

How Congress Works

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“Who knew that our time-tested and powerful democracy could not survive a few days of debate and disagreement on our most important questions?” [asked](#) journalist Glenn Greenwald weeks ago during the House voting for Speaker.

“To hear establishment mavens all tell the story,” he pointed out, “the failure of Congress to smoothly and swiftly and immediately elect a speaker that’s been preordained — with little debate (as it usually does) — has put the U.S. Government on the verge of collapse.

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“Apparently, a healthy democracy requires that everyone march in lockstep, follow orders from on high, and never question anything,” he added sarcastically.

Greenwald is onto something.

“One of the dirty secrets of how Congress works in the modern era,” he explained, “has been that actual members of Congress, your representatives, have very little power — almost none. They’re more like little, tiny chess pieces moved around for a tiny coterie



of party leaders.

“It’s a dynamic that has turned Congress into a profoundly anti-democratic institution,” noted Greenwald. “And it’s one of the main reasons why we get so little reform and so much corruption out of [Congress].

“Many Americans remain convinced that the two parties can’t agree on anything . . . can’t make anything happen, when in fact they’re making a lot happen.” Such as making “tens of trillions of dollars fly out the door.”

Mr. Greenwald blames “a small handful of omnipotent party leaders, from each party, who are willing to play the game, join hands and ensure that totally insulated from election outcomes and public debate, the Washington consensus churns on.”

What to do? Greenwald did not mention term limits. But I just did.

This is Common Sense. I’m Paul Jacob.