

Daily Lecture Notes

Lesson

5-1

Did you know?

Jeanette Rankin, a Republican from Montana, was the first woman elected to Congress. She was elected to the House of Representatives in 1916 and was reelected in 1940.

Outline

I. Congressional Sessions (page 123)

- A. Each term of Congress has two sessions.
- B. Sessions last until Congress votes to adjourn.

Discussion Question

Until 1933 Congress remained in session only four to six months each year. Should modern Congresses return to this schedule? Why or why not? (Answers will vary. Students should support their opinions with good reasons.)

II. Membership of the House (pages 124–127)

- A. Members must be at least 25 years old, citizens for at least 7 years, and residents of the states they represent.
- B. Members serve for two-year terms.
- C. The number of representatives from each state is determined by the census population count every 10 years.
- D. State legislatures set up congressional districts after the census count, with one representative from each district.

Discussion Question

Today, each House member represents about 625,000 people. When the population increases, should Congress add more members to the House? Why or why not? (No. The size of the House is limited for more efficient government.)

III. Membership of the Senate (pages 128–129)

- A. Senators must be at least 30 years old, citizens for at least 9 years, and residents of the states they represent.

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III. Membership of the Senate (pages 128–129, continued)

- B.** Senators serve for 6-year terms; one-third are elected every two years.
- C.** Each state elects two senators.
- D.** The Senate and the House set their members' salaries; members receive numerous benefits, allowances for office staffs and business trips, tax breaks for maintaining two residences, and pensions when they retire.
- E.** Both House and Senate members enjoy immunity from arrest, in cases not involving a felony or treason, or being sued for libel when Congress is in session.
- F.** Both the Senate and House may refuse to seat a member and may censure or even expel members.

Discussion Question

If you were a politician, would you rather be a member of the House or the Senate? Explain. (Answers will vary. Students should cite the advantages of membership in either chamber.)

IV. The Members of Congress (pages 129–130)

- A.** Nearly half the members of Congress are lawyers.
- B.** White, middle-aged male members are increasingly joined by members reflecting the ethnic, racial, and gender makeup of the general population.
- C.** Most incumbent members of Congress win reelection to office because they are well known, find it easier to raise campaign money, and often represent districts gerrymandered in favor of their parties.
- D.** Candidates for Congress have begun using the Internet as a campaign tool; experts forecast that Congressional candidates will make greater use of Web technologies in the future.

Discussion Question

In the late 1990s, members of Congress faced growing criticism about spending so much time in office raising money and planning their reelection campaigns. Do you think this criticism was justified? Explain. (Answers will vary. Students should support their opinions with examples.)

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Did you know?

The Speaker of the House who served the longest was Democrat Sam Rayburn of Texas. He served from 1940–1947, 1949–1953, and 1955–1961, for a total of seventeen years. No other Speaker has served more than 10 years.

Outline

I. Rules for Lawmaking (pages 132–134)

- A. Each house of Congress has rules to help members conduct business.
- B. Congress carries out most of its work by committees. Because of its large membership, committee work is even more important in the House than in the Senate.
- C. Party membership guides Congress in its work, since the majority party in each house organizes the committees, appoints committee heads, and controls the flow of legislation.

Discussion Question

Do you agree or disagree with the House rule that limits a representative's speaking time during a debate? Explain. (Answers will vary. Students should support their answers with logical reasons.)

II. House Leadership (pages 134–135)

- A. The Speaker of the House is leader of the majority party and has great power and influence over its members.
- B. Floor leaders of both the majority and minority parties are party leaders who help steer bills through committees.
- C. Party whips assist the floor leaders in persuading party members to support laws the party favors.

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Discussion Question

The Speaker of the House follows the vice president in the line of presidential succession. Do you support or object to this plan? Explain. (Answers will vary. Students should give sound reasons for the plan they support.)

