

roles and each had its own unique priorities. The Catholic bishops' lobby strongly supported the pro-family bill but would run at any hint of leave for abortions. The AARP would sign on only if it could secure leave for the care of aging parents. Organized labor would leave the table if workers' rights were traded for business's support. With every change in wording, the support of interest groups and members of Congress shifted. Even at the end, three Republican freshmen who had been thought to be supporters of the bill spoke out against it.

The bill reached its final form in 1991, passing both houses of Congress only to be vetoed by Bush, who said the bill would tie the hands of businesses. An attempt to override the veto failed, but Congress re-introduced and passed the bill without any major changes in 1992, at the height of the presidential campaign, knowing Bush would veto the bill again and leave himself open to charges that he was "anti-family."

After Clinton was inaugurated, he made the Family and Medical Leave Act his first piece of legislation, signing it on the White House lawn on February 5, 1993. Had the various compromises required to build the coalition undercut the law's social benefit? Thus far, there is little reason to believe so. To be sure, Elving writes, many Americans cannot afford to leave work for three months without pay, even if their jobs will be waiting for them. But millions of Americans now have an option they didn't have two years ago.

This is a book about process, not about white hats and black hats, or blood on the House floor. The players are not pictured as PAC-driven or obsessed with ideological agendas. Key staffers feel that pragmatism and compromise are tools to bring about a worthy end. You won't read about Chris Dodd's nocturnal habits, or whether Pat Schroeder cashed checks in the House bank. And refreshingly little time is spent dwelling on political

chest-pounding and vapid sound-bites—too often what the public sees and hears about Congress in the press.

But what emerges is a valuable and highly readable description of how Congress makes a law. *Conflict and Compromise* may lack the dash of Steven Waldman's *The Bill*, the account of the creation of Clinton's national service corps, but Elving's ground-zero perspective and fluid writing style will be welcomed by students of Congress accustomed to plowing through arid statistics and academese.

Elving concludes that the time it took to get the helpful and largely popular law enacted is an example of the cost of divided government and minority obstructionism. But the odyssey also shows that beneath the anger and shouting, representative democracy can still work. Even with the recent sweeping changes in Congress, Elving notes, the "underlying forces and structures ... remain much the same. Even after a dramatic role reversal between the parties, the human dynamic of conflict and compromise continues."

One of these days, Ollie and Rush, with their two-dimensional view of government and their ideological huffing and puffing, will fade. If other journalists follow Elving's lead and spend more time laying out Congress' process it might speed that blessed moment. But it will take more news organizations finally understanding that C-Span, and process reporting by newspapers like *The Wall Street Journal* and *The New York Times*, are not for the political elite, but in fact respond to a widening public interest in how Congress works.

But politicians more than the press have kept us in the dark about Congress by underestimating Americans' intelligence and interest and exploiting Washington's mysteries instead of explaining them. If the press demands to know more, politicians will be forced to reveal more. When that day comes, when Americans can truly understand the forces that move the democratic process, we just might have

the kind of citizen legislature that the Founding Fathers intended.

Lewis W. Wolfson, professor of communication at American University, is author of *The Untapped Power of the Press*, and has written on the media and politics for *The Hill*.

The NEA and AFT: Teacher Unions in Power and Politics

Charlene Haar, Myron Lieberman, and Leo Troy

Pro-active Press, \$25

By Maribeth Vander Weele

America's swerve to the right last November put the nation's two teachers unions in the crosshairs of critics of failing education. Republican-controlled state legislatures, giddy with the prospect of dressing down the powerful, traditionally Democratic unions, have produced a spate of proposals that threaten union strength, such as reducing union bargaining leverage and giving districts the freedom to more strictly punish striking teachers.

A book, then, about the powerhouse teacher unions—the National Education Association and the American Federation of Teachers—couldn't have come at a better time. *The NEA and AFT: Teacher Unions in Power and Politics* is a clarion call for policymakers to understand these important players in education and politics. This is made all the more urgent by the potential merger between the two unions. Talks between the two long-running rivals have broken off for now, but may resume in the future.

The NEA is already the largest union in North America, and perhaps the world, with 2.2 million members. The merged teacher union would surge to a membership unprecedented by any union anywhere. "It would be the Goliath of labor," write authors Myron Lieberman, Charlene Haar, and Leo Troy. The merged union would number 2.5 to 2.7 million members initially; it could add an additional million within a decade.

This book provides valuable insight into how the NEA and AFT amassed

their power, but it fails to explore a critical question: how that power undermines the best interest of children.

It barely mentions the wretched school building conditions that result when maintenance funds are diverted to teacher salaries; the harm to students when incompetent teachers cannot be dismissed because the unions have negotiated contracts that make firing bad teachers nearly impossible; and the fact that would-be parent volunteers are kept out of schools because their work threatens paid union labor.

In contrast, the authors go into ponderous detail about arguments over secret ballots at union conventions; varying estimates on the size of union membership; and the internal politics over the merger issue. The authors could have summarized such information and deftly relegated the details to endnotes for culling by only the most curious union aficionado. Indeed, the importance of these topics to the question of the quality of public school education is comparatively minor.

Despite its shortcomings, *The NEA and AFT* draws a useful picture of the unions' role in everything from the election of Bill Clinton to health care reform. One of every 10 delegates to the 1992 Democratic National Convention was a member of either union. The unions were powerful supporters of health reform because if the federal government absorbs school medical costs, more money will be available for teacher salaries.

