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Political Science

Speaker Nancy Pelosi and the New American Politics
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In January 2007, Nancy Pelosi was elected the first female Speaker of the House. As she broke through the glass ceiling of the male world of politics, the Democrats regained control of the House of Representatives for the first time in twelve years. Pelosi's climb is an important part of this book, but it is not the only story here. Peters, Regents Professor of Political Science at the University of Oklahoma, and Rosenthal, Carlisle and Lurleen Mabrey Professor of Political Science and Director of the Carl Albert Congressional Research and Studies Center at the University of Oklahoma, also describe the often corrosive environment of the "New American Politics," how the position of Speaker of the House has changed as a result, and, most importantly, how effective Pelosi has been as a Speaker.

The New American Politics is characterized by extreme partisanship, constant fundraising to harness powerful electronic media options, the emergence of Latinos as a significant political force, and the increase of women in important positions in both parties. To become Speaker, Pelosi had to both prove that a woman could be an effective Speaker and overcome the impression that she, as an individual, was not a serious politician. The authors include illuminating analyses of Pelosi's leadership during the final years of the Bush administration (2006-07) and during the first two years of the Obama administration (2008-09).

Pelosi, in a fascinating chapter on gender politics, is shown to be adept at playing the gender card: benefiting from being a woman when promoting family, children, and education legislation, issues which are often viewed as women's issues; then assuming a combative posture—traditionally identified as a male trait—when involved in inter-party fights and attacking Bush foreign policy.

The authors attribute Pelosi's low approval rating in part to her gender, but much more to her partisan liberal positions that have alienated Republicans, independents, and centrist

Democrats. Despite this, Pelosi, the authors claim, has had success as Speaker in the New American Politics era. She has demonstrated skillful Party management and won significant legislative accomplishments, including healthcare reform and regulation of the financial industry.

Readers hoping for a rich biography of Pelosi will have to wait. This book is an excellent appraisal of Pelosi as Speaker functioning in a take-no-prisoners political world. It will appeal to political scientists and informed readers of contemporary affairs.

Karl Helicher