

# Lesson 9

We will begin this week by reading Chapter Seven on Congress at Work from **pages 180-203**. This chapter is divided into 4 sections. Each section's focus and objective will be listed for you. As you read through your text, take appropriate notes to help prepare for tests.

**Section 1:** This section discusses the process by which bills become laws, the methods opponents use to defeat them, and the positive and negative implications of the process.

**Objective:** Explain the process by which federal legislation is proposed, reviewed, and enacted.

**Section 2:** This section explains the procedure by which Congress provides money to the executive agencies and departments, and the authority of Congress over how the national government will raise and spend money.

**Objective:** Analyze the power of Congress to raise and spend money through tax laws and appropriations bills.

**Section 3:** This section describes influences over Congress, lobbying, and the factors that Congress members must weigh when deciding whether to support an interest group or the president.

**Objective:** Identify factors that often influence members of Congress.

**Section 4:** This section discusses the ways in which legislators help their constituents, the awarding of federal grants and contracts, and pork-barrel legislation.

**Objective:** Explain how members of Congress help voters in their state or district.

After you finish reading this chapter, go over your notes one last time to prepare for the test. Make sure you are clear on all focus points and that you feel comfortable with the material. Click on the link to complete the chapter test. Good luck!

## U.S. Government

## Lesson 9

### Congress at Work



**Serving You** Congress's primary responsibility is to make law. Members of Congress also make appointments to military academies, provide passes to visit the Capitol and the White House, and help citizens deal with the government bureaucracy.

 [Web Link](#)

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To learn more about how Congress works and how to access its services, view the *Democracy in Action* Chapter 7 video lesson:

### How a Bill Becomes a Law

In 1957 the Civil Rights Bill was one of many bills introduced in Congress. Unlike a majority of the bills introduced that year, and against the backdrop of a lengthy filibuster, it passed. During each 2-year term of Congress, thousands of bills are introduced. Why are so many introduced? Congress, as the national legislature, is open to all Americans who want things from the government. The president, federal agencies, labor unions, business groups, and individual citizens all look to Congress to pass laws favorable to their various interests.

*Lecture notes*

**Reader's Guide**

Of the thousands of bills introduced in each session, only a few hundred become laws. Most die in Congress, and some are vetoed by the president. If a bill is not passed before the end of a congressional term, it must be reintroduced in the next Congress to be given further consideration.

In this section you will find out how the lawmaking process actually works. First you will look at the different forms new legislation may take. Then you will learn about the steps a bill must go through in order to become a law.

### Types of Bills and Resolutions



**COVER STORY**

Two types of bills are introduced in Congress. **Private bills** deal with individual people or places. They often involve people's claims against the government or their immigration problems. One such private bill waived immigration requirements so that an American woman could marry a man from Greece. Private bills used to account for a large number of the bills introduced in Congress. Lately, however, their numbers have declined. In a recent Congress, only a few hundred of the 11,722 bills introduced were private bills.

On the other hand, **public bills** deal with general matters and apply to the entire nation. They are often controversial. Major public bills usually receive significant media coverage. They may involve such issues as raising or lowering taxes, national health insurance, gun control, civil rights, or abortion. Major public bills account for about 30 percent of the bills passed in each term of Congress. They may be debated for months before they become law.

**Resolutions** Congress may also pass several types of resolutions to deal with unusual or temporary matters. A **simple resolution** covers matters affecting only one house of Congress and is passed by that house alone. If a new rule or procedure is needed, it is adopted in the form of a resolution. Because it is an internal matter, it does not have the force of law and is not sent to the president for signature.

*Politics and You*

**Joint Resolutions** When both houses pass a **joint resolution** the president's signature gives it the force of law. Joint resolutions may correct an error in an earlier law, for example, or appropriate money for a special purpose. Congress also uses joint resolutions to propose constitutional amendments, which do not require the president's signature.

**Concurrent Resolutions** Another type of resolution is a concurrent resolution. **Concurrent resolutions** cover matters requiring the action of the House and Senate, but on which a law is not needed. A concurrent resolution, for example, may set the date for the adjournment of Congress, or it may express Congress's opinion about an issue. Both houses of Congress must pass concurrent resolutions. They do not require the president's signature, and they do not have the force of law.

**Riders** Bills and resolutions usually deal with only one subject, such as civil rights or veterans' benefits. Sometimes, however, a rider is attached to a bill. A **rider** is a provision on a subject other than the one covered in the bill. Lawmakers attach riders to bills that are likely to pass, although presidents have sometimes vetoed such bills because of a rider they did not like. Sometimes lawmakers attach many unrelated riders simply to benefit their constituents. Such a bill resembles a Christmas tree loaded with ornaments. "**Christmas tree**" bills sometimes pass because of the essential nature of the underlying bill.

**Why So Few Bills Become Laws** Less than 10 percent of all bills introduced in Congress become public laws. Why so few?



One reason is that the lawmaking process itself is very long and complicated. A congressional study found that more than 100 specific steps may be involved in passing a law. Thus, at many points in the lawmaking process a bill can be delayed, killed, or changed. This process has two important implications. First, it means that groups that oppose a bill have an advantage over those that support it. Opponents can amend the bill or kill it at many steps along the way.



Second, because the lawmaking process has so many steps, sponsors of a bill must be willing to bargain and compromise with lawmakers and interest groups. Compromise is the only way to get support to move a bill from one step to the next. Without strong support, most major bills have little chance of becoming law. Moreover, bills that powerful interest groups oppose are not likely to be passed.

