

Chapter 12: Congress in Action

Opener

Lecture Notes

AMERICAN GOVERNMENT

PEARSON

Congress in session is Congress on public exhibition, whilst Congress in its committee-rooms is Congress at work.

—Woodrow Wilson, *Congressional Government: A Study in American Politics*, 1885



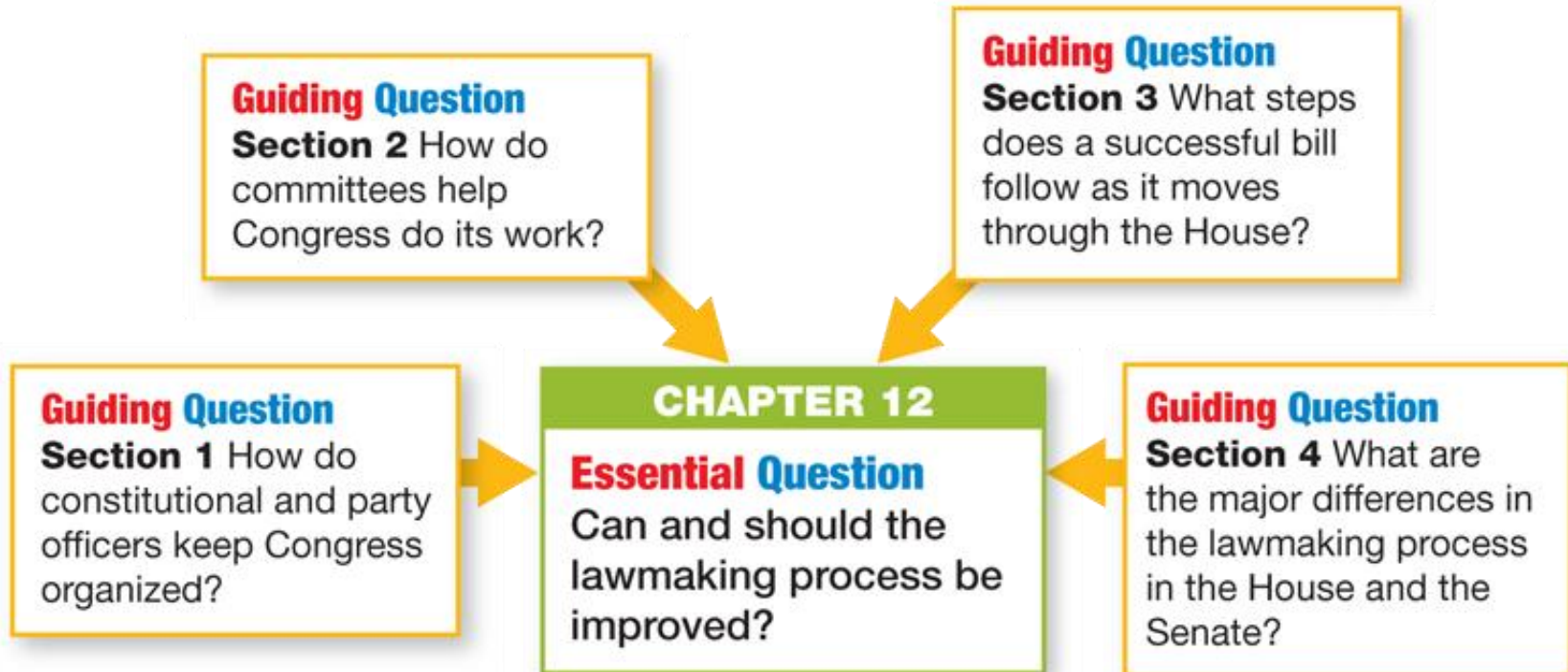
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Photo: Members of the press take photographs at a Senate Select Committee on Intelligence session.

▶ Essential Question

- Can and should the lawmaking process be improved?



▶ Guiding Questions

- Section 1: Congress Organizes
 - How do constitutional and party officers keep Congress organized?
 - The presiding officers settle rules issues and direct the flow of floor debate. The majority and minority party leaders and whips organize party policy and voting on issues. The committee chairs guide the passage of bills through each house.

▶ Guiding Questions

- Section 2: Committees in Congress
 - How do committees help Congress do its work?
 - Standing committees and their subcommittees review and modify bills and decide if they should be reported to the floor for a vote, joint committees coordinate the efforts of both houses on key issues, and select committees conduct special investigations.

▶ Guiding Questions

- Section 3: Making Law: The House
 - What steps does a successful bill follow as it moves through the House?
 - A bill is introduced, receives a first reading, and is assigned to a committee that reviews and possibly amends the bill before reporting it to the House floor for a second reading. Further debate and amendment occurs before a vote approving the bill is held and it receives a third and final reading.

▶ Guiding Questions

- Section 4: Making Law: The Senate
 - What are the major differences in the lawmaking process between the House and the Senate?
 - The Senate lacks the Rules Committee, has fewer rules limiting floor debate than the House, and allows the delaying tactic known as the filibuster.