CONGRESS

THE HOUSE AND THE SENATE; CAPITOL HILL
KEY INFO

• CREATED BY ARTICLE I OF THE CONSTITUTION
• BICAMERAL (2 CHAMBERS) LEGISLATURE
• 535 MEMBERS IN CONGRESS
  • 435 IN THE HOUSE; 2 YEAR TERMS
  • 100 IN THE SENATE; 6 YEAR TERMS- 1/3 EVERY 2 YRS

• HOUSE: 25 YRS; CITIZEN 7 YRS
• SENATE; 30 YRS; CITIZEN 9 YRS
CONGRESSIONAL ELECTIONS

Who Wins Elections?

• Incumbent: Those already holding office.

Figure 12.1
CONGRESSIONAL ELECTIONS; EVERY 2 YRS. EVEN YRS.

The Role of Party Identification

• Most members represent the majority party in their district.

Defeating Incumbents

• Some incumbents face problems after a scandal or other complication in office.
• They may face redistricting. Gerrymandering
• They may become a victim of a major political tidal wave.
REAPPORTIONMENT AND REDISTRICTING

Reapportionment- based on census

- Changes in number of seats in the House in the states
- 1 for 650K-700K
- Determines number of electors by state
- Greatly impacts power of states
- Move to South and West; move out of East and Midwest
REAPPORTIONMENT AND REDISTRICTING

Redistricting

- Redrawing districts based on changes in population
- GERRYMANDERING- drawing districts to the advantage of a political party
  - Must be continuous line
  - Cannot disenfranchise any groups of people
  - Occurs nationally and within states
  - If there is a dispute, courts decide
  - Happens every 10 years after census
HOW CONGRESS IS ORGANIZED TO MAKE POLICY

- American Bicameralism
  - Bicameral: Legislature divided into two houses.

The House
- 435 members, 2 year terms of office.
- Minimum 1 per state
- Initiates all revenue bills, more influential on budget.
- House Rules Committee
- Limited debates.

The Senate
- 100 members, 6 year terms of office.
- Gives “advice & consent”, more influential on foreign affairs.
- Unlimited debates.

From Table 12.3
HOW CONGRESS IS ORGANIZED TO MAKE POLICY

The House

- Impeaches Executive and Judicial Branch officials by a MAJORITY
- ONLY 2 PRESIDENTS IMPEACHED; ANDREW JOHNSON AND BILL CLINTON; NOT NIXON

The Senate

- Convicts Executive and Judicial Branch officials by 2/3
- Approves treaties by 2/3 (formal agreement between US and one or more nations)
- Confirms by majority presidential nominees
- Confirms Federal Judges by a majority

From Table 12.3
HOW CONGRESS IS ORGANIZED TO MAKE POLICY

The Senate

• FILIBUSTER RULE (not in Constitution)
  • Senate must vote for CLOTURE (60 votes)
  • If not 60, bill is dead
  • Rules changed in 2013 to NOT include presidential nominees and district and appellate Federal judges; 2017 Supreme Ct. Justices

From Table 12.3
How Congress is Organized

- Congressional Leadership

- The House
  - Led by Speaker of the House - elected by House members. Most powerful member of Congress
  - Major role in committee assignments and legislation.
  - Assisted by majority leader and whips.

- The Senate
  - Formally led by Vice President.
  - Really led by Majority Leader - chosen by party members.
  - Assisted by whips.
  - Must work with Minority leader.
HOW CONGRESS IS ORGANIZED TO MAKE POLICY

The Committees and Subcommittees

- Four types of committees:
  - Standing (permanent) committees: subject matter committees handle different policy areas.
  - Joint committees: few policy areas- made up of House & Senate members.
  - Conference committees: resolve differences in House and Senate bills.
  - Select committees: created for a specific purpose.
HOW CONGRESS IS ORGANIZED TO MAKE POLICY

The Committees and Subcommittees

- The Committees at Work: Legislation and Oversight
  - Committees work on the 11,000 bills every session.
  - Some hold hearings and “mark up” meetings.
  - Oversight involves hearings and other methods of checking the actions of the executive branch.
  - As the size of government grows, oversight grows too.
HOW CONGRESS IS ORGANIZED TO MAKE POLICY

The Committees and Subcommittees

• The Committees at Work: Legislation and Oversight
  • The vast majority of bills introduced never reach the floor of either chamber
  • 7 of 8 bills die in committee
HOW CONGRESS IS ORGANIZED TO MAKE POLICY

