

CHAPTER SUMMARY * * * * *



The Organization of Congress

★ CONGRESSIONAL MEMBERSHIP * * * * *

The United States Congress has two chambers—the House of Representatives and the Senate. Each Congress meets for one two-year term divided into two one-year sessions. Representatives serve two-year terms; Senators serve six-year terms.

The 100 Senators are elected by all the voters in their state. The 435 seats in the House are divided among the states based on population. Every state has at least one seat. Every 10 years the number of seats for each state is recalculated based on census figures—a process called reapportionment. States may then redistrict, or change election district boundaries. Occasionally the majority party in state legislatures has abused this power by gerrymandering—using voter registration information to draw districts for political advantage. The Supreme Court has ruled gerrymandering unconstitutional.

Members of Congress have constitutional immunity from arrest or law suits arising from their

<p>Qualifications for Representatives</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Must be at least 25 years old • Must be citizens for at least 7 years • All members of Congress must legally reside in the state that elects them.
<p>Qualifications for Senators</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Must be at least 30 years old • Must be citizens for at least 9 years • All members of Congress must legally reside in the state that elects them.

duties, but legislators can censure, or formally disapprove, a member's actions. In serious cases, such as treason or bribery, expel a member by a two-thirds vote.

★ THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES * * * * *

Both the House and Senate have complex rules and leadership structures. In each chamber precedents, or past rulings, guide the way business is conducted. The House's large size makes complex rules necessary. Each term, members introduce more than 10,000 bills, but only about 10 percent of them ever go to the full House for a vote. Still, legislation must move quickly once it reaches the floor so House rules allow its leaders to make key decisions without consulting other members. Committees do most legislative work because they have more time to study and shape bills. To serve the interests of constituents in their districts, many representatives specialize in issues important to those constituents. Serving on the right committees gives representatives enormous influence.

At the start of each session, the majority party in the House meets in caucus, or closed meeting, to select the Speaker of the House—the presiding

officer and most dominant leader. The speaker appoints committee chairs, which allows the majority party to control the flow of legislation. The speaker also follows the vice president in the line of succession to the presidency. The speaker's top assistant, the majority leader, helps plan and move forward that party's legislative program. House bills appear on one of five calendars, or schedules, that are organized by subject and arranged in the order in which they will be considered. Representatives called *whips* help the majority leader organize party members.

The most powerful committee in the House, the Rules Committee, serves as a "traffic officer." After a committee approves a bill, it usually goes to the Rules Committee, which can move it ahead quickly, hold it back, or stop it completely. The Rules Committee also rules on jurisdictional disputes among other committees.

(continued)

CHAPTER 5 SUMMARY CONTINUED

THE SENATE ★★★

Although the Senate leadership structure parallels that of the House, Senate leaders have less power. The vice president presides but may not debate issues or vote except to break a tie. In the vice president's absence, a senior majority party member presides over the Senate's president *pro tempore* (for a time). Majority and a minority floor leaders are the most important officers. Each works to further his or her

party's legislative program, and together they plan the Senate's agenda. As in the House, whips assist them. The Senate has no rules committee. Bills reach the Senate floor by unanimous consent of the members. Because unlimited debate is usually allowed, one or more senators may filibuster, or try to defeat a bill by talking until a majority of the Senate abandons the bill or agrees to modify it.

CONGRESSIONAL COMMITTEES ★★★

Congressional committees and subcommittees handle the detailed, daily work of considering proposed legislation. The committee system allows members of Congress to divide their complex workload and become specialists on certain issues. Select, from bills proposed, those that merit further consideration and holding hearings to help inform the public

Each political party's representation on a committee roughly equals the percentage of its seats in the House or Senate. Chairs of standing committees are extremely powerful. Historically, the member of the majority party with the longest uninterrupted service on a committee became its chair, but recent rules changes have weakened this seniority system.

PERMANENT STANDING COMMITTEES OF CONGRESS

Select Committees	study one issue and report their findings
Joint Committees	made up of members from both houses
Conference Committees	work out the differences when the House and Senate pass conflicting versions of the same bill

STAFF AND SUPPORT AGENCIES ★★★

The workload of the modern Congress is so massive and complicated that lawmakers employ thousands of trained staff members. Personal staff work directly for individual Congress members. Administrative assistants oversee schedules. Legislative assistants conduct research, draft bills, and write speeches. Clerks handle constituent's requests. Committees and subcommittees also hire experts. Lawmakers are concerned that unelected staffers have too much influence; they have sought to limit congressional staff.

Four important support agencies also help Congress carry out its responsibilities:

- The Library of Congress maintains almost 100 million items and administers copyright law.
- The Congressional Budget Office coordinates the budget-making work of Congress.
- The General Accounting Office oversees government spending.
- The Government Printing Office, the world's largest multipurpose printing plant, prints materials for the entire federal government.

Copyright © by The McGraw-Hill Companies, Inc.

CHAPTER SUMMARY Activity



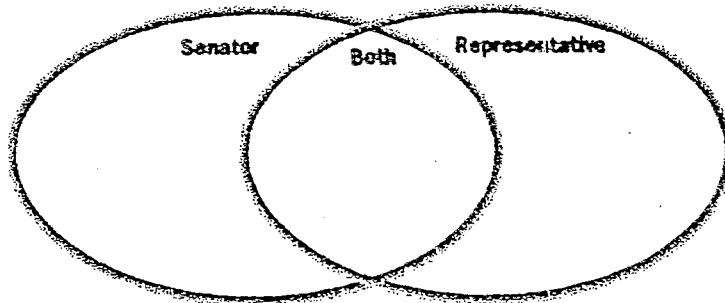
The Organization of Congress

DIRECTIONS In the space provided, write the word or phrase that best completes each sentence.

1. The United States Congress is made up of two chambers: the _____ and the _____.
2. _____ is the process by which the government recalculates the number of House seats to which each state is entitled.
3. The rules of the House of Representatives allow its leaders to make key decisions without _____ other members.
4. At the start of each congressional session, the representatives in the majority party meet in caucus to select the _____ of the _____.
5. The _____ Committee has the power to move House bills ahead quickly, hold them back, or stop them completely.
6. To _____ means to keep talking until a majority of the Senate abandons a bill or agrees to modify it.
7. In both the House and the Senate _____ do the detailed, daily work of considering proposed legislation.
8. Permanent _____ committees oversee bills dealing with certain kinds of issues.
9. Under the _____ system, the member of the majority party with the longest uninterrupted service on a particular committee is named its chairperson.
10. _____ staff work directly for an individual lawmaker; committee staff work for _____ and _____.

Organizing Information Examine the following diagram and study the list of characteristics associated with representatives and senators. Write the letter of each item in the appropriate space.

- a. elected to a six-year term
- b. must be at least 30 years of age
- c. makes laws for the nation
- d. elected to a two-year term
- e. must reside in the state represented
- f. must be at least 25 years of age
- g. elected from a district
- h. elected statewide
- i. may serve on a joint committee



Critical Thinking Answer the following question on a separate sheet of paper.

11. Which of the four support agencies do you think is more important and why?