Another reason so few bills become law is that lawmakers sometimes introduce bills they know have no chance of ever becoming law. Members of Congress may introduce such bills to go on record in support of an idea or policy or simply to attract the attention of the news media. Members may also want to satisfy an important group from their state or district. Still another reason is to call attention to the need for new legislation in an area such as health care or highway safety. Introducing a bill can help lawmakers avoid criticism at reelection time. By introducing a bill, lawmakers can report that they have taken action on a particular problem. When the bill does not move forward, they can blame a committee or other lawmakers.

## Introducing a Bill



The Constitution sets forth only a few of the many steps a bill must go through to become law. The remaining steps have developed as Congress has grown in size and complexity and the number of bills has increased.

**How Bills Are Introduced** The first step in the legislative process is proposing and introducing a new bill. The ideas for new bills come from private citizens, interest groups, the president, or officials in the executive branch. Various people may write new bills, such as lawmakers or their staffs, lawyers from a Senate or House committee, a White House staff member, or even an interest group itself. Only a member of Congress, however, can introduce a bill in either house of Congress. Lawmakers who sponsor a major public bill usually try to find cosponsors to show that the bill has wide support.

To introduce a bill in the House, a representative simply drops the bill into the hopper, a box near the clerk's desk. To introduce a bill in the Senate, the presiding officer of the Senate must first recognize the senator who then formally presents the bill.



Bills introduced in the House and Senate are printed and distributed to lawmakers. Each bill is given a title and a number. The first bill introduced during a session of Congress in the Senate is designated as S.1, the second bill as S.2, and so forth. In the House, the first bill is H.R. 1, the second bill, H.R. 2, and so on. This

process is the **first reading** of the bill.

**Committee Action** In each house of Congress, new bills are sent to the committees that deal with their subject matter. Committee chairpersons may, in turn, send the bill to a subcommittee. Under the chairperson's leadership, the committee can ignore the bill and simply let it die. This procedure is called "**pigeonholing.**" Most bills die quietly this way. However, the committee also can kill the bill by a majority vote. The committee can recommend that the bill be adopted as it was introduced, make changes, or completely rewrite the bill before sending it back to the House or Senate for further action.

The House and Senate almost always agree with a committee's decision on a bill. Committee members and staff are considered experts on the subject of the bill. If they do not think a bill should move ahead, other lawmakers are usually reluctant to disagree with them. Besides, all members of Congress are also members of various committees. They do not want the decisions of their own committees overturned or questioned, so they usually go along with the decisions other committees make. Time is also a serious factor. Lawmakers have heavy workloads and must depend on the judgment of their peers.

**Committee Hearings** When a committee decides to act on a bill, the committee (or subcommittee) will hold hearings on the bill. **Hearings** are sessions at which a committee listens to testimony from people interested in the bill. Witnesses who appear at the hearings may include experts on the subject of the bill, government officials, and representatives of interest groups concerned with the bill.

The hearings on a bill may last for as little as an hour or go on for many months. Hearings are supposed to be an opportunity for Congress to gather information on the bill. Most detailed information about the bill, however, comes from research done by the committee staff.

Hearings can be very important in their own right, though. Skillful chairpersons may use hearings to influence public opinion for or against a bill or to test the political acceptability of a bill. Hearings can also help focus public attention on a problem or give interest groups a chance to present their opinions. In addition, hearings are often the best point in the lawmaking process to influence a bill. It is during hearings that letters and telegrams from interested citizens can have their greatest impact on the bill.

After the hearings are completed, the committee meets in a markup session to decide what changes, if any, to make in the bill. In this type of session, committee members go through the bill section by section adopting changes they deem necessary to make the bill acceptable. A majority vote of the committee is required for all changes that are made to the bill.



**Reporting a Bill** When all the changes have been made, the committee votes either to kill the bill or to report it. To report the bill means to send it to the House or Senate for action. Along with the revised bill, the committee will send to the House or Senate a written report the committee staff has prepared. This report is important. It explains the committee's actions, describes the bill, lists the major changes the committee has made, and gives opinions on the bill. The report is often the only document available to lawmakers or their

staffs as they decide how to vote on a bill. The committee report may recommend passage of the bill or it may report the bill unfavorably. Why would a committee report a bill but not recommend passage? This happens extremely rarely. A committee may believe the full House should have the opportunity to consider a

bill even though the committee does not support it.

## Floor Action



The next important step in the lawmaking process is the debate on the bill on the floor of the House and Senate. Voting on the bill follows the debate. As you may recall, both houses have special procedures to schedule bills for floor action.

**Debating and Amending Bills** Usually, only a few lawmakers take part in floor debates. The pros and cons of the bill have been argued in the committee hearings and are already well known to those with a real interest in the bill. The floor debate over a bill, however, is the point where amendments can be added to a bill (unless the House has adopted a closed rule, which means no amendments may be adopted). During the floor debate, the bill receives its second reading. A clerk reads the bill section by section. After each section is read, amendments may be offered. Any lawmaker can propose an amendment to a bill during the floor debate.

Amendments range from the introduction of major changes in a bill to the correction of typographical errors. Opponents of the bill sometimes propose amendments to slow its progress through Congress or even to kill it. One strategy opponents use is to load it down with so many objectionable amendments that it loses support and dies. In both the House and the Senate amendments are added to a bill only if a majority of the members present approves them.



**Voting on Bills** After the floor debate, the bill, including any proposed changes, is ready for a vote. A quorum, or a majority, of the members must be present. The House or Senate now receives the third reading of the bill. A vote on the bill is then taken. Passage of a bill requires a majority vote of all the members present.

House members vote on a bill in one of three ways. The first is a **voice vote**, in which members together call out "Aye" or "No." The Speaker determines which side has the most voice votes. The second way of voting is by a **standing vote**, or **division vote**, in which those in favor of the bill stand and are counted, then those opposed stand and are counted. The third method is a recorded vote, in which members' votes are recorded electronically. Their votes are flashed on large display panels in the House chamber. This method, used since 1973, saves the House many hours of time that it took for roll-call votes in each session.