But their influence isn't limited to only those issues that directly affect them. The NEA's political action committee was the third-largest donor in 1992, behind special interest heavyweights the Teamsters and the American Medical Association. With that money they have chimed in on a range of topics from Haitian refugees to the balanced budget amendment.

The teachers unions also play pivotal roles in state legislative races, local school district races, and ballot questions on education. The battle over

California's 1993 Voucher Initiative (Proposition 174), for example, may have been "the most intensive campaign over a state educational initiative in U.S. history," the authors report. The measure would have provided families vouchers worth \$2,600 to enroll each child in any public or private school of their choice. Fearing that the vouchers would drain children from public school systems, the California Teachers Association, the state affiliate of the NEA, spent an astounding \$12.3 million to defeat the proposition.

The linchpin to the unions' political power is their structure. The advent of collective bargaining rights for public employee unions in the sixties spawned, as a side effect, vast political machines. Those machines, effectively organized under a national umbrella, were strengthened by a number of factors. Teachers have more time than most citizens to serve as campaign volunteers. In addition, unlike members of other unions, teachers traditionally don't lose pay on an annual basis when they strike. In almost every state, teachers make up lost strike time at the end of the year, making the labor action a much more attractive means of extracting concessions. Michigan only recently outlawed paying striking teachers for these make-up days.

The unions have other advantages. When their clout elects school board members sympathetic to teachers, they influence both sides of the bargaining table—a situa-

tion unparalleled in private industry.

Of state legislatures, Republicans control 50 chambers, up from 31 before the November elections. With their power, Republicans will have to focus on teacher unions as they have never done before, write Haar, Lieberman, and Troy. Typically conservative forces lack any program or strategy to deal with union issues, "partly due to their ignorance about teacher union structure, leadership, revenues, governance documents, dynamics—just about anything that matters," the authors write.

But such understanding is critical, the authors argue convincingly, considering the implications of a merger and creation of what would be the most powerful political interest group in American politics.

Maribeth Vander Weele covers education for the Chicago Sun-Times and is author of Reclaiming Our Schools: The Struggle for Chicago School Reform.

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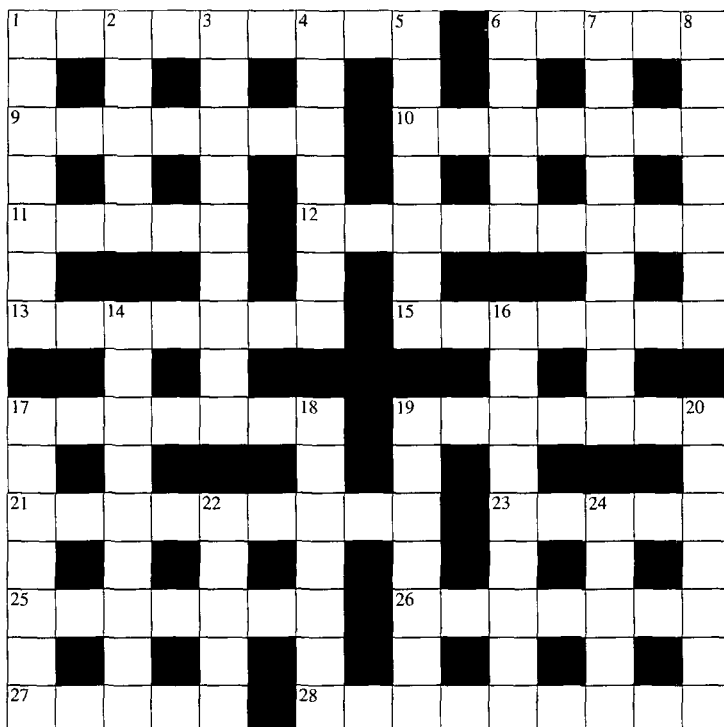
Political Puzzle

BY JOHN BARCLAY

The numbers indicate the number of letters and words—thus (2,3) means a two-letter word followed by a three-letter word. Groups of letters, such as USA, are treated as one word.

ACROSS

1. Mistake in swirling mist is major threat today. (9)
6. Throw tips around circle to make statement. (5)
9. Takes off improperly secured. (7)
10. Relaxation from flower collection, why not? (7)
11. Arrange ride after start of walk to be more extensive. (5)
12. Explain messy tree print. (9)
13. Contrition from breaking cane after jail term. (7)
15. Desire for dough or Gardner grain. (7)
17. Meet Rex informally at the edge. (7)
19. Pith gut alloy near the breaking point. (7)
21. Proper sign for events next spring. (9)
23. Daily advertising about mimic. (5)
25. Clear back dive before net is set up. (7)
26. Stone at store display. (7)
27. State in computer system backwards for church group. (5)



28. Post office leaders playing with live sex display is dynamite. (9)

DOWN

1. Ruth Pew unfortunately had digestive problem. (5, 2)
2. Diderot started back and put in new furnishings. (5)
3. Cure once with carbon prescription for an event. (9)
4. Supply encouragement to make pin rise. (7)
5. Casualties around freshman course for rightist group. (7)
6. Replaced ecclesiastic? (5)
7. Rapid movements make us grin and cry. (9)
8. Bridge construction unsettled settler. (7)
14. Conspicuous consumption of sorts—ruin it not carelessly. (9)
16. A top saint cooked Luigi's

dish. (9)

17. Ruler of space estate. (7)
18. Letter pile sent awry. (7)
19. Loosen shimmering sun before carriage. (7)
20. Before end of June, Carter reset level. (7)
22. Leading in America, he added substance. (5)
24. New tripe dish for labworkers. (5)

Answers to last month's puzzle:

