In the Lions' Den: The Story of Senator Orrin Hatch by Richard Vetterli and Brad E. Hainsworth.

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Having two favorable books published about you in the midst of a reelection campaign would boost anyone’s hopes for victory. Besides Vetterli and Hainsworth’s book, journalist Lee Roderick also published a biography about Orrin Hatch (Leading the Charge: Orrin Hatch and 20 Years of America, Gold Leaf Press, 1994). Both are overwhelmingly favorable toward the Senator.

Vetterli and Hainsworth did not write a political science book in the traditional sense. Instead, it’s a political biography written in a style that’s easy to read. The theme centers on the political battles fought by Orrin Hatch, both for election to the Senate and within the Senate. Vetterli and Hainsworth use the images of the mace and the olive branch throughout as they describe scenes where Senator Hatch battles Senate liberals one day and makes peace the next.

Vetterli and Hainsworth have carried over several chapters from an earlier book by Vetterli, Orrin Hatch: Challenging the Washington Establishment (1982, Regenery Gateway). Throughout the book the documentation is sometimes confusing: usually it is given as part of the text, but in the end chapters, it is placed in endnotes. At times I wished for more detail in their sources. For example, they quote James Q. Wilson about the liberal bias of the news media without documentation.

The book begins with Hatch’s election in 1976, perhaps the most entertaining part of the book. Vetterli and Hainsworth describe Hatch’s emergence as an unknown Salt Lake lawyer who makes a stunning victory in the primary after a late campaign start and then caps it off by defeating incumbent Democrat Frank Moss. Hatch was aided by then BYU President Ernest Wilkinson and bolstered by an unusual pre-primary endorsement from Ronald Reagan, already very popular in Utah at the time. Less detail is offered about subsequent elections, probably because they lack the same excitement as 1976.

Vetterli and Hainsworth cover many Senate battles over such topics as labor law reform, the balanced budget (1995 was not the first time), the Equal Rights Amendment, and confirmation hearings for Robert Bork and Clarence Thomas. In each case, the perspective is very favorable toward Hatch. If the new Senate minority is looking for a model for a successful filibuster, they should examine Hatch and company’s successful filibuster of labor reform legislation in 1978. “[T]he filibuster lasted five, gut-wrenching weeks. And when it was over it had withstood a total of six cloture votes, one of them by a single vote” (117).

Overall, the book is an intriguing account of the political experiences of Orrin Hatch as seen through the eyes of two favorable observers. If you like Orrin Hatch, you’ll like the book.

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