The Power of American Governors

Winning on Budgets and Losing on Policy

With limited authority over state lawmaking, but ultimate responsibility for the performance of government, how effective are governors in moving their programs through the legislature? This book advances a new theory about what makes chief executives most successful and explores this theory through original data. Thad Kousser and Justin H. Phillips argue that negotiations over the budget, on one hand, and policy bills, on the other, are driven by fundamentally different dynamics. They capture these dynamics in models informed by interviews with gubernatorial advisors, cabinet members, press secretaries, and governors themselves. Through a series of novel empirical analyses and rich case studies, the authors demonstrate that governors can be powerful actors in the lawmaking process but that whether they are bargaining over the budget or policy shapes both how they play the game and how often they can win it. In addition to assessing the power of American governors, this book contributes broadly to our understanding of the determinants of executive power.

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To William and Kat, my governors of unchecked power
– TK

To my parents, Michael and Patricia
– JHP
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