



Rangel and the Ways and Means to Power

Charles Rangel, a longtime liberal Democrat from a northern industrial state (New York), a congressman who chairs the immensely powerful House Ways and Means Committee, faces almost overwhelming evidence of corruption and abuse of power. Although many of his constituents think of Rangel highly — because of all the favors he has been able to do for them over his long tenure in Congress, he faces a tough reelection fight. Still, Rangel intends to fight to keep his seat in Congress.



If this sad tale sounds familiar in many ways, there is a reason. In 1994, the year in which Democrats took an enormous thumping in the November elections, Dan Rostenkowski, a longtime liberal Democrat from a northern industrial state (Illinois), a congressman who chaired the immensely powerful House Ways and Means Committee, faced almost overwhelming evidence of corruption and abuse of power. Many of his Chicago constituents, however, rallied around the highly tainted Chicago politician and he ran hard for reelection in November 1994.

By macabre coincidence, Rostenkowski, who is about the same age as Rangel, died within a day or so of Rangel's own birthday party, which was an occasion for Rangel and his supporters to plan his political survival. This is a very old story in Washington politics. The chairmen of congressional committees, particularly certain congressional committees such as Appropriations, Ways and Means (or Finance, in the Senate), Judiciary, and Foreign Relations (or Foreign Affairs, in the House), automatically wield almost life and death power over many congressional actions.

Everyone, more or less, knows or assumes that these mandarins are exercising power, at least in part, for their own benefit. They are also granting "favors" to constituents, which makes it very hard to generate much hostility for them among their insular, pampered constituencies. Because these men also connect to the grand, misty dreams of militant statist, men like Rangel and Rostenkowski get a pass from the establishment media because they are, somehow, doing "good."

Anyone wading through the complex and irrational Internal Revenue Code, when bosses like Rangel and Rostenkowski had more to do with making than almost any other politicians, sees the real side of corrupt politicians using their elective office to feather their nests, win elections with our tax dollars, and create such chaos that the real producers of wealth in America are hobbled and the rest of us suffer.



Photo of Rep. Rangel: AP Images



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