The Senate has three methods of voting. These methods include a voice vote, a standing vote, and a roll call. The voice vote and the standing vote are the same as in the House. In a **roll-call vote**, senators respond "Aye" or "No" as their names are called in alphabetical order. Roll-call votes are recorded and over the years have become increasingly common.

## Final Steps in Passing Bills



To become law a bill must pass both houses of Congress in identical form. A bill passed in the House of Representatives often differs somewhat from a bill on the same subject passed in the Senate.

**Conference Committee Action** Often, one house will accept the version of a bill the other house has passed. At times, however, the bill must go to a conference committee made up of senators and representatives to work out differences between the versions. The members of the conference committee are called **conferees** or managers. They usually come from the House and Senate committees that handled the bill originally.

The conferees work out the differences between the two bills by bargaining and arranging compromises. Conference committees rarely kill a bill. The conference committee is supposed to consider only the parts of a bill on which there is disagreement. In actual practice, however, the members of the committee sometimes make important changes in the bill or add provisions neither the House nor Senate previously considered. A majority of the members of the conference committee from each house drafts the final compromise bill, called a **conference report**. Once it is accepted, the bill can be submitted to each house of Congress for final action.

**Presidential Action on Bills** Article I of the Constitution states that:

🟢🟢Every Bill which shall have passed the House of Representatives and the Senate, shall, before it becomes a Law, be presented to the President of the United States... 🟢🟢

— Article I, Section 7


After both houses of Congress have approved a bill in identical form, it is sent to the president. The president may take any one of several actions. First, the president may sign the bill, and it will become law. Second, the president may keep the bill for 10 days without signing it. If Congress is in session, the bill will become law without the president's signature. This rarely happens. Presidents may use this procedure if they approve of most of the provisions of a bill but object to others. By letting the bill become law without a signature, the president indicates dissatisfaction with these provisions. Most of the time, however, presidents sign the bills that Congress sends them.

**Vetoing Bills** The president can also reject a bill in two ways. First, the president may veto a bill. In a **veto** the president refuses to sign the bill and returns it to the house of Congress in which it originated. The president also includes reasons for the veto. Second, the president may kill a bill passed during the last 10 days Congress is in session simply by refusing to act on it. This veto is called a **pocket veto**. Because Congress is no longer in session, it cannot override the veto and the bill dies.

**Line-Item Veto** In 1984, President Reagan suggested a constitutional amendment that would give a president the same veto power that many governors have. These governors may veto specific provisions (lines or items) of a bill while accepting the main part of the legislation. Bill Clinton announced his support of a line-item veto in the 1992 presidential campaign. To sidestep the need for an amendment, Congress passed an enhanced rescission bill in 1996. Essentially a line-item veto for spending and tax issues, this bill allowed Congress to override a line-item veto by two-thirds majority vote of both houses.



### Landmark Cases

**Clinton v. City of New York** President Clinton first used the new veto power in August 1997. When the president canceled a provision of the Balanced Budget Act of 1997 and parts of the Taxpayer Relief Act of 1997, two parties filed suit. New York and several local hospitals challenged the veto because it reduced Medicaid funding for New York state. The Snake River Potato Growers of Idaho challenged the veto of a tax break in the Taxpayer Relief Act. On appeal, the Supreme Court ruled in *Clinton v. City of New York* (1998) that the Line Item Veto Act was unconstitutional because it "authorizes the president to effect the repeal of laws for his own policy reasons without observing the procedures set out in Article I, [Section] 7." 

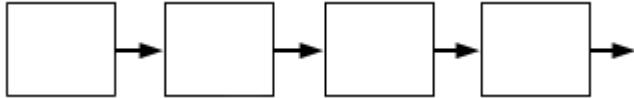
**Congressional Override of a Veto** Congress can override a president's veto with a two-thirds vote in both houses. If Congress overrides the veto, the bill becomes law. Congress does not override vetoes very often because it is usually difficult to get the necessary two-thirds vote in both the House of Representatives and the Senate. Opponents of a bill need to have only one-third of the members present and voting plus one additional vote in either the Senate or the House to uphold a veto.

**Registering Laws** After a bill becomes law, it is registered with the National Archives and Records Service. This process includes identifying it as a public or private law and assigning it a number that identifies the Congress that passed the bill and the number of the law for that term. For example, Public Law 187 under the 105th Congress is registered as PL 105-187. This law is then added to the United States Code of current federal laws.

## Section 1 Assessment

### Checking for Understanding

1. **Main Idea** Create a flow chart to analyze the major stages by which a bill becomes a law. Which stage do you think takes the longest?



2. **Define** private bill, public bill, simple resolution, rider, hearing, veto, pocket veto.
3. **Identify** voice vote, standing vote, roll-call vote.
4. Why do so few bills actually become laws?

### Critical Thinking

5. **Drawing Conclusions** Is it possible for all members of Congress to keep abreast of all bills under consideration? Support your answer.



**Political Processes** Imagine that you are asked to help younger children learn how laws are made in the United States. Create a poster, using cartoonlike illustrations, to show how a bill becomes a law.

[Email !\[\]\(3cb60d42b10e53f9522bb0b392c1c4cd\_img.jpg\) My Answers](#)

[Print My Answers](#)

## Taxing and Spending Bills

Today, running the national government costs about \$2 trillion a year. The Constitution gives Congress the authority to decide where this money will come from and in what ways it will be spent. Passing laws to raise and spend money for the national government is one of the most important jobs of Congress. The government could not operate successfully without money to carry out its many programs and services.