III. Lawmaking in the House (pages 135–137)

- A.** Members attend House floor sessions to vote on legislation.
- B.** All laws begin as bills introduced in the House, then go to committee. If approved there, they are put on the proper calendar, listing the order in which they will be considered on the House floor.
- C.** The House Rules Committee receives all bills approved by the various committees of the House.
- D.** The Rules Committee determines which bills will be considered by the full House and places them on the House Calendar.
- E.** The Rules Committee also settles disputes among other House committees and delays or blocks bills that representatives and House leaders do not want to come to a vote.
- F.** When the Rules Committee sends bills to the floor, the House may sit as a Committee of the Whole, in which 100 members constitutes a quorum, in order to speed up consideration of an important bill, so that the full House can then vote on it.

Discussion Question

Why is so much of the work of Congress done in committees? (Committees divide up the tasks and make them manageable.)

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Did you know?

You have probably heard someone say that “talk is cheap.” Not in the Senate, where in a 1953 debate senators opposed to a bill about offshore oil drilling rights added 1,241,414 words to the pages of the *Congressional Record*—and increased the printing cost by several thousand dollars.

Outline

I. The Senate at Work (pages 138–140)

- A. The Senate has fewer rules than the House. Senators have more freedom to express their views and are less subject to party discipline than representatives.
- B. The atmosphere in the Senate is more informal than in the House.
- C. The vice president presides over the Senate but has much less power and influence there than does the Speaker of the House; the president pro tempore often presides in the Senate.
- D. The Senate majority floor leader is responsible for guiding bills through the Senate; the minority floor leader develops criticisms of majority party bills and tries to keep the opposition party members working together.
- E. Majority and minority floor whips assist their floor leaders in making sure members are present for key Senate votes.
- F. Senate leaders control the flow of bills to committees and to the floor for debate; there is no Senate committee comparable to the House Rules Committee.

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I. The Senate at Work (pages 138–140, continued)

- G. The Senate has only two calendars—the Calendar of General Orders, which schedules bills to be considered in the Senate, and the Executive Calendar, which schedules treaties and nominations.
- H. A filibuster—a stalling of the legislative procedure to prevent a vote—can be ended only by a three-fifths vote; in recent years the filibuster has lost effectiveness as a legislative weapon because new rules allow other matters to continue at the same time.
- I. The majority party controls the flow of legislative work in the Senate.

Discussion Question

Why does the committee system have a less important role in the Senate than in the House of Representatives? (More discussion takes place on the floor of the Senate because there are fewer senators.)

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Did you know?

In the early 1950s Wisconsin Senator Joseph McCarthy, chairman of the Committee on Government Operations, treated witnesses before that committee so harshly, ignoring their constitutional rights, that the Senate later censured him. Such misconduct now is often called "McCarthyism."

Outline

I. Purposes of Committees (page 141)

- A. Committees ease Congressional workload by dividing work among smaller groups, allowing members to specialize on key issues.
- B. Committees allow members to discuss and select the most important bills Congress will consider.
- C. Committees hold investigative public hearings on key problems and issues to inform the public.

Discussion Question

Identify some advantages and disadvantages to working out a compromise on a bill.

(Advantages: wider support in Congress, more care in crafting legislation.

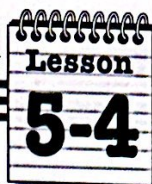
Disadvantages: bill loses original focus; it takes a longer time.)

II. Kinds of Committees (pages 142–144)

- A. Standing committees deal with certain issues continuing from one Congress to the next.
- B. The majority party in each house controls standing committees and bases committee membership on each party's strength.
- C. Subcommittees handle special subcategories of standing committees' work and continue from one Congress to the next.
- D. Select committees are special committees created in both houses of Congress, usually for one term only, to study a specific issue and report their findings.
- E. Joint committees are made up of members of both houses to act as study groups.

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II. Kinds of Committees (pages 142–144, continued)

- F. Conference committees are temporary committees set up to resolve the differences in the House and Senate versions of a bill by working out a compromise bill that each house then can accept or reject.

