

Congress:

Structure & Powers

Role of Political Parties

- In each chamber of Congress, the party breakdown determines the leadership positions
- Chairpersons of committees ~ majority party always leads the committees
- Leadership makes committee assignments
- The majority party sets the agenda
- Bottom line: Who's in control really does matter!

House Republican Leadership

- Speaker of the House ~ Mike Johnson (LA)
- Majority Leader ~ Steve Scalise (LA)
- Majority Whip ~ Tom Emmer (MN)







House Democratic Leadership

- Minority Leader ~ Hakeem Jeffries (NY)



- Minority Whip ~ Katherine Clark (MA)



Senate Democratic Leadership

President of the Senate = V.P. Kamala Harris



Majority Leader = Chuck Schumer (NY)



President Pro-Tempore = Patty Murray (WA)



Majority Whip = Richard Durbin (IL)



Senate Republican Leadership

Minority Leader = Mitch McConnell (KY)



Minority Whip = John Thune (SD)



Role of the Caucus in Congress

- Caucuses are groups of Representatives who come together to pursue shared goals
- Party Caucuses ~ private strategy meetings held by the members of each party
- Other caucuses/coalitions:
- Congressional Air Force Caucus
- Congressional Black Caucus
- The Blue Dogs
- Congressional Border Security Caucus
- Congressional Women, Peace, and Security Caucus
- House Freedom Caucus

Committee Work—This is where the work of Congress gets done

- Committees & subcommittees work out the details of each bill
- Thousands of bills are introduced each year
- Assigned to the appropriate committee based upon topic
- Chairperson of the committee sets the agenda
- Very few actually make to the floor for debate
- “Die in committee”
- Fewer actually get passed into law

Types of Committees

- Standing Committees ~ permanent committees in the House & Senate (usually by topic)
- http://www.house.gov/committees/
- http://www.senate.gov/pagelayout/committees/d_three_sections_with_teasers/committees_home.htm

- Joint Committees ~ consists of members from both the House & Senate (oftentimes, they will be temporary)

- Conference Committees ~ consists of members from both the House & Senate; goal is to work out differences between different versions of a bill

- Select committees ~ put together to deal with specific issues (Example = House Select Committee to Investigate the Assassination of JFK)

How a bill becomes a law

- Long, complicated process
- Typically, takes 5 years or more
- Importance of the Rules Committee ~ "Gatekeeper" in the House of Rep's

I'm just a bill.

HOW A BILL BECOMES A LAW



Idea from consituent or lawmaker.

Bill is written and placed in the hopper.

Bill is introduced in either House.

Bill is studied by House committee

Bill is debated and voted on House floor

Approved bill is sent to Senate or other House

Senate committee may "mark-up" the bill.

Bill is "reported favorably" to the floor of the Senate.

Bill is debated. Filibuster and cloture may occur in the Senate.

Senate approves the bill.

Different versions made one by conference committee

Unified bill debated and voted on by both houses. Bill passes.

Bill is signed or vetoed by president

2/3 both houses of Congress needed to override veto. Approved bill becomes...

The Law

Start Here

Powers of Congress

Expressed powers (aka Enumerated Powers) {Article I, Section 8} ~ specifically written into the Constitution

(Just copy a few of these)

- To borrow money on the credit of the United States;
- To regulate commerce with foreign nations, and among the several states, and with the Indian tribes;
- To establish a uniform rule of naturalization, and uniform laws on the subject of bankruptcies throughout the United States;
- To coin money, regulate the value thereof, and of foreign coin, and fix the standard of weights and measures;
- To provide for the punishment of counterfeiting the securities and current coin of the United States;
- To establish post offices and post roads;
- To promote the progress of science and useful arts, by securing for limited times to authors and inventors the exclusive right to their respective writings and discoveries;
- To constitute tribunals inferior to the Supreme Court;
- To define and punish piracies and felonies committed on the high seas, and offenses against the law of nations;
- To declare war, grant letters of marque and reprisal, and make rules concerning captures on land and water;
- To raise and support armies, but no appropriation of money to that use shall be for a longer term than two years;
- To provide and maintain a navy;
- To make rules for the government and regulation of the land and naval forces;
- To provide for calling forth the militia to execute the laws of the union, suppress insurrections and repel invasions;
- To provide for organizing, arming, and disciplining, the militia, and for governing such part of them as may be employed in the service of the United States, reserving to the states respectively, the appointment of the officers, and the authority of training the militia according to the discipline prescribed by Congress;
- To exercise exclusive legislation in all cases whatsoever, over such District (not exceeding ten miles square) as may, by cession of particular states, and the acceptance of Congress, become the seat of the government of the United States, and to exercise like authority over all places purchased by the consent of the legislature of the state in which the same shall be, for the erection of forts, magazines, arsenals, dockyards, and other needful buildings;--And

Implied powers = how Congress applies each power

Elastic Clause

- “To make all laws which shall be necessary and proper for carrying into execution the foregoing powers, and all other powers vested by this Constitution in the government of the United States, or in any department or officer thereof.”

House & Senate Differences

House:

- 2 year terms
- Revenue bills must start in the House
- Impeachment =charges brought against the Prez
- Electronic voting
- Limited debate
- Tend to be younger & not as wealthy

Senate:

- 6 year terms
- Approves presidential appts. & treaties
- Trials for presidents who are impeached
- Traditional voice voting
- Can have unlimited debate (filibuster)
- Tend to be older, wealthier, and from higher class professions

How should they represent you?

- Instructed delegates vs. Trustees
- Instructed delegates = do exactly what your district wants even if it goes against your own personal beliefs
- Trustees = use your judgment & personal beliefs to do what's best for the country (in your opinion)

Dealing with Constituents

- Casework ~ resolving problems for people in their districts
- Pork barrel ~ projects for their home districts/states
- “bringing home the bacon”
- Credit claiming
- Members of Congress have a record

Checking the other Branches

Legislative oversight of the Exec. Branch

- Committee hearings to get updates on implementation of policies & laws passed by Congress
- Power of the purse ~ the ability of Congress to withdraw funding for programs
- POTUS can nominate heads of departments, but must be confirmed by the US Senate
- Can override a presidential veto with a 2/3^{rds} majority in each chamber

Oversight of the Courts:

- All federal judges are nominated by POTUS, but must be confirmed by the US Senate
- Budget of the federal courts must be approved by Congress during the regular budget process

Conclusion

- Congress passes laws and shapes policies
- They hold the money bag!
- Federal government cannot spend money unless approved by Congress (appropriations)
- Seniority matters!
- Real work of Congress is done in committees and subcommittees