

Chapter 12: Congress in Action

Section 2

Lecture Notes



AMERICAN
GOVERNMENT

PEARSON

► Objectives

1. Explain how standing committees function.
2. Describe the responsibilities and duties of the House Rules Committee.
3. Describe the role of select committees.
4. Compare the functions of joint and conference committees.

▶ Key Terms

- **standing committee:** permanent panels in each house of Congress
- **subcommittee:** divisions of standing committees that do most of the committee's work
- **select committee:** a committee set up for a special purpose and often for a limited time
- **joint committee:** a committee made up of members of both houses
- **conference committee:** a temporary joint committee created to settle differences in versions of a bill passed by each house of Congress

► Introduction

- How do committees help Congress do its work?
 - Standing committees review and modify bills and decide if they should be reported to the floor for a vote. Subcommittees then do much of the work of reviewing a bill.
 - Joint committees coordinate the efforts of both houses on key issues, while select committees conduct special investigations.

▶ Standing Committees

- When a bill is introduced in either house, it is referred to the standing committee that deals with the subject matter of that bill. The fate of most bills is decided in committee rather than on the floor of either house.



▶ Standing Committees, cont.

- Members of each standing committee are elected by a floor vote at the beginning of each term of Congress.
 - Each House committee has from 10 to 75 members, while Senate committees have from 14 to 28 members.
 - Representatives usually serve on one or two standing committees, while senators serve on three or four.
 - Committee chairmen are chosen according to the seniority rule.

▶ Standing Committees, cont.

- Today the House has 20 standing committees.
- The most influential House committees are Rules, Ways and Means, Foreign Affairs, Armed Services, Judiciary, Agriculture, and Appropriations.

House Standing Committee Chairs

Committee	Name, Party, State, Year Elected
Agriculture	Collin C. Peterson (D., Minn.), 1990
Appropriations	David Obey (D., Wis.), 1969
Armed Services	Ike Skelton (D., Mo.), 1976
Budget	John M. Spratt, Jr. (D., S.C.), 1982
Education and Labor	George Miller (D., Calif.), 1974
Energy and Commerce	Henry A. Waxman (D., Calif.), 1974
Financial Services	Barney Frank (D., Mass.), 1980
Foreign Affairs	Howard Berman (D., Calif.), 1982
Homeland Security	Bennie G. Thompson (D., Miss.), 1993
House Administration	Robert A. Brady (D., Penn.), 1998
Judiciary	John Conyers, Jr. (D., Mich.), 1964
Natural Resources	Nick J. Rahall II (D., W. Va.), 1976
Oversight and Government Reform	Edolphus Towns (D., N.Y.), 1982
Rules	Louise M. Slaughter (D., N.Y.), 1986
Science and Technology	Bart Gordon (D., Tenn.), 1984
Small Business	Nydia M. Velazquez (D., N.Y.), 1992
Standards of Official Conduct	Zoe Lofgren (D., Calif.), 1994
Transportation and Infrastructure	James L. Oberstar (D., Minn.), 1974
Veterans' Affairs	Bob Filner (D., Calif.), 1992
Ways and Means	Charles B. Rangel (D., N.Y.), 1970

SOURCE: *Congressional Directory* and Clerk of the House

▶ Standing Committees, cont.

- Today the Senate has 16 standing committees.
- The most influential Senate committees are Armed Services, Finance, Judiciary, Foreign Relations, Appropriations, and Banking, Housing, and Urban Affairs.

Committee	Name, Party, State, Year Elected
Agriculture, Nutrition, and Forestry	Tom Harkin (D., Iowa), 1984
Appropriations	Daniel Inouye (D., Hawaii), 1962
Armed Services	Carl Levin (D., Mich.), 1978
Banking, Housing, and Urban Affairs	Christopher C. Dodd (D., Conn.), 1980
Budget	Kent Conrad (D., N.D.), 1986
Commerce, Science, and Transportation	Jay Rockefeller (D., W.Va.), 1984
Energy and Natural Resources	Jeff Bingaman (D., N.M.), 1982
Environment and Public Works	Barbara Boxer (D., Calif.), 1992
Finance	Max Baucus (D., Mont.), 1978
Foreign Relations	John Kerry, Jr. (D., Mass.), 1984
Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions	Edward M. Kennedy (D., Mass.), 1962
Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs	Joseph L. Lieberman (I., Conn.), 1988
Judiciary	Patrick T. Leahy (D., Vt.), 1974
Rules and Administration	Mary Landrieu (D., La.), 1996
Small Business and Entrepreneurship	Charles Schumer (D., N.Y.), 1998
Veterans' Affairs	Daniel K. Akaka (D., Hawaii), 1990

SOURCE: *Congressional Directory* and *Secretary of the Senate*

▶ Subcommittees

- Most standing committees are divided into more specific subcommittees, which do much of the work of researching and reviewing bills.
 - There are 99 subcommittees in the House and nearly 70 in the Senate.
 - The subcommittees relay their findings to the main committee.

▶ The House Rules Committee

- The House Rules Committee controls which bills make it to the floor of the House.
- Bills that leave their standing committee must then be scheduled for floor consideration by the Rules Committee.
- This power lets the Rules Committee speed, delay, or block House action on a measure.

▶ A Sample Bill

- The Food and Energy Security Act was introduced in the House in 2007.
 - The Speaker referred the bill to the Committee on Agriculture, which reviewed and reported it, and the Committee on Foreign Affairs, which simply discharged it.
 - After leaving committee, the bill was scheduled for floor debate and amendment by the Rules Committee.
 - The bill was then considered by the full house.

► Investigation and Oversight

- Congressional committees and subcommittees often conduct investigations into public issues.
- They may do so to gather information, to ensure that federal agencies are following the law, or to raise public awareness.



▶ Select Committees

- Checkpoint: What is a select committee?
 - Select or special committees are typically temporary panels set up to investigate a specific issue.
 - The Senate Watergate Committee investigated the Watergate scandal.
 - The Iran-Contra Committee examined the arms-for-hostages deal and illegal aid to the Contras.
 - The Senate Committee on Indian Affairs uncovered corruption tied to lobbyists for Native American tribes.

▶ Joint Committees, cont.

- Joint committees include members from both houses.
- Those shown in the chart are permanent groups, while others are select committees.
 - Why do you think the topics shown on the chart are handled by joint committees?

Joint Committees of Congress

The **Joint Economic Committee** addresses matters related to the U.S. economy.
Chair: Sen. Charles Schumer (D., N.Y.)

The **Joint Committee on the Library** addresses matters related to the Library of Congress.
Chair: Sen. Dianne Feinstein (D., Calif.)

The **Joint Committee on Printing** oversees the Government Printing Office and other printing by the Federal Government.
Chair: Rep. Robert A. Brady (D., Penn.)

The **Joint Committee on Taxation** is involved in legislation about taxes. The chair position rotates between the chair of the House Ways and Means Committee and the Senate Finance Committee.

▶ Conference Committees

- Checkpoint: What is the difference between a joint committee and a conference committee?
 - Joint committees coordinate the efforts of each house of Congress on specific subjects and help administer shared functions.
 - Conference committees are temporary, joint panels formed to create a compromise bill when each house has passed a different version of a bill.

► Review

- Now that you have learned about how committees help Congress do its work, go back and answer the Chapter Essential Question.
 - Can and should the lawmaking process be improved?