The Organization of Congress

Chapter 5
Ch 5 Section 1

Congressional Membership
Congress

- Bicameral
  - House
  - Senate
- Formulates national policies; makes laws
Congressional Terms

- Begins January 3\textsuperscript{rd} in years ending in odd number; lasts for 2 years (112\textsuperscript{th}-2011)
- 2 sessions per 1 term
Congressional Terms

- Congress stays in session until they adjourn
  - Neither house can adjourn for more than 3 days without approval of the other

- President has authority to call it back for a special session if necessary
Membership

**House**
- 435
  - # per state based on population
  - Each state gets at least 1
    - 2 year terms
  - Elected Nov of even years
  - Qualifications: 25 yrs old, citizen for 7 yrs, legal resident of state, live in district
  - Death/Resign 1st session: special election

**Senate**
- 100
  - = representation
  - 2 per state
  - 6 year terms
  - Staggered elections
  - Qualifications: 30 yrs old, citizen for 9 yrs, legal resident of state, elected at-large
  - Death/Resign: Governor or special election
Salary and Benefits

- House and Senate set own salary
  - 27th Amendment (1789-1992)
- Other benefits/resources
  - Stationery
  - Franking privilege
  - Medical
  - Gymnasium
  - Allowances
  - Income tax deduction
  - Pensions

http://usgovinfo.about.com/od/uscongress/a/congresspay.htm
Privileges of Members

- Protections to carry out public duties
- Free from arrest when attending Congress or on way to or from Congress
- Cannot be sued for comments on House or Senate floor
  - Libel for news release or newsletter comments
Privileges of Members

- Judge or decide to seat members
- Punish members for disorderly conduct
- Reprimand
- Censure
- Expulsion
  - Treasons
  - Accepting bribes
Representation, Reapportionment and Redistricting

- Census to determine population
- State population = number of representatives
- Reapportionment
- Redistricting
  - Controlled by State Legislature
Gerrymandering

- Drawing district boundaries to give one party an electoral advantage
  - Packing
  - Cracking
Ohio Congressional Districts
2002-2012
Congressional Districts 2012-2022

Proposed Congressional Districts
Ch 5 Section 2 and 3

The House of Representatives
The Senate
Both Houses of Congress

- Main task is to make laws
- Each house organized to help it carry out main task
- Complex rules
  - House and Senate print out every 2 years
The House and Rules

Examples…

- Define actions a individual Rep can take
  - Limit debate speech
  - Move legislation

- Leaders have more power than Senate
  - Leaders can make key decisions about legislative work without consulting other members
The House and Committee Work

- Committees of Congress perform most legislative work
  - House committees more important than Senate
  - Organizes work of House; Size
  - Has time to study and shape bills
  - Representatives specialize in issues and serve on committees that are important to constituents
The House and Party Affiliation

- In House and Senate
  - Republicans sit on the right
  - Democrats sit on the left
- Majority party picks leaders of that body
  - Control flow of legislative work
  - Appoint chairs of all committees
Congress Leadership (112th)

Speaker of the House: John Boehner (Bay-Ner)

Minority Floor Leader: Eric Cantor

Minority Whip: Steny Hoyer

Majority Whip: Kevin McCarthy

Min FL: Nancy Pelosi

Pres. Pro Tempore: Daniel Inouye

Min FL: Mitch McConnell

Maj FL: Harry Reid

Maj Whip: Richard Durbin

VP/President of Senate: Joseph R Biden
Leaders coordinate the work of members

Six goals:
- Organize and unify party members
- Scheduling work
- Make certain members present for key votes
- Distribute/collection information
- Keep House in touch with President
- Influence members to support party’s position
Speaker of the House

- Presiding officer
- Chosen in caucus (closed meeting) of majority party at start of each session

Power
- Decides which members to recognize
- Appoint committee members
- Schedules bills for action
- Refers bills to proper committee
- Follows VP in succession to Presidency
Speaker of the House

- Persuasion as important as formal powers
- Favors for support
House Floor Leaders

- **Majority Floor Leader**
  - Elected by party
  - Plan party’s legislative program
  - Steer important bills through House
  - Ensure committee chairs finish work on bills important to party
  - Helped by Whip

- **Minority Floor Leader**
  - Minority party counterpart
House Floor Leaders

- Majority Whips/Deputy Whips
  - Assistant floor leaders in House
  - Watch how party members vote on bills
  - Persuade support of party position
  - Make sure party members present to vote

