

Making Everything Easier!™

How Washington Actually Works

FOR
DUMMIES®

Learn to:

- Grasp what it's like behind the scenes in the most powerful city on Earth
- Experience a day in the life of Congress
- Discover the workings of the White House
- Make sense of how policy ideas are born

Edited by Greg Rushford



How Washington Actually Works For Dummies®

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Introduction

Washington, D.C., Capital of the Free World. The most powerful city on Earth. No other country, company, or international organization can compare with the reach and wealth of the U.S. federal government. Policymaking — the art of deciding what programs to support, what laws to pass, or what regulations to write — is at the core of what Washington does and is what everyone, from the President on down, wants to influence. The Founding Fathers expected policymaking to be an inclusive process, and the diversity and number of actors who have emerged in Washington reflect this reality. While civics textbooks can teach you how a bill becomes law, a textbook is little help in understanding how things really get done in Washington.

As with any complicated system, you can easily miss the forest for the trees when trying to figure out policymaking. But don't despair! You *can* get a grip on the policymaking process at the federal level — the players, the rules, and the game they play — without knowing the minutiae of congressional procedure or the agency behind every acronym. In fact, with a firm grasp of the basics, you too can try your hand at the policymaking game.

What will you learn from following pages? You won't get a dry explanation of the American system of government (you remember that from grade school anyway, right?). Instead, you find a playbook for how Washington really works: who has a seat at the table, how the policymaking process works, and how someone survives. We give you the inside skinny. Some disillusioned observers may call the whole process dysfunctional, and some critics may decry it as corrupt, but for the veterans who have witnessed its successes and failures, it's simply how Washington actually works.

About This Book

As any tourist knows, finding your way around the city of Washington, D.C., can be a challenge. Finding your way around Washington's policymaking world is even more harrowing. It has confounded fresh-out-of-college interns and newly elected presidents equally.

This book is your map to understanding the intricate world of federal policymaking. We introduce you to all the major players, from federal bureaucrats and Congress to lobbyists and the media, and we share our insights about how much power each group actually wields. We also offer a few tips for connecting with these players, in case your goal in reading this book is to set yourself on a course for becoming one of D.C.'s most influential.

As with any *For Dummies* book, this is a reference book, so feel free to jump from chapter to chapter to satisfy your curiosity and read what's most relevant to you.

Conventions Used in This Book

To help you navigate this text, we use the following conventions:

- ✓ When we introduce a new term, it appears in *italic* and we provide a definition or explanation nearby.
- ✓ Sometimes we share interesting information that isn't crucial to your understanding of the topic at hand. That

information appears in a *sidebar* — a gray box set apart from the rest of the text.

- ✓ Website addresses appear in monofont so they're easy to pick out if you need to go back and find them.

Foolish Assumptions

We wrote this book assuming that you're interested in understanding the behind-the-scenes world of how things get done in Washington. Perhaps you are a cable news junkie who gets tired of watching hours of programming that merely touch the superficial and trivial side of Washington politics. You may be a civic-minded citizen who desires to become more involved in influencing federal policy. Maybe you're a student studying U.S. politics who wonders how things really get done. Or you could even be an old Washington hand who is amused to find a book about daily life in the capital. Whoever you are, the fact that you are reading these words right now indicates an above-average intelligence and insatiable curiosity about politics.

Icons Used in This Book

Throughout the book, we place two icons in the margins that call your attention to certain types of text. Here's what each icon means:



This icon denotes paragraphs that contain useful how-to's for better understanding how Washington works and positioning yourself for a D.C. career.



When you see this icon, pay close attention. The point we're making is something that's worth recalling long after you read the words.

Where to Go from Here

The great thing about this book is you can start anywhere you want. Feel free to use the table of contents to pinpoint subjects of particular interest.

If you're aiming for a career as a federal worker, you may want to head straight to Chapter 2. If the President's job is particularly fascinating to you, aim for Chapter 6. If you want to know if this book confirms your cynical view of special interests, Chapter 3 on lobbying may be right for you. The civic-minded reader may want to jump to Chapter 8 to find out how to start participating in American political life.

Wherever you start, remember to come back and page through the chapters you skip — we happen to think they're all worthwhile!