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Congress I (Leadership, Committees, Staffs, Legislative Process)

Vocabulary

1. Majority leader- the legislative leader selected by the majority party; helps plan party strategy, confers with party leaders, keeps members in line
2. Minority leader- legislative leader selected as spokesperson for opposition
3. Whip- party leader who is liaison between leadership and rank-and-file in legislature
4. Speaker- presiding officer in House, formally elected by the House (selected by majority party)
5. President pro tempore- acts as chair in absence of VP; selected by majority party
6. Standing committee-permanent committee focusing on a policy area
7. Joint committee-committee with members from Senate and House
8. Select/Special Committee-created for specific purpose, sometimes an investigation
9. Seniority rule-assigns chair of committee to the member of majority party with longest tenure
10. Discharge petition- if signed by majority of House, will pry a bill from committee and bring it to the floor
11. Conference committee- appointed by presiding officers of each chamber to adjust differences on a bill
12. Closed rule- procedural rule in house that prohibits or says that only members of committee can offer amendments to bills
13. Open rule- procedural rule in House that permits floor amendments within overall time allocated to bill
14. Hold- practice in senate whereby a senator temporarily blocks the consideration of a bill or nomination
15. Filibuster- practice in senate where a senator holds the floor and delays proceedings and prevents a vote
16. Cloture- procedure for terminating debate, especially filibusters, in the Senate
17. Log rolling- mutual aid and vote trading among legislators

* Party with most seats is the majority, other is the minority party
* House of Representatives limits debate while the Senate does not
  + House Rules Committee regulates debate
* Bills are referred to committees in either House or Senate, depending on where they are proposed
* All bills for raising revenue must start in the House
* Work of Congress is done in committee; if a bill is to die, it dies in committee
  + Pigeonholed
* Congressmen have extensive staffs
  + Serve requests from constituents, work in district offices, devise proposals and meet with lobbyists
  + Reliance on staff has increased
* Staff Agencies do not work for congressmen individually, but for Congress as a whole.
  + Congressional Research Service, General Accounting Office, Office of Technology Assessment, Congressional Budget Office
* Once a bill is voted on in both the house and the Senate, if it is passed in different forms, it is sent to a committee to fix it

Most of the work in Congress is done in committee. Legislative committees are the most important features of Congress and their job is to consider bills or proposals, maintain oversight of executive agencies, and conduct investigations. Chairs of committees usually are of the majority party and have the longest tenure of those in the majority party in that committee. Bills get marked up and changed and amended in committees before going to the floor vote.

Once a bill gets out of a committee and is up for floor debate, it goes to either the House or the Senate first. In the House, debate is regulated by the Rules Committee. In the Senate, debate is scarcely limited. Filibusters are hardly used anymore, but the threat of a filibuster is enough. A filibuster is when a Senator holds the floor and continues to hold it in order to prevent a vote on a bill. The only thing that can stop this is a cloture, which is where 3/5 of the Senate agrees, resulting in a limit of 30 hours of debate.

The Speaker of the House is the leader of the House of Representatives. He is of the majority party. His jobs include: recognizing members who wish to speak, ruling on questions of procedure, appointing members to select and conference committees, directing business on the floor, appointing members of committees that appoint members to standing committees, control over which bills get assigned to which committees, and appointing his or her party’s legislative leaders. He or she also has a lot of political and behind the scene influence. The Majority Leader is an important colleague of the Speaker.

Necessities

* COMMITTEES! Work is done in committees in Congress.
* The majority party in the houses of Congress has the power in the leadership of the legislature and in the committees.

For Further Information

* Chapter 11 in the textbook
* <http://college.cengage.com/polisci/wilson/am_gov/11e/assets/students/study_guide/wilson_11e_sg_ch13.pdf>
* <http://www.course-notes.org/US_Gov_and_Politics/Outlines/American_Government_7th_Edition_Textbook/Chapter_11_Congress>