[Lecture notes](#)

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## Making Decisions About Taxes



The national government gets most of the money it needs to keep the government functioning from taxes. **Taxes** are money that people and businesses pay to support the government. The Constitution states:

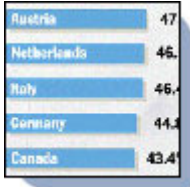
**COVER STORY**

 *The Congress shall have the power to lay and collect taxes, duties, imposts and excises, to pay the debts*

and provide for the common defense and general welfare of the United States... 🟢🟢

— Article I, Section 8

**The House's Power Over Revenue Bills** The Constitution gives the House of Representatives the exclusive power to start all revenue measures. Almost all important work on tax laws occurs in the House **Ways and Means Committee**. The Ways and Means Committee decides whether to go along with presidential requests for tax cuts or increases. It also makes the numerous rules and regulations that determine who will pay how much tax. Some of these rulings are very simple while others are more complex. This committee, for example, influences how much of a tax deduction parents are allowed on their income tax for each child living at home. It also decides what kind of tax benefit businesses can claim for building new factories.



For many years the committee's tax bills were debated on the House floor under a closed rule. A **closed rule** forbids members to offer any amendments to a bill from the floor. This rule meant that only members of the Ways and Means Committee could have a direct hand in writing a tax bill.



Other House members accepted this closed-rule procedure on tax bills for several reasons. House leaders claimed that tax bills were too complicated to be easily understood outside the committee. Leaders also warned that representatives could come under great pressure from special interests if tax bills could be revised from the floor. Floor amendments, they argued, might upset the fair and balanced legislation recommended by the committee.

In the 1970s House members revolted against the Ways and Means Committee. In 1973 the House allowed members to amend a tax bill on the floor. In 1974 it forced Chairperson Wilbur Mills to resign following a personal scandal. Critics charged that tax bills soon became a collection of amendments written to please special interests.

In the Senate no closed rule exists, and tax bills often do become collections of amendments. Many tax bills are amended so often on the Senate floor they become "Christmas tree" bills similar to appropriations bills that include many riders.

**The Senate's Role in Tax Legislation** All tax bills start in the House. Article I, Section 7 of the Constitution, however, says, "The Senate may propose... amendments..." Because of this provision, the Senate often tries to change tax bills the House has passed. As a result, many people view the Senate as the place where interest groups can get House tax provisions they do not like changed or eliminated.

The Senate Committee on Finance has primary responsibility for dealing with tax matters. Like the House Ways and Means Committee, the Senate Finance Committee is powerful. Although the Senate Finance Committee has subcommittees, the full committee does most of the work on tax bills. As a result, the chairperson of the Finance Committee is an extremely important figure.

## Appropriating Money



In addition to passing tax laws to raise money, Congress has another important power over government spending. The power of **appropriation**, or approval of government spending, is a congressional responsibility. In Article I, Section 9, the Constitution states, "No money shall be drawn from the Treasury, but in consequence of [except by] appropriations made by law." Thus, Congress must pass laws to appropriate money for the

federal government. Congress's approval is needed before departments and agencies of the executive branch such as the Department of Defense or the Federal Communications Commission can actually spend money.

**How Congress Appropriates Money** Congress follows a two-step procedure in appropriating money — an authorization bill and an appropriations bill. Suppose the president signs a bill to build recreational facilities in the inner cities. This first step in the legislation is an authorization bill. An **authorization bill** sets up a federal program and specifies how much money may be appropriated for that program. For example, one provision of this law limits the amount of money that can be spent on the program to \$30 million a year. The recreation bill also specifies that the Department of **Housing and Urban Development (HUD)** will administer the program. HUD, however, does not yet actually have any money to carry out the program.

The second step in the appropriations procedure comes when HUD requests that Congress provide the \$30 million. This kind of bill is an **appropriations bill** and provides the money needed to carry out the many laws Congress has passed. HUD's request for the \$30 million for the recreational facilities will be only one small item in the multibillion-dollar budget HUD will send to Congress for that year. HUD's budget, in turn, will be part of the president's total annual budget for the executive branch. Each year the president presents his budget to Congress. There the appropriations committees create their own appropriations bills. Congress might decide to grant HUD only \$15 million to carry out the building program. Next year, HUD would have to ask for another appropriation to continue the program.



**The Appropriations Committees** The House and Senate appropriations committees and their subcommittees handle appropriations bills. Both the House and Senate appropriations committees have 13 subcommittees that deal with the same policy areas in each house. Thus, the same appropriations subcommittees in the House of Representatives and the Senate would review the HUD budget, including its recreational facility program as presented.

Every year heads of departments and agencies and program directors testify before the House and Senate appropriations subcommittees about their budgets. During the budget hearings, these officials explain why they need the money they have requested. Each year agency officials must return to Congress to request the money they need to operate in the coming year. In this way lawmakers have a chance to become familiar with the federal agencies and their programs.

Appropriations subcommittees often develop close relationships with certain agencies and projects that they tend to favor in appropriating funds. In addition, powerful interest groups try hard to influence Congress and the appropriations subcommittees to give these agencies all the money they request.

**Uncontrollable Expenditures** The House and Senate appropriations committees, however, do not have a voice in all the current spending of the federal government. By previous legislation, some of which established many long-standing programs, about 70 percent of the money the federal government spends each year is already committed to certain uses and, therefore, not controlled by these committees. These expenditures are termed **uncontrollables** because the government is legally committed to spend this money. Such required spending includes Social Security payments, interest on the national debt, and federal contracts that already are in force. Some of these expenditures are known as **entitlements** because they are social programs that continue from one year to the next.

## Section 2 Assessment

### Checking for Understanding

1. **Main Idea** Using a graphic organizer like the one to the right, show the two-step procedure that Congress follows when appropriating money.

2.

1.

