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# Done Deal?: The Politics of the 1997 Budget Agreement

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***Done Deal?***  
***The Politics of the 1997 Budget Agreement***

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## Acknowledgments

From January to August 1997, I served as a Congressional Fellow for Congressman Robert L. Ehrlich Jr. (R-Md.). Mr. Ehrlich had just been appointed to the House Budget Committee, and I was seeking a position as a legislative assistant for budget policy. I hoped to use the opportunity to learn more about the budget process and develop my research on entitlement reform. I thought the budget would dominate the 1st Session of the 105th Congress, and in January it appeared that President Clinton and congressional Republicans might attempt to negotiate a bipartisan budget deal. Of course, no one could reliably predict whether they would be successful, and I never dreamed the process would be completed during my short stay in Washington. As history and fortune would have it, I was precisely in the right place at the right time. So when the budget agreement was announced on 2 May 1997, I set aside my research on entitlement reform and focused on writing a book about the budget agreement that would be instructive to students and engaging to scholars.

*Done Deal?* is a story about the politics of the 1997 budget agreement from a political scientist's perspective. The story is couched in general terms about how the separation of powers system works under a divided government, and it is based on document analysis and participant observation. My appointment with Congressman Ehrlich placed me in an ideal position to see the process unfold as I was performing my duties as a legislative assistant. I attended Republican Budget Committee caucuses and weekly Republican Party whip meetings; I worked with Budget Committee staff; I watched the process and analyzed policy for Mr. Ehrlich; I talked with Mr. Ehrlich after he returned from Republican Conference meetings; and I received a slew of faxes and memoranda from the party conference, Dear Colleague letters, and communications from interest groups. In addition to keeping a daily journal, I collected information from various sources and interviewed key members of Congress and staff personnel. I could hardly imagine a better situation.

Thus, I am greatly indebted to Congressman Ehrlich. He not only granted me access to the process but also shared his observations, insights, and analysis of budget politics throughout. We should all be so lucky to know such a talented representative and skilled practitioner of politics. I also wish to acknowledge the congressman's Washington, D.C., staff, including Diane Baker, Richard Cross, Lisa Ellis, Steve Kreseski, Marjorie Kwah, Greg Muth, and J.P. Scholtes. Each contributed in some way to the development of this study, and each made the fellowship educational, exciting, and enjoyable. They also put up with my ceaseless enthusiasm for "the book."

If Congressman Ehrlich and his staff made my experience special, the American Political Science Association (APSA) made it possible. I am grateful to the Selection Committee for offering me the fellowship, and I thank Christopher Deering, Lisa Foust, and Mark Hyman for advising me on the appointment with Congressman Ehrlich. I also learned a great deal from talking regularly with Pat Sellers and Rich Forgette, two congressional scholars in the APSA program. Pat and Rich added valuable perspectives to the research project in its formative stages, and our conversations helped to sharpen my focus and broaden my perspective. Roger Davidson and Bill Connelly also commented on the initial book prospectus.

Most of the book was written after I left Washington, though I continued to be well-served by outstanding colleagues. Most political scientists know about Charles O. Jones's contributions to our understanding of Congress, the presidency, the policy process, and the separation of powers system from his many books. I have had the opportunity to benefit directly from Chuck's scholarly advice since the late 1980s when I was a graduate student at the University of Virginia. Anyone familiar with Chuck's work will readily discern his influence on this book. I cannot thank him enough for sharing his time, wisdom, advice, and personal warmth. I also relied on the insightful comments of Randall Strahan, a good friend and another student of Chuck Jones, who has taught me a lot about congressional leadership and tax politics. Randy reviewed a first draft of the entire manuscript and discussed it with me extensively on several occasions. His observations and editorial suggestions greatly improved the book. Bill Swinford and John Whelan, my colleagues at the University of Richmond, made helpful suggestions on selected chapters. Several former or current students, including Andy Rich, Sean McMenamin, and Michael Thames, reviewed parts of the book as well. I appreciate the editorial assistance of Irene Glynn and the professional guidance of the resourceful people at Chatham House, especially Bob Gormley, Katharine Miller, and Melissa Martin. Finally, hats off to Bob Kern of *TIPS* Technical Publishing, Karen Brown and Sarah O'Keefe of Scriptorium Publishing Services, Inc., and Paulette Miley for facilitating final production of the book. All of the above individuals did nothing but strengthen and improve this book, leaving me responsible for any remaining shortcomings.

Anything worth doing is a product of the mind and of the heart. So I dedicate this book to my wife, Jennifer, and two daughters, Sarah and Elena. They stayed in Richmond while I spent weeknights in Washington during the fellowship year, only to endure the long hours I needed to research and write the book when I returned to teaching at the University of Richmond. They are more patient, supportive, and loving than a father or a husband could ever expect. Some guys have all the luck.