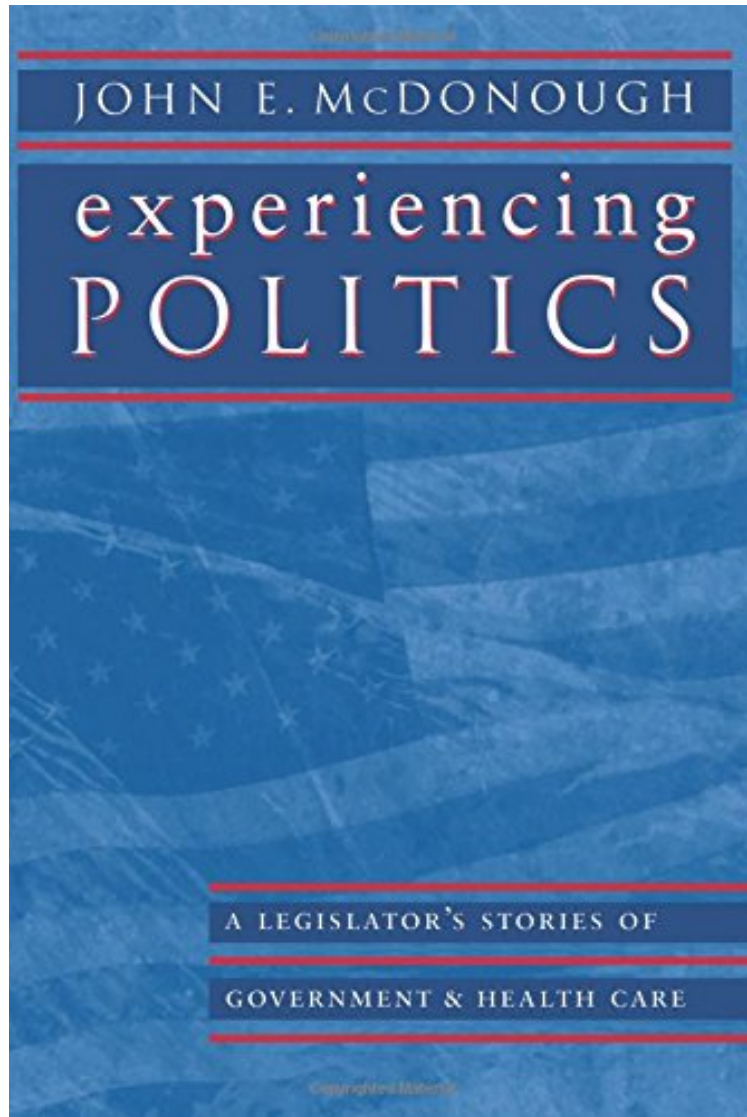


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## Experiencing Politics: A Legislator's Stories of Government and Health Care (California/Milbank Series on Health and the Public)

*John E. McDonough*

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**John E. McDonough : Experiencing Politics: A Legislator's Stories of Government and Health Care (California/Milbank Series on Health and the Public)** before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Experiencing Politics: A Legislator's Stories of Government and Health Care (California/Milbank Series on Health and the Public):

0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. Revealing and insightfulBy C. FerraraRevealing and insightful. This book brings the reader behind the scenes into one of the most fascinating aspects of social life, the political process and how public policy really gets made. Each chapter begins with some interesting theory or theme then the author, a former policy maker in the House of Representatives in MA brings it all to life with his personal stories.It's an easy read, very interesting and a page turner for me. He uses national examples that most people will be familiar with, but also his own experience in MA which highlights how policies everywhere gets made.2 of 2 people found the following review helpful. Political Reality as Observed by a ParticipantBy LEON L CZIKOWSKY"Experiencing Politics" is a look at legislative politics as observed by a state legislator, John McDonough, who served in the Massachusetts legislature. It is interesting reading one legislator's account and descriptions of how the legislative process works. Political theory and reality are compared. For instance, the author notes that it was Machiavelli who noted that strong societies channel their political conflicts and social frictions into a democratic process. These democratic battles actually strengthen society. It is governments that suppress conflict that become unstable. He notes this appears to be true, as no democratic government has even gone to war against another democratic government. The author observes that political mobilization is dominated by wealthier political interests. This is especially noticed in political fights over Massachusetts's health care system, which is a focus of this book. This fight is particular fierce for one wealthy side's gain would come at the expense of another wealthy side. This clash of political titans creates a major schism in attempting to make any changes to the current health care system. While wealthier interests may have advantages, this does not mean that parties with lesser influence are forgotten. The author observes that while political leaders from both parties had favored landlords in revising landlord-tenant law, neither side wished to be publicly identified with landlords. Thus, the legislation was revised in a manner than favored tenants, even though tenants appeared to have less influence over the legislature. The author urges parties in a political dispute to learn the real and personal interests of the parties involved in the dispute. Knowing these interests and how they would be affected by each step helps in guiding parties as to the risks and rewards of taking alternative steps. Some political scientists state that political change tends to occur incrementally. While the author concludes this is the usual process, he does argue that comprehensive changes are also possible and should not be overlooked. Comprehensive changes can occur when those with political power perceive that a problem is serious enough that comprehensive changes are required and the political elements are aligned for comprehensive changes to be approved. It is good to see state legislators writing about their legislative experiences. From notations such as John McDonough's observation that legendary Massachusetts Senate President William Bulger was not as harsh as his reputation to more general observations about the political process in theory, this book is very useful to people who wish to learn more about state legislatures and politics.1 of 1 people found the following review helpful. Insider look at legislative politicsBy Leon Czikowsky"Experiencing Politics" is a look at legislative politics as observed by a state legislator, John McDonough, who served in the Massachusetts legislature. It is interesting reading one legislator's account and descriptions of how the legislative process works. Political theory and reality are compared. For instance, the author notes that it was Machiavelli who noted that strong societies channel their political conflicts and social frictions into a democratic process. These democratic battles actually strengthen society. It is governments that suppress conflict that become unstable. He notes this appears to be true, as no democratic government has even gone to war against another democratic government.The author observes that political mobilization is dominated by wealthier political interests. This is especially noticed in political fights over Massachusetts's health care system, which is a focus of this book. 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John E. McDonough affords a rare glimpse into the practice of state politics in this insider's account of the fascinating interface between political science and real-life politics. A member of the Massachusetts House of Representatives for