2. **Define** tax, closed rule, appropriation, authorization bill, entitlement.
3. **Identify** Ways and Means Committee, HUD.
4. What control does the House Ways and Means Committee exert over presidential requests for changes in tax laws?

### Critical Thinking

5. **Synthesizing Information** Do you think Congress should have the power both to raise and to spend money? Support your answer.



**Public Policy** Using the library or the Internet, research the major categories of revenue and expenditure in the current federal budget. Find out what amounts of money the government plans to raise and spend in each category. Create an illustrated report or series of graphs and charts.

Email  My Answers

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**Skills**

## Critical Thinking

### Analyzing Information



To analyze information, you must determine its accuracy and reliability. Biased information may contain factual errors, be incomplete, or be distorted by propaganda techniques.

#### Learning the Skill

To analyze the information you encounter, follow these five steps:

1. Determine the purpose and nature of the information.
2. Determine if the information is from a primary or secondary source.
3. Evaluate the reliability of the source.
4. Determine what evidence the author presents.
5. Compare the information with other sources to see if they support or contradict each other.

### Practicing the Skill

Read the excerpt below. It defines the nature of the Senate. Then answer the questions that follow.

**☞☞** *In the classic anecdote about the origins of the Senate, Thomas Jefferson — in France during the Constitutional Convention — asked George Washington about the purpose of the new Senate. 'Why,' asked Washington, 'did you pour that coffee into your saucer?' 'To cool it,' Jefferson replied. 'Even so,' responded Washington, 'we pour legislation into the senatorial saucer to cool it.' That the Senate was intended to be the more deliberative and reasoning of the two chambers is well known. In designing the Senate, the Framers chose institutional features with an eye to restraining any ill-considered or rash legislation passed by the*

*popularly elected House. With its smaller size, longer terms, older members, staggered elections by state legislative elite, and exclusive power to advise and consent on treaties and nominations, the Senate was expected to act 'with more coolness, with more system and with more wisdom, than the popular branch.'* ●●  
— from *Politics or Principle*, Sarah A. Binder and Steven S. Smith

1. What subject are the authors addressing?
2. Is it a primary or secondary source?
3. Do you think the source is reliable? Why?
4. What evidence do the authors offer to support their viewpoint?
5. What other places or sources would you check to verify the accuracy of this article?

### Application Activity

Look through the letters to the editor in your local newspaper. Prepare a short report analyzing one of the letters. Summarize the context of the article, the writer's motivation, point of view, and possible bias.



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## Influencing Congress

Like Senator Ross, members of Congress must constantly make difficult decisions. They decide which policies they will support and when to yield or not to yield to political pressures. They must also decide how to vote on controversial issues and when to make speeches explaining their views. In a single session, members may cast votes on a thousand issues. By their speeches and actions they influence the direction of government policies and help shape the public's views about a particular bill or about an issue that is before Congress. Who influences the lawmakers?

[Lecture notes](#)

[Reader's Guide](#)

## Influences on Lawmakers



**COVER STORY**

A great many factors influence a lawmaker's decisions. One factor is the lawmaker's personality. Some members of Congress, for example, are by nature more willing to take risks when making a choice. Sometimes the very nature of the issue determines the factors that will influence lawmakers most. For example, concerning a controversial issue such as gun control, a lawmaker may pay close attention to the voters back home, no matter what his or her own beliefs may be. On issues that have little direct effect on their home states or districts, most lawmakers are likely to rely on their own beliefs or on the advice and opinions of other lawmakers.

Congressional staff members also influence lawmakers' decisions in Congress. They can do this in several ways. One way is by controlling the information on which lawmakers base their decisions. Another way is by setting the agendas for individual lawmakers and for congressional committees that may favor a certain point of view.

Thus, many factors affect a lawmaker's decision on any given issue. Most lawmakers agree that the most important influences on their decision making are the concerns of voters back home, their own political parties, the president, and special-interest groups.

## The Influence of Voters



The political careers of all lawmakers depend upon how the voters back home feel about lawmakers' job performance. Only very unusual lawmakers would regularly vote against the wishes of the people in their home states or districts.

**What Voters Expect** Experienced lawmakers know that their constituents expect them to pay a great deal of attention to their state or district. Most people expect their representatives to put the needs of their district ahead of the needs of the nation. What if a conflict arises between what the lawmaker believes should be done and what the people in the district want? In a national opinion survey, most people said their lawmaker should "follow what people in the district want."

The voting behavior of most members of Congress reflects the results of this survey. On issues that affect their constituents' daily lives, such as civil rights and social welfare, lawmakers generally go along with the voters' preferences. In contrast, on issues where constituents have less information or interest, such as foreign affairs, lawmakers often make up their own minds.

Voters say they want their lawmakers to follow constituents' wishes on the issues and enact laws that reflect their needs and opinions. Most voters, however, do not take the trouble to find out how their senators and representatives cast their votes in Congress. Sometimes voters are not even aware of all the issues lawmakers must decide and vote on. Why, then, is the way lawmakers vote so important to their chance of reelection?

In an election campaign, the candidate from the other party and opposing interest groups will bring up the lawmaker's voting record. They may demand that the lawmaker explain votes that turned out to be unpopular back home. The opposite is also true. A legislator running for reelection may call attention to his or her votes on certain measures in order to attract constituents' support. As a result, voters who might otherwise not know how the lawmaker voted are told how well he or she "paid attention to the folks back home." The margin between a candidate's victory and defeat may be only a few thousand votes. Consequently, a small group of voters on either side — those who were unhappy with a lawmaker's voting record and those who strongly supported that record — could mean the difference between the candidate's victory and defeat. As a result, lawmakers try to find out what the voters back home are concerned about well before an election.