- Minority Whip
  - Minority party counterpart
Lawmaking in the House

- Sessions from Monday-Friday
  - Most important work: Tuesday-Thursday
- Floor sessions start at noon or earlier
  - Members called to chamber by buzzer
House Rules Committee

- Oldest, most powerful House committees
- Chair has influence over legislative activity and how bills progress through Congress
Function of Rules Committee

- Major bills reach floor for vote by rule (special order) of Rules Committee
  - Entered on Union or House Calendar
- Can move bills ahead of others
- Determine length of debate/revision of a bill
- Settles disputes among other committees
- Delay or block a bill from vote
Business in the House

- Quorum (min. number) needed for official legislation
  - Majority (218) for regular session
- Committee of the Whole
  - 100 members needed to debate and amend legislation
  - Speeds consideration of important bills
  - Reports back to full House for vote
Deliberative body
  - Formally discusses public policies
Senators expected to be knowledgeable about many issues
Smaller body
More flexibility in rules and debate
Senate Leadership

- Parallels leadership roles in House
- No Speaker
- Less influence of party leaders over members because of freedoms
The Vice President

- Presides over Senate
- Recognize members
- Put question to vote
- Cannot vote except to break tie
- No debate
- Can influence members
- Replaced by President Pro Tempore when absent
The Filibuster and Cloture

- **Filibuster**
  - Tactic to capitalize on unlimited debate and kill a bill
  - Talk a bill to death; extend debate to prevent bill from coming to vote

- **Cloture**
  - Vote that limits debate time
  - 60 votes needed; impossible when even
Ch 5 Section 4

Congressional Committees
Purposes of Committees

- Allows members of Congress to divide work into smaller groups; specialists
- Choose bills that are to receive further consideration
- Hold public hearings and investigations
Kinds of Committees

- Standing (143)
  - Subcommittees
- Select (temporary and/or specific)
- Joint (temporary or permanent)
  - Coordinate work of 2 houses
- Conference (temporary)
  - Reconcile a bill between House and Senate
Choosing Committee Members

- Career of Congress member can be influenced by committee assignments
- “Right” committee assignment can result in reelection
- Influence national policy
- Influence other members
- House: Rules, Ways and Means, Appropriations
- Senate: Foreign Relations, Finance, Appropriations
Choosing Committee Members

- Parties assign members to committees
- Committee chairs are from majority party; powerful
  - Set meetings and hearings
  - Hire staff members and control budget
  - Manage floor debates on bills from committee
- Seniority
Chapter 5 Section 5

Staff and Support Agencies
Congressional Support

- Trained Staff
- Support Agencies
Congressional Staff Role

- Help handle growing work load
- Communicate with voters
- Run committee hearings & floor sessions
- Draft new bills
- Write committee reports
- Attend committee meetings
- Help with reelection
- Watch political developments
- Speeches, newsletters (blogs) & websites
- Meet with lobbyists
Congressional Staff

- Personal (direct lawmaker)
  - Administrative Assistant (AA)
    - Runs office, schedule, advice
  - Legislative Assistant (LA)
    - Keeps lawmaker well informed about bills
    - Research, draft bills, studies bills, speech/article writer
    - Assist in committee meetings
    - Tracks action on Congress floor and bills
- Caseworkers
  - Handles requests from constituents
Congressional Staff

Committee
- Draft bills
- Study issues
- Collect information
- Plan committee hearings
- Write memos
- Prepare committee reports
Support Agencies

- Library of Congress
  - [http://www.loc.gov/about/](http://www.loc.gov/about/)
  - Research arm for Congress
  - Burned during War of 1812; Jefferson library purchased to rebuild
  - Largest library in the world
Support Agencies

- Congressional Budget Office (CBO)
  - Coordinate the budget work of Congress
  - Study budget proposals by president
  - Project costs of proposed programs
  - Balances Office of Management and Budget (OMB) in Executive Branch
Support Agencies

- **Government Accountability Office (GAO)**
  - Watchdog over Congressional fund appropriations
  - Run by appointed comptroller general for 15-year term
  - Review financial management of government programs that Congress creates
  - Collect government debts
  - Settle claims
  - Provide legal services
Support Agencies

- Government Printing Office (GPO)
  - Largest multipurpose printing plant in the world
  - Printing for entire federal government
    - Daily Congressional Record
      - Bills in both houses, speeches (edited)
    - Statistical Abstract of the United States
      - Info on various topics
      - Used by congressional staff and general public