

# **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.

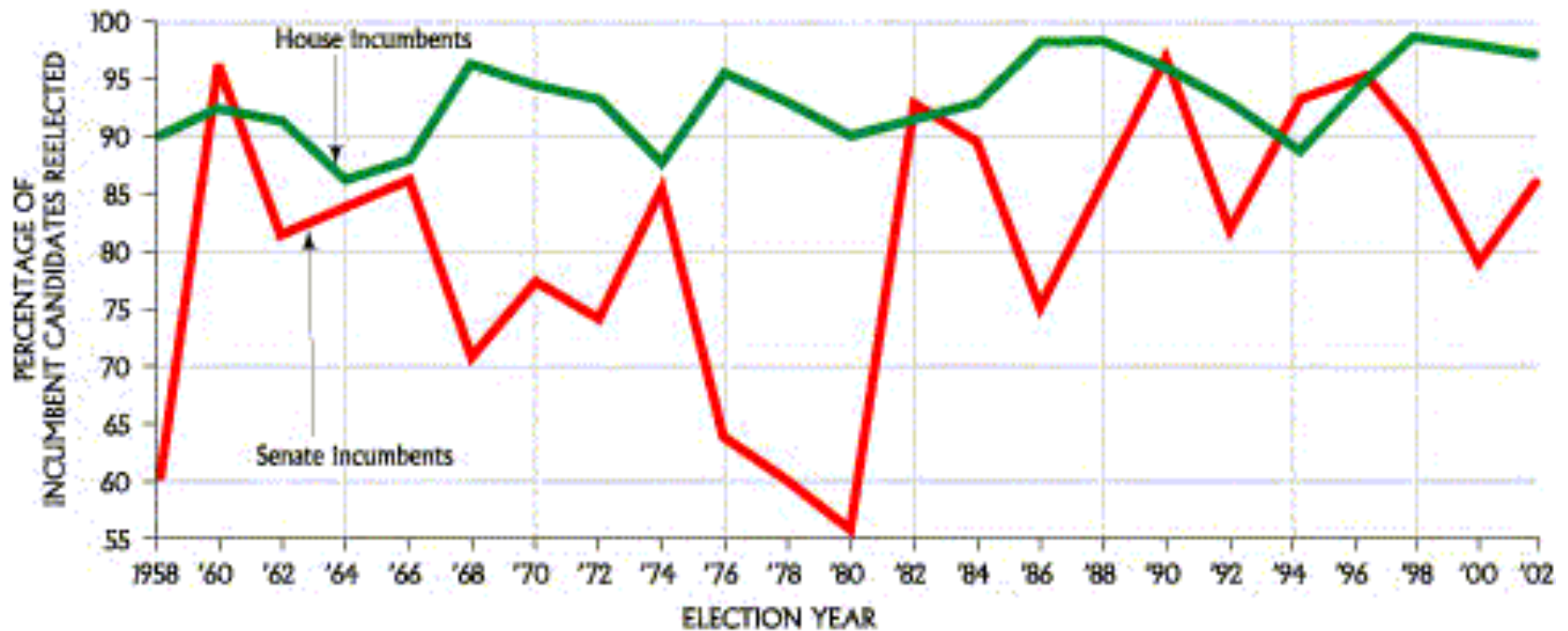


Figure 12.1

# 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. (filibuster)

# 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



# 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

# 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.

# HOW CONGRESS IS ORGANIZED TO MAKE POLICY

## 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.

# THE CONGRESSIONAL PROCESS

## Lobbyists and Interest Groups

- 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



# UNDERSTANDING CONGRESS

## 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.

# UNDERSTANDING CONGRESS

## 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**