**Learning What Voters Want** Most lawmakers use several methods to try to keep track of their constituents' opinions. One method is to make frequent trips home to learn the local voters' concerns. Members of the House of Representatives make dozens of trips to their home districts each year. During these trips they will try to speak with as many voters as possible about the issues concerning them.



In addition, staff members usually screen the lawmaker's mail to learn what issues concern voters the most. Many lawmakers also send questionnaires to their constituents asking for their opinions on various issues. Near election time lawmakers often hire professional pollsters to conduct opinion surveys among the voters of their districts.

Finally, all lawmakers pay close attention to the ideas of their rain-or-shine supporters — those people who work in candidates' campaigns, contribute money, and help ensure their reelection. As one lawmaker put it, "Everybody needs some groups which are strongly for him." These supporters also help lawmakers keep in touch with what is going on back home.

## The Influence of Parties



Almost every member of Congress is either a Republican or a Democrat. Both political parties

generally take stands on major issues and come out for or against specific legislation. Political party identification is one of the most important influences on a lawmaker's voting behavior. In most cases knowing which political party members of Congress belong to will help predict how they will vote on major issues. Political party membership often will indicate how a lawmaker votes better than knowing almost anything else about him or her.

**Party Voting** On most bills Democrats tend to vote together, as do most Republicans. In the House of Representatives, members vote with their party more than 70 percent of the time. Senators, who are generally more independent than House members, are less likely to follow their party's position.

Party voting is much stronger on some issues than on others. On issues relating to government intervention in the economy, party members tend to vote the same way. Party voting is also strong on farm issues and fairly strong on social-welfare issues. Party voting is much weaker on foreign policy issues because the two parties often do not have very fixed positions on international questions. On certain other issues, such as dams and water projects, party position is often less influential than local or regional voter preferences in determining how a legislator votes.

**The Importance of Parties** One reason Republicans or Democrats vote with their parties is that members of each party are likely to share the same general beliefs about public policy. As a group, Democratic lawmakers are more likely than Republicans to favor social-welfare programs, job programs through public works, tax laws that help people with lower incomes, and government regulation of business. Taken as a group, Republican members of Congress are likely to support less spending for government programs, local and state solutions to problems rather than solutions by the national government, and policies that favor business and higher-income groups.

Another reason for party voting is that most lawmakers simply do not have strong opinions about every issue on which they vote. They do not know enough about every issue to make informed decisions based on all the important details of all the bills on which they must vote. Consequently, they often seek advice on how to vote from other lawmakers who know more about the issue. According to one senator:

☺☺ *When it comes to voting, an individual will rely heavily not only on the judgment of staff members, but also on a select number of senators whose knowledge he has come to respect and whose general perspectives [views] he shares.* ☺☺

— Senator Wendell Ford

On some issues party leaders pressure members to vote for the party's position. Often, party leaders support the president's program if the president is a member of the same party. On the other hand, leaders of the opposing party may vote against the president's program and seek to turn such opposition into a political issue. Congressional party leaders such as the Senate majority leader or the Speaker of the House usually use the power of persuasion. These leaders do not expect to get their way all the time. But they do work hard to influence lawmakers to support the party's position on key issues. Gaining the support of party members is one of the main jobs of a party leader. Very few issues are unaffected by political party affiliation.

**We the People**

## Other Influences on Congress



Although voter preferences and political parties strongly influence the decisions of lawmakers, two other influences are often equally strong: the president and interest groups.

**The Influence of the President** All presidents try to influence Congress to pass the laws that the

president and his party support. Some presidents work harder than others at gaining support in Congress, and some are more successful in getting Congress to pass their programs.

Members of Congress have often complained that presidents have more ways to influence legislation and policy than do lawmakers. Presidents can appear on television to try to influence public opinion and put pressure on Congress. In late 1990 and early 1991, for example, President Bush deployed United States troops to Saudi Arabia. More than 6 months of military buildup followed, in which the United States government attempted to force Iraq out of Kuwait. Congress let the president take the lead in responding to Iraq. President Bush took every opportunity to express his views in the press and on television. With growing public support for military action behind the president, Congress voted to approve military action in the Persian Gulf. Presidential influence, in this instance of policy making, had tremendous influence.

Presidents may also use their powers to influence individual members of Congress. They can give or withhold support of lawmakers. In the mid-1960s, for example, Senator Frank Church of Idaho criticized President Lyndon Johnson's conduct of the Vietnam War. To support his viewpoint, Church showed President Johnson a newspaper column written by journalist Walter Lippmann criticizing the war. "All right," Johnson said, "the next time you need a dam for Idaho, you go ask Walter Lippmann."

Since the early 1900s, many presidents have tried to increase their influence over Congress and the lawmaking process, and they have succeeded. In more recent years Congress has taken steps to limit the president's influence, letting Congress remain a more autonomous legislative body.



**The Influence of Interest Groups** The representatives of interest groups, called **lobbyists**, are another important influence on Congress. Lobbyists try to convince members of Congress to support policies favored by the groups they represent. Their efforts to persuade officials to support their point of view is called **lobbying**. The largest and most powerful lobbies have their own buildings and full-time professional staffs in the nation's capital.

Lobbyists represent a wide variety of interests such as business organizations, labor unions, doctors, lawyers, education groups, minority groups, and environmental organizations. In addition, lobbyists work for groups that sometimes form to support or to oppose a specific issue.

Lobbyists use various methods to influence members of Congress. They provide lawmakers with information about policies they support or oppose. They visit lawmakers in their offices or in the lobbies of the Capitol and try to persuade them to support their position. They encourage citizens to write to members of Congress on the issues they favor or oppose.

