



# A Government of Strangers: Executive Politics in Washington

*Hugh Hecla*

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## **A Government of Strangers: Executive Politics in Washington** Hugh Heclo

How do political appointees try to gain control of the Washington bureaucracy? How do high-ranking career bureaucrats try to ensure administrative continuity? The answers are sought in this analysis of the relations between appointees and bureaucrats that uses the participants' own words to describe the imperatives they face and the strategies they adopt.

Shifting attention away from the well-publicized actions of the President, Hugh Heclo reveals the little-known everyday problems of executive leadership faced by hundreds of appointees throughout the executive branch. But he also makes clear why bureaucrats must deal cautiously with political appointees and with a civil service system that offers few protections for broad-based careers of professional public service.

The author contends that even as political leadership has become increasingly bureaucratized, the bureaucracy has become more politicized. Political executives—usually ill-prepared to deal effectively with the bureaucracy—often fail to recognize that the real power of the bureaucracy is not its capacity for disobedience or sabotage but its power to withhold services. Statecraft for political executives consists of getting the changes they want without losing the bureaucratic services they need.

Heclo argues further that political executives, government careerists, and the public as well are poorly served by present arrangements for top-level government personnel. In his view, the deficiencies in executive politics will grow worse in the future. Thus he proposes changes that would institute more competent management of presidential appointments, reorganize the administration of the civil service personnel system, and create a new Federal Service of public managers.

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