A realization that gained strength as this project unfolded is the extent to which the United States legislative committee system is an important organizational phenomenon. It is a critical form, I think, in the understanding of all organizations that practice collective choice. The United States Congress is often noted for its unique qualities, but an examination of the fifty state legislatures and ninety-nine chambers has led me to feel that organizationally Congress is unique only in minor ways, and that there is an evolutionary process in which commonly felt needs bring about similar changes. It seems apparent that many of the interesting theory-based propositions drawn from observations about Congressional behavior are testable at the state level by methods acceptable to the scientific community.

State legislative committee systems offer also an almost irresistible challenge to our understanding of how individuals behave rationally in a collective choice environment. They offer an opportunity to utilize theoretical elements of rational choice in conjunction with systematically collected evidence about ongoing organizational entities. The state legislative bodies serve almost as a “natural experiment.” Many structural components are identical from state to state, yet in other ways state or chamber attributes vary considerably. Within different structural constraints, legislators employ trial and error to achieve their goals. They do so in different size chambers, in different size committees, in varying numbers of committees, perhaps in party caucuses, and perhaps in subcommittees. It would seem that discovering optimalities in the interplay of structure and behavior poses neither too great nor too small a challenge. In any case it is a challenge this book accepts.

Students of comparative state politics (as distinguished from national politics) have for a long time experienced serious deficiencies in regularized data collection. There is no national program to record or even consolidate state level data through the use of modern technology.
As scholars, we have been fortunate to have the Council of State Government publications to inform us of many of the basics, but I have found in every case in my own research that I must initiate additional surveys, not only for opinions of participants, but for basic facts that should be collected on a more systematic basis. For help in this regard I am grateful to the National Science Foundation and to the Weldon Springs Foundation of the University of Missouri. Their financial support was crucial.

While I am grateful for the financial support for this project, it should be stated that greater resources would have allowed more definitive and expansive work. To some I suppose this effort may seem broad enough, but several self-limiting choices had to be made. In writing the chapters of this book I hope to stimulate some of the additional research that I could not undertake. My primary data sources are the responses of over two thousand legislators to a fifty-state questionnaire, official and semi-official information received from legislative service personnel in all fifty states, and more complete information from two “case-study” states, Indiana and Missouri.

Many individuals were involved in this project, but I wish to thank most of all three co-authors, all of whom were funded at one time or another, and all of whom contributed greatly to the success of the project. James Riddlesperger worked with me at the inception of the study when it was funded by NSF. He successfully directed data collection operations for the main survey of state legislators while completing his graduate work. We co-authored “U.S. State Legislative Committees: Structure, Procedural Efficiency, and Party Control,” Legislative Studies Quarterly 7 (1982): 453–71. Pieces of this article appear throughout the book.

The second co-author was William Jacoby, who came into the project in the analysis stages while he was completing his dissertation at North Carolina. His computer and statistical expertise and advice were invaluable. We also co-authored the piece “Scaling Legislative Decision-Making: A Methodological Exercise,” Political Behavior 7 (1985): 285–303. The results of this article are employed in chapter five.

The third co-author, John R. Baker, came to the project nearer to its completion. While doing his graduate work, he directed new data collections to supplement the main legislator survey, including a special study of two states as well as additional fifty-state material. We co-authored “Why Do U.S. State Legislators Vacate Their Seats?” Legislative Studies Quarterly 11 (1986): 119–26. This article is incorpo-
rated, with only a few additions, into chapter seven under the title of “Self-Interest and Legislative Turnover.”

The main legislator survey employed in this study was developed through two methods. First, I implemented a pilot survey prior to NSF funding. Second, NSF funding supported a panel of consultants for the final construction of the questionnaire. The survey and legislative specialist consultants were Ronald Hedlund, William Panning, Eric Uslaner, and Ronald Weber. Randall Calvert and Gary Miller were consulted for their mathematical expertise and rational choice interests. While the final decisions were mine, their assistance was very beneficial and I am grateful for their help. I can recommend the procedure to other researchers.

During the several years of this project’s existence, sound advice and help have come from a variety of sources. In particular, I wish to thank John Freeman for his mathematical advice when the ideas for the work were germinating, Jim King for his help with the survey and discussions about the content, and several other colleagues who have offered helpful criticisms on parts of the project, including Keith Hamm and Malcolm Jewell.

I am indebted also to Wendy Francis, a mathematics major at the University of Texas, who helped with the coding and was able to construct a needed proof (where her father had failed). Others who worked diligently on the project were Barbara Cable, Rob Presley, and Deborah Basnett, all undergraduate students at the time.