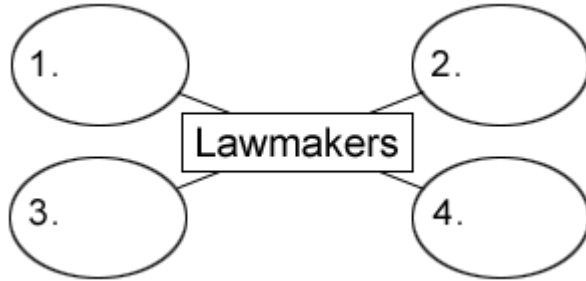
Interest groups and their lobbyists also focus their attention on congressional committees. For example, farm groups concentrate their attention on influencing the committees responsible for laws on agriculture. Labor unions focus their effort on committees dealing with labor legislation and the economy.

**Political Action Committees** Some observers believe that the importance of individual lobbyists has declined in recent years as political action committees, known as **PACs**, have dramatically increased in number and influence with lawmakers. PACs are political fund-raising organizations established by corporations, labor unions, and other special-interest groups. PAC funds come from voluntary contributions by employees, stockholders, and union members. A PAC uses its funds to support lawmakers who favor the PAC's positions on issues.

## **Section 3 Assessment**

### **Checking for Understanding**

1. **Main Idea** Using a graphic organizer like the one to the right, identify four ways lawmakers can keep in touch with voters' opinions.



2. **Define** lobbyist, lobbying.
3. **Identify** PAC.
4. On which type of issues do lawmakers tend to pay less attention to voter opinion?
5. What influence does the president have on Congress?

### Critical Thinking

6. **Making Inferences** Why do some people think that PACs now have more influence over members of Congress and the process of congressional legislation than do individual lobbyists?



**Political Processes** Contact a special-interest group to request literature on the group's purpose and activities. Summarize how the group attempts to influence legislators. Post the literature and summary on a bulletin-board display.

Email  My Answers

Print My Answers



## SPACE STATION: WHAT SHOULD CONGRESS DO?

In 1984 the National Aeronautics and Space Administration proposed to build a space station as a long-term project that would provide valuable knowledge and be a way station for trips to other planets or the moon. The project provided additional justification for another major project, the space shuttle.

### COST-CONSCIOUS GOVERNMENT

This original vision, as proposed in 1984, was soon questioned because the government had become more cost conscious. By late 1996 President Clinton confirmed that the manned mission to Mars project was dead. Instead, the National Aeronautics and Space Administration began preparing a vast armada of robots to send to the red planet. In 1997, the first robot landed on Mars and sent back dramatic images and extensive data. It

collected most of the data that human explorers could collect, at a fraction of the cost. A human mission would have cost \$500 billion. NASA builds each of its automated probes for far less money. Some scientists argue that the original plans for a manned space station also should be abandoned because they are no longer relevant.

## HUMANS IN SPACE



Arguments supporting the development of a manned station include the notion that the space station is an inspiring international project that will allow the world's most talented space scientists to keep active until human exploration of space is feasible. Some experts say that it will keep former Soviet scientists away from dangerous employers. The lucrative construction contracts from the United States and other countries further support pursuing a manned station. Scientists also plan to use the station for biological experiments. United States leadership in this area would be questioned if America backed out.

### Debating the Issue

## WOULD YOU VOTE FOR OR AGAINST THE FUNDING BILL?

Assume you are a member of Congress who will vote on funding for a manned space station. Your home district has research companies that might benefit from government contracts if the station were built. However, you were elected on a pledge to reduce unnecessary government spending. The proposed budget is for \$94 billion over a 15-year period.

### KEY ISSUES

1. What are the benefits and costs of a manned space station?
2. Could the same benefits be gained at less cost by another method?
3. How will your decision affect your constituents? Your nation?

### Debate

Discuss the issue in class. Allow time for two people on either side of the issue to prepare short speeches to present to the class.

### Vote

Make your decision for or against the funding bill. Then have the class vote and record the results. Discuss the outcome of the vote.

## Helping Constituents

Representative Doggett's experience mirrors what many seasoned lawmakers have learned — they are expected to do more in Washington, D.C., for their constituents than debate great issues. To be reelected, lawmakers must spend much of their time on two other important tasks. First, they must act as problem solvers for voters who have difficulties with departments or agencies of the federal government. Second, they must make sure that their district or state gets its share of federal money for projects such as new post offices, highways, and contracts.

*Lecture notes*

**Reader's Guide**

These two duties are not new to members of Congress, but in recent years these duties have become increasingly important. As the national government has grown, they have become a time-consuming part of

the lawmaker's job.

## Handling Problems



### COVER STORY

All lawmakers today are involved with casework. Helping constituents with problems is called **casework**. One House member put it this way, "Rightly or wrongly, we have become the link between the frustrated citizen and the very involved federal government in citizens' lives... We continually use more and more of our staff time to handle citizens' complaints."

**Many Different Requests** Lawmakers respond to thousands of requests from voters for help in dealing with executive agencies. Typical requests include: (1) A soldier would like the Army to move him to a base close to home because his parents are ill. (2) A local businessperson claims the Federal Trade Commission (FTC) is treating her business unfairly. She would like to meet with top FTC officials. (3) A veteran has had his GI life insurance policy cancelled by a government agency. The agency says the veteran failed to fill out and return a certain form. The veteran says he never got the form, but he wants the life insurance. (4) A new high school graduate would like help finding a government job in Washington.

Many lawmakers complain that although voters say they want less government they demand more services from their members of Congress. Sometimes voters make unreasonable requests or ask for help that a lawmaker is unwilling to deliver. A representative from New York, for example, was asked to fix a speeding ticket. Another member received a call asking what the lawmaker was going to do about the shortage of snow shovels at a local hardware store during a blizzard.

