

Chapter 10: Congress

Section 4

Lecture Notes



AMERICAN  
**GOVERNMENT**

PEARSON

# ► Objectives

1. Identify the personal and political backgrounds of members of Congress.
2. Describe the duties performed by those who serve in Congress.
3. Describe the compensation and privileges of members of Congress.

## ▶ Key Terms

- **delegate:** a lawmaker who acts as the agent of the people who elected him or her, even if it means going against his or her own views
- **trustee:** a lawmaker who acts based on their personal convictions and judgment
- **partisan:** a lawmaker who acts in accordance with their party platform and party leaders
- **politico:** a lawmaker who tries to combine the approaches of the delegate, trustee, and partisan

## ▶ Key Terms, cont.

- **bills:** laws proposed in Congress
- **floor consideration:** the process of considering and acting upon a proposed measure or bill on the floor of the House or the Senate
- **oversight function:** the process by which Congress, through its executive committees, ensures that executive branch agencies are carrying out the policies that Congress has set by law
- **franking privilege:** benefit that allows Senate and House members to mail letters and other materials postage-free

- What roles and functions do members of Congress perform?
  - Members of each house have **five major roles**. They act as:
    - Legislators
    - Representatives of their constituents
    - Committee members
    - Servants of their constituents
    - Politicians

# ► Overview of Members

- Congress is made up mostly of upper-middle-class Americans.
  - Most of the 535 members of Congress are married white men aged 50 or older who have college degrees and identify themselves as Christians.
  - Congress has 89 women, 44 African Americans, 29 Hispanics, seven Asian Americans, and one Native American.
  - The typical senator is serving a second term, while the average representative has served four terms.

# How Representative Is Congress?

## COLLEGE DEGREES

**27%**  
of Americans

**93%**  
of 110th Congress

In the First Congress, elected in 1789, only 48.4% of the members had college degrees. Today, 44% of senators and representatives have law degrees.

## WOMEN

**51%**  
of Americans

**17%**  
of 110th Congress

The first woman in Congress was Jeanette Rankin (R., Montana), a suffragist and peace activist elected in 1916.

## AGE 60 AND OLDER

**17%**  
of Americans

**40%**  
of 110th Congress

The 110th Congress was, on average, the oldest that has ever served. The oldest member was 83, the youngest was 31.

## FOREIGN-BORN

**13%**  
of Americans

**2%**  
of 110th Congress

Foreign-born members of Congress have come from Canada, Cuba, Hungary, Japan, Mexico, the Netherlands, Pakistan, Taiwan, and elsewhere.

SOURCES: U.S. Census Bureau; Congressional Research Service; Biographical Directory of the United States Congress; *Politics in the First Congress, 1789–1791*

▶▶ **Analyzing Charts** Over time, the membership of Congress has become more educated, older, and more diverse. **To what extent should the composition of Congress reflect the general population? Why?**

# ► Ways of Representing

- There are four broad ways in which lawmakers choose to represent the people when they vote.
  - **Delegates**
    - Believe they should vote however their constituents want them to, even if it means going against the delegate's personal views or those of his or her party.
  - **Trustees**
    - Guided by their personal views on each specific issue, even if it may mean voting differently than their constituents might want



## ► Ways of Representing, cont.

### – Partisans

- Place their loyalty to their political party first when deciding how to vote. They support the party platform and party leaders.

### – Politicos

- Try to balance the other three approaches—personal views, party loyalty, and the wishes of constituents—when deciding how to vote.
- Any of these approaches can place a congressperson in a difficult situation. It is hard to make everyone happy.

# How should Members of Congress Vote?

The Senate must vote on an appropriations (spending) bill passed by the House. It includes earmarks (funds designated for specific projects) for hospitals and state college system in Senator Miller's home State, as well as projects for other States. Senator Miller may decide to act as a delegate, a trustee, a partisan, or a politico. *How should he vote?*

## What are the options?

### DELEGATE

Although Senator Miller personally thinks that it is bad policy to run a deficit, polls show that his constituents support this bill. As a delegate, he would vote **for the bill**.

### TRUSTEE

Senator Miller's personal goal is a balanced budget. His constituents trust him. As a trustee, he would vote **against this bill** because it would cause another year of deficits.

### PARTISAN

Senator Miller believes that it is important for his party to show that they can get things done. As a partisan, he would **follow the party leadership** and vote to pass the bill.

### POLITICO

As a politico, Senator Miller attempts to **balance the views** of his constituents, his own views, those of his party, and other considerations.

# ▶ Committee Members

- Members of Congress do much of their work in committees.
- Committee members must decide which bills will die in committee and which ones will move ahead to be voted on.
- Committee members also provide oversight of executive branch agencies, making sure that they carry out the public policies set by law.

# ▶ Serving the People

- Members of Congress and their staffs help citizens of their districts and states deal with the federal bureaucracy.
  - There are many kinds of request for aid from constituents. Some involve finding information or submitting it through proper channels, while many requests involve putting in a good word or recommendation on behalf of a constituent.
  - Failing to fulfill such requests can cost members votes in the next election.

# ► Compensation

- Congress sets its own pay.
- Today all but a few senators and representatives with special titles make \$169,300 per year.



## ▶ “Fringe” Benefits

- Checkpoint: Name five “fringe benefits” for members of Congress.
  - Benefits include access to inexpensive health care, fine dining, free parking, and generous pensions.
  - Members receive funds to hire staff and run their rent-free offices. They can mail letters and other materials without postage, print items for free, and produce radio or television tapes at low cost.



" MORE PAY WOULD BE NICE, BUT I'D SETTLE FOR FREE LUNCHES, SUPERBOWL TICKETS, AND AN ALL-EXPENSES-PAID, FACT-FINDING JUNKET TO PARIS ONCE OR TWICE A YEAR"

- ▶▶ **Analyzing Political Cartoons** To eliminate the need to vote for their own raises, Congress now receives an automatic annual salary increase to keep up with inflation. It is known as a “cost of living adjustment,” or C.O.L.A. Critics, however, point out that they have not provided the same automatic adjustment for the minimum wage. **What factual information can you learn from studying this cartoon?**

# ▶ Privileges of Membership

- Members of Congress cannot be arrested for civil crimes while taking part in congressional business.
- Members of Congress cannot be charged with libel or slander for anything they say while conducting official business in Congress.
  - This protects the freedom of discussion and debate in Congress.
  - Members can still be punished for simply making false accusations against people verbally or in writing.



## ► Review

- Now that you have learned what roles and functions members of Congress perform, go back and answer the Chapter Essential Question.
  - Whose views should members of Congress represent when voting?