thirteen years and a skilled storyteller, McDonough eloquently weaves together stories of politics and policy with engaging theoretical models in a way that illuminates both the theory and the practice. By providing a link between scholarship and the world of experience, he communicates much about the essence of representative democracy. In the process, he demonstrates how politics extend beyond the public sphere into many aspects of life involving diverse values and interests. McDonough describes the nature of conflict, the role of interests, agenda setting, the nature and pace of change, the use of language, and more. Accessible, insightful, and original, his stories touch on a broad range of issues including health care politics, campaigns, and elections; a street gang called the X-men; the death penalty; campaign finance reform, and tenants versus landlords. To the author, politics is everywhere and political dynamics are universal. While the setting for this book is one legislature, the lessons and insights are intended for everyone.

From The New England Journal of Medicine John McDonough's *Experiencing Politics* is a brilliant book. McDonough provides a fascinating account of the high stakes, the drama, and the excitement involved in making laws. This is an enlightening and entertaining book that offers an inside, real-life look at legislating. McDonough's book seamlessly blends academic political science with lively "case stories" drawn from his 13 years in the Massachusetts legislature. His book will interest not only academics but also citizens engaged in the political process, especially those concerned with health policy. McDonough holds a doctorate in public health from the University of Michigan, and he specialized in health policy during much of his legislative career. That special interest is reflected throughout the book. Perhaps a disclaimer is in order. John McDonough is a good friend of mine, and I have often turned to him for advice on health policy issues. His counsel was always valuable. The qualities that make him a valued advisor -- a clear understanding of the links between politics and policy, an instinct for what is achievable, a shrewd grasp of strategy and tactics, a sound understanding of the substance of health policy, and a passionate commitment to improving society -- are very much in evidence in this book. McDonough uses a number of concepts from academic political science to explain how policy evolves. He discusses the use of language in politics, both as a barrier and an aid to reaching agreement and as a tactical weapon that can determine the outcome of a conflict. He describes the ways in which the scope, site, and intensity of a political conflict can shape its outcome and the ways in which participants in a political conflict may try to manipulate these factors to achieve their own goals. He explains how the positions taken by elected officials are shaped not only by their need to represent their constituencies but also by a web of relationships that can be even more important in defining the resulting policies. He explains the factors that determine whether incremental or comprehensive reform is achievable. McDonough is a lively writer. The detailed descriptions of the fights over policy in which he has been involved are well worth the price of the book. One of the most interesting and important events McDonough describes is the effort to enact a children's health insurance program funded by increases in the cigarette tax -- a policy prescription I was later able to follow successfully in Washington. McDonough explains how a combination of the mobilization of citizens, changes in political discourse, focused policy research, and a proposal that brought together advocates for children and senior citizens, proponents of expanded health insurance coverage, and antismoking forces made it possible to enact an important policy initiative that has made a real difference in the lives of tens of thousands of Massachusetts children. The achievement was even more remarkable because it required the override of a gubernatorial veto and the defeat of a well-funded opposition effort by the tobacco companies. Other cases are equally compelling. McDonough discusses policy issues ranging from rent control, to attempts to deal with an urban gang that was impeding neighborhood redevelopment, to the demise of hospital rate setting, to the death penalty. The book includes portraits of the compelling figures, ranging from a charismatic urban priest to the Speaker of the Massachusetts House, who made a difference in the outcome of these policy debates. McDonough's book is more than a scholarly dissection of what happens and why. It is a call to action and a guidebook for every citizen who cares about public policy and wants to have an effect on people's lives. His compassion for all Americans -- a trait that has characterized McDonough throughout his career -- comes through clearly in this important book. As McDonough says in his introduction, "Politics is about `us,' about the needs of ordinary people and how they get translated effectively or poorly into policies.... My challenge and hope are to help readers become more familiar and comfortable with life in the arena so that you will want to join." Any reader with an interest in politics and policy will benefit from reading this remarkable book. Edward M. Kennedy Copyright copy; 2001 Massachusetts Medical Society. All rights reserved. The New England Journal of Medicine is a registered trademark of the MMS. "McDonough's book deserves a wide medical audience as we reflect on where to go from here."--"Journal of the American Medical Association From the Inside Flap" Some people study policy making, other people do it. McDonough's spirited account of his dual life in the political trenches of the Massachusetts legislature and the analytic turf of the academy carries two powerful messages: scholars have reason to care deeply about the consequences of the governing processes they research and the shocker a healthy peppering of political science can actually help practitioners become more effective policy makers." Mark A. Peterson, author of *Healthy Markets?: The New Competition in Medical Care*