**Who Handles Casework** All lawmakers have staff members called **caseworkers** to handle the problems of their constituents. In most instances the caseworkers are able to handle the requests for help themselves. Sometimes the problem can be solved with a simple question from a caseworker to the agency involved. At other times, however, the senator or representative may have to get directly involved. One representative explained, "When nothing else is working and the staff feels they've had it with the bureaucracy, then I step in."

**Purposes of Casework** Why do lawmakers spend so much of their time on casework? Lawmakers are involved in casework because it serves three important purposes. First, casework helps lawmakers get reelected. Lawmakers know that helping voters with problems is part of what they can do for the people in their states or districts. "I learned soon after coming to Washington," a Missouri lawmaker once said, "that it was just as important to get a certain document for somebody back home as for some European diplomat — really, more important, because that little guy back home votes."

As a result, many lawmakers actually look for casework. One lawmaker, for example, regularly sent invitations to almost 7,000 voters in his district asking them to bring their problems to a town meeting his staff runs. Today lawmakers may encourage voters to communicate with them by electronic mail. Many representatives have vans that drive through their districts as mobile offices to keep watch on problems back home.

Second, casework is one way in which Congress oversees the executive branch. Casework brings problems with federal programs to the attention of members of Congress. It provides opportunities for lawmakers and their staffs to get a closer look at how well the executive branch is handling such federal programs as Social Security, veterans' benefits, or workers' compensation.

Third, casework provides a way for the average citizen to cope with the huge national government. In the years before the national government grew so large, most citizens with a problem turned to their local

politicians — called ward heelers — for help. One member of Congress explained that:

☺☺*In the old days, you had the ward heeler who cemented himself in the community by taking care of everyone. Now the Congressman plays the role of ward heeler — wending his way through bureaucracy, helping to cut through red tape and confusion.*☺☺

— Sam Rayburn

## Helping the District or State



Besides providing services for their constituents, members of Congress also try to bring federal government projects and money to their districts and states. Lawmakers do this in three ways: (1) through pork-barrel legislation; (2) through winning federal grants and contracts; and (3) through keeping federal projects.

**Public Works Legislation** Every year, through **public works bills**, Congress appropriates billions of dollars for a variety of local projects. These projects may include such things as post offices, dams, military bases, harbor and river improvements, federally funded highways, veterans' hospitals, pollution-treatment centers, and mass-transit system projects.

Such government projects can bring jobs and money into a state or district. For example, Senator Robert Byrd's pet project, the Appalachian Regional Commission, oversaw more than a billion dollars worth of government spending in its first three years. Beginning in 1989, Byrd used his position as chair of the Appropriations Committee to transplant federal agencies into his home state of West Virginia. For example, agencies or divisions of the FBI, CIA, Internal Revenue Service, and even the Coast Guard were moved from Washington to Byrd's state.



When Congress passes laws to appropriate money for such local federal projects, it is often called **pork-barrel legislation**. The idea is that a member of Congress has dipped into the "pork barrel" (the federal treasury) and pulled out a piece of "fat" (a federal project for his or her district). Sometimes such legislation draws criticism. Referring to Robert Byrd's project, a Maryland congresswoman claimed she was "afraid to go to sleep at night for fear of waking up and finding another agency has been moved to West Virginia."

More often, lawmakers take the "You scratch my back and I'll scratch yours" approach to public works legislation. Believing that getting federal projects for the home state is a key part of their job, they usually help each other. Such agreements by two or more lawmakers to support each other's bills is called **logrolling**.

**Winning Grants and Contracts** Lawmakers also try to make sure their districts or states get their fair share of the available federal grants and contracts which are funded through the national budget. A senator from Colorado put it this way, "If a program is to be established, the state of Colorado should get its fair share."

Federal grants and contracts are very important to lawmakers and their districts or states. These contracts are a vital source of money and jobs and can radically affect the economy of a state. Every year federal agencies such as the Department of Defense spend billions of dollars to carry out hundreds of government projects and programs. For example, when the Air Force decided to locate a new project at one of its bases in Utah, almost 1,000 jobs and millions of dollars came into the state. Lawmakers often compete for such valuable federal grants or contracts. For example, several other states wanted the Air Force project, but Utah's lawmakers won the prize for their state.



**Behind the Scenes** Lawmakers do not have the direct control over grants and contracts



that they do over pork-barrel legislation. Instead, agencies of the executive branch such as the Department of Defense or the Department of Labor award federal grants and contracts. Lawmakers, however, may try to influence agency decisions in several ways. They may pressure agency officials to give a favorable hearing to their state's requests. Lawmakers may also encourage their constituents to write, telephone, or E-mail agency officials in order to make their requests or needs known. If problems come up when someone from the state is arranging a grant or contract, congressional members may step in to help.

Many lawmakers assign one or more of their staff members to act as specialists in contracts and grants. These staff members become experts on how individuals, businesses, and local governments can qualify for federal money. They will help constituents apply for contracts and grants. The lawmakers' job is to make sure federal grants and contracts keep coming into their state or district.

## Section 4 Assessment

### Checking for Understanding

1. **Main Idea** Using a graphic organizer like the one below, explain how allocation of grants and contracts is different from pork-barrel legislation.

Grants/Contracts	
Pork	

2. **Define** casework, pork-barrel legislation, logrolling.
3. **Identify** caseworker, public works bill.
4. Why do lawmakers get involved in casework?
5. List three ways lawmakers bring federal projects to their states.
6. Which branch of government awards federal grants and contracts?

### Critical Thinking

7. **Drawing Conclusions** Why do you think the size of the lawmakers' staff has increased in recent years?



**Federalism** Look through several editions of your local paper to find examples of federal money spent in your state or community. Present your findings in the form of a radio news broadcast. Your broadcast should explain how the pork-barrel legislation benefited your state or local community.

Email  My Answers

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