The Committees and Subcommittees

• Getting on a Committee
  • Members want committee assignments that will help them get reelected, gain influence, and make policy.
  • New members express their committee preferences to the party leaders.
  • Support of the party is important in getting on the right committee.
  • Parties try to grant committee preferences.
HOW CONGRESS IS ORGANIZED TO MAKE POLICY

The Committees and Subcommittees

• Getting Ahead on the Committee: Chairs and the Seniority System.
  • The chair is the most important position for controlling legislation.
  • Chairs were once chosen strictly by the seniority system.
  • Now seniority is a general rule, and members may choose the chair of their committee.
Caucuses: The Informal Organization of Congress

- Caucus: A group of members of Congress sharing some interest or characteristic.
- Caucuses pressure for committee meetings and hearings and for votes on bills.
- Caucuses can be more effective than lobbyists.
- Party caucus-members of a party select party leaders and develop party policy.
HOW CONGRESS IS ORGANIZED TO MAKE POLICY

Congressional Staff

- Personal staff: Work for the member. Mainly providing constituent service, but help with legislation too.
- Committee staff: organize hearings, research & write legislation, target of lobbyists.
- Staff Agencies: GAO, CBO provide specific information to Congress.
THE CONGRESSIONAL PROCESS

Legislation:

• Bill: A proposed law.
• Anyone can draft a bill, but only members of Congress can introduce them.
• More rules in the House than in the Senate.
• Party leaders play a vital role in steering bills through both houses, but less in the Senate.
• Countless influences on the legislative process.
THE CONGRESSIONAL PROCESS

HOW A BILL CAN DIE BEFORE BECOMING LAW

1. SPEAKER CAN REFUSE TO GIVE BILL TO COMMITTEE
2. THE COMMITTEE(S) CAN KILL OR TABLE THE BILL
3. THE HOUSE APPROPRIATIONS SUBCOMMITTEE CAN REFUSE TO FUND THE BILL
4. A MAJORITY OF THE HOUSE OR SENATE CAN REJECT THE BILL
THE CONGRESSIONAL PROCESS

HOW A BILL BECOMES LAW:
1. INTRODUCTION BY HOUSE OR SENATE: HR, SB
2. COMMITTEE REVIEW; 7 OF 8 DIE
3. FLOOR DEBATE AND PASSAGE; CONFERENCE COMMITTEE
4. PRESIDENTIAL APPROVAL

PRESIDENTIAL OPTIONS:
1. SIGN INTO LAW
2. VETO
3. POCKET VETO; DON’T SIGN AND CONGRESS ADJOurns
4. DON’T SIGN AND 10 DAYS BECOMES LAW
VETO PROCESS CONTINUED

IF THE PRESIDENT VETOS
MUST BE OVERRIDEN BY 2/3 OF THE HOUSE AND
2/3 OF THE SENATE
THE CONGRESSIONAL PROCESS

Party, Constituency, and Ideology

- Party Influence: Party leaders cannot force party members to vote a particular way, but many do vote along party lines.
- Constituency versus Ideology: Most constituents are uninformed about their member. It is difficult for constituents to influence their member, but on controversial issues members can not ignore constituents.
There are several thousand lobbyists trying to influence Congress - the bigger the issue, the more lobbyists will be working on it.

Lobbyists can be ignored, shunned and even regulated by Congress.

Ultimately, it is a combination of lobbyists and others that influence members of Congress.
THE CONGRESSIONAL PROCESS

Citizens

- Citizens can influence Congress by:
  - Calling their members of Congress
  - Joining Interest Groups that lobby Congress
  - Sending letters to their members of Congress
  - Sending e-mails to their members of Congress
  - Attend town hall meetings
Congress and Democracy

- Leadership and committee assignments are not representative.
- Congress does try to respond to what the people want, but some argue it could do a better job.
- Members of Congress are responsive to the people, if the people make clear what they want.
Congress and the Scope of Government

- **Enumerated powers** - powers given explicitly given to Congress in the Constitution
- The more policies Congress works on, the more ways they can serve their constituencies.
- The more programs that get created, the bigger government gets.
- Everybody wants government programs cut, just not *their* programs. **EARMARKS; SPECIAL SPENDING PROJECTS PASSED BY CONGRESSPERSON FOR HIS/HER CONSTITUENCIES**