Discussion Question

Identify some issues that you think are important enough to create a select congressional committee. (Answers will vary. See list of types of issues on page 143.)

III. Choosing Committee Members (pages 144–145)

- A. Membership in committees is one key role played by members of Congress.
- B. Membership on certain committees:
 - 1. helps members to build reputations and to increase their chances for reelection;
 - 2. gives members a chance to influence important national legislation;
 - 3. enables members to influence other members since those committees deal with issues that are important to all members.
- C. In both houses, both parties assign members to the standing committees.
- D. The party leaders and chairpersons of the standing committees are the most powerful members of Congress.
- E. Standing committee chairpersons make key decisions about the work of their committees, though their power has been reduced since 1970.
- F. Seniority traditionally guided the election of chairpersons until the 1970s.

Discussion Question

Members of Congress who have served the longest often head key committees and have an important voice in passing legislation. Do you think this seniority system helps Congress to operate more effectively? Explain your viewpoint. (Answers will vary. See seniority system page 145.)

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Did you know?

The Library of Congress is the world's largest library, as of 2000 housing more than 18 million books and 71 million maps, recordings, photographs, and manuscripts. One of its most treasured items is the Gutenberg Bible, which is on permanent display for visitors to see.

Outline

I. Congressional Staff Role (pages 146–147)

- A. Lawmakers rely on their staffs to help with many congressional duties.
- B. As congressional workloads have increased, staff duties have become increasingly important as well.

Discussion Question

In 1995 Congress cut the congressional staff by one-third. Do you think this reduction was necessary? Explain your answer. (Answers will vary. Staff cuts are rare, but this one had bipartisan support.)

II. Congressional Staff Growth (page 147)

- A. Prior to 1946, Congress had no staff aides. In recent decades, increased complexity has resulted in much larger congressional staffs.
- B. Congressional staffs provide expert help on key issues and help members of Congress serve constituents' growing demands.

Discussion Question

Should members of Congress be responsible for helping private citizens resolve their difficulties with government agencies? Why or why not? (Answers will vary. See constituent service under Congressional Staff Growth on page 147.)

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III. Personal Staff (pages 147–148)

- A.** Members' personal staffs are divided so that some staffers work in Washington and others work in members' home states.
- B.** Administrative assistants run lawmakers' offices, supervise schedules, and advise on political matters.
- C.** Legislative assistants keep lawmakers well informed about bills, assist in committee work, write speeches, and keep track of the workflow.
- D.** Caseworkers are congressional personal staff members who handle requests from constituents; they usually staff members' offices in their home states.

Discussion Question

Congressional staffers are not elected, yet they sometimes exert great power and influence in the lawmaking process. What are some advantages and disadvantages of this system? (Advantages: staff provides expert information; helps manage workload. Disadvantages: may be out of touch with the people; may have too much influence.)

IV. Committee Staff (pages 148–149)

- A.** Committee staffs work for congressional committees, assisting chairpersons as bills proceed through various committees to the floor.
- B.** Committee staff members often become experts in the areas their committees handle; critics argue that staff members are unelected, yet they have a large role in shaping legislation.

Discussion Question

What are the advantages and disadvantages of having an experienced staffer remain with the same committee for many years? (Answers will vary but should show evidence and understanding of committee work.)

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(continued)

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V. Support Agencies (pages 149–150)

- A. The Library of Congress provides information requested by Congress, congressional staff, and committees.
- B. The Congressional Budget Office coordinates budget making, studies presidential budget proposals, projects new program costs, and tracks congressional spending.
- C. The General Accounting Office is the watchdog over the spending of funds appropriated by Congress, informing members about specific program costs.
- D. The Government Printing Office serves the federal government by printing the *Congressional Record*, a complete account of all congressional speeches and testimony, and the *Statistical Abstract of the United States*, an annual publication.

Discussion Question

What is the main advantage of having congressional support agencies that are independent of the executive branch? (Agencies that support Congress are responsible only to Congress.)

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