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David C. King. *Turf Wars: How Congressional Committees Claim Jurisdiction*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1997. xiv + 207 pp. \$21.00 (paper), ISBN 978-0-226-43624-1; \$45.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-226-43623-4.

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Turf Wars: A Review

David King makes an important contribution to political science literature in *Turf Wars* by making good sense out of the normally convoluted topic of committee jurisdictions in the U.S. Congress. King accomplishes several things in this book: he explains how thinking about the role of the committee system in Congress has changed and why jurisdictions become a major bone of contention; he illuminates the role of the parliamentarian, whose contribution to the running of the House has been largely overlooked; and he formulates a theory of why and how committees try to enlarge their jurisdictions by claiming authority over new issues tangential to their previous jurisdictions.

King explains that legislators care about jurisdictions because jurisdictions are property rights over issues (p. 1). This view of jurisdictions has grown as committees have assumed a more permanent role in the conduct of business in the U.S. Congress (the evolution of committee ownership of jurisdictions is conveyed in Chapter Four). The scope of issues in need of public policy attention has also expanded, and congressional committees must take on these new issues in one form or another (i.e. the issue must be given to an extant committee or some new committee must be created to deal with it). King argues that desirable issues will be sought out by ambitious politicians who will use their committee assignments to conduct turf wars with other committees. A successful turf war will not only result in one committee gaining a new issue, but will also assist that committee in gaining other attractive turf from issue proximate committees, which benefits all the members of the victor committee. King looks to three theories in political science literature to explain the politics of jurisdictions: distributive, informational, and strong party. Though King finds merit in all three theories, he clearly prefers the informational theory which argues that committee jurisdictions are created to distribute the labor of the legislative process and to create public policies which are based on the best ex-

pertise available. Though jurisdictions can clearly benefit constituents (distributive) or assist congressional leaders with their legislative agenda (strong party) neither explains the intricacies of turf wars as well as the informational approach.

Building on this, King makes the case for better appreciation for the role of the parliamentarian in turf wars. King makes the important distinction between statutory and common law jurisdictional guidelines. Statutory jurisdictions are those which are formally codified in the rules of the House of Representatives. These rules have led political scientists to assume that jurisdictions are relatively stable, save for reform periods (e.g. 1946, 1974, 1980, and 1995) when the entire committee system experiences an overhaul. King argues that these reform efforts that result in changes in statutory jurisdictions are codifications of agreed upon shifts and that the real turf encroachment takes place in the incremental changes in common law jurisdictions. These common law jurisdictions are the results of turf wars launched by political entrepreneurs over politically ambiguous bills which must be sent to some committee or committees for consideration. The arbiter of these common law jurisdictions is technically the Speaker, but in reality is in fact the parliamentarian. King traces the growth of this position from that of partisan assistant to the Speaker to neutral defender of the Congress's processes. The modern parliamentarian was defended to allow members to pursue their individual interests (more power) in a way that preserved the functioning of the institution. Says King: "In short, parliamentarians adjudicate border disputes because members cannot trust themselves to do it alone. The House parliamentarians transcend elections, helping to maintain institutional integrity" (p. 79). King actually asked the parliamentarian about his job and explains how they assess the weight of the bill to refer legislation that is jurisdictionally ambiguous to committees.

Finally, King brings all of this together in a theory of

jurisdictional change. Two steps are involved: a political entrepreneur must initiate a turf war and then a parliamentarian must make a decision about how the war will fall out. Members initiate turf wars with three considerations in mind: the relationship of the new jurisdiction to constituency interests, membership expertise on the topic in the committee, and staff expertise and commitment to the issue. Parliamentarians stick closely to precedents when making bill referrals, so the weight of the bill in term of the perceived skew of its contents, matter a great deal.

King's book gives us a great deal to think about. He has demonstrated that committees are as dynamic as any political institution and illuminates the role of the parliamentarian which had been much overlooked in political science. However, I believe that King has pushed the parliamentarian's role a bit too far. I disagree with King over the real power the parliamentarian has in making politically important jurisdictional decisions. King does recognize this by showing how entrepreneurial members will manipulate the writing of legislation to present the weight of the bill in a light favorable to them and how these members will confer with the parliamentarian during the drafting of the bill to help them do this (or put ideas about referral in the parliamentarian's head). But to me, this awareness of the parliamentarian's malleability (precisely because of his neutral status) simply makes the parliamentarian a step in the turf war, not its arbiter. King says that the parliamentarian's decisions can be challenged by the whole House or the Speaker, though this happens rarely. So what makes the parliamentarian

more than a traffic cop? Just because he makes many decisions that go unchallenged does not make him strong (perhaps he is more cautious—in making multiple referrals for example—because he wants to prove his neutrality). Also, I simply disagree with King when he says that the use of task forces by the majority party to overcome jurisdictional fragmentation is on the wane (p. 141), alluding to many informal bodies created by the Speaker to guide complicated legislation under consideration by several committees (such as Medicare and Welfare Reform) through the legislative process outside the committee system. King thinks task forces have peaked in the 104th Congress, but I believe that the majority party will continue to use them on complex or controversial legislation, making turf wars a side game on the really big issues. This is also because I give more credence to the strong party theory of congressional operations than King does.

In sum, this is a well-written book which will appeal to all levels of students of the U.S. Congress. King tackles an interesting and complex issue which will make readers question their views about committee jurisdictions. It will also stimulate discussion of the House parliamentarian's role for a long time to come.

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