Congress

Lecture 2

I’m Just a Bill – How Congress Works

The Congress of these United States:

Our Legislative Branch

How a Bill Becomes a Law   
(page 224)

Simplified How a Bill…

How Many Bills?

How Many Filed?

20,000 annually!

How Many Pass?

Between 400 and 600.

That’s less than 5%!

How a Bill Becomes a Law

Bill must be introduced by a member of Congress

Bill is referred to a committee for consideration by either Speaker or presiding officer of the Senate

Revenue bills must originate in the House

Most bills die in committee

After hearings and mark-up sessions, the committee reports a bill out to the House or Senate

Bill must be placed on a calendar to come for a vote before either house

House Rules Committee sets the rules for consideration

Bills are debated on the floor of the House or Senate

If there are major differences in the bill as passed by the House and Senate, a conference committee is appointed

The bill must pass with exactly the same language from both chambers.

The bill goes to the president

The president may sign it

If the president vetoes it, it returns to house of origin

Both houses must support the bill, with a two-thirds vote, in order to override the president’s veto

The Work Gets Done In: Committees

Committees

Where the work gets done

Subcommittee

Specialization

Types: Joint (only 2) Special or Select Budget

Standing Conference (not the same as party conferences)

Standing Committees

The Workhorses of Congress

19 Standing Committees in the House

16 in the Senate

88 Subcommittees in the House, 68 in the Senate

Quorum – enough members present to hold a vote

House Committees

The Big Three

House Rules Committee

Sets a rule for each bill about how debate will occur

All bills go through here before making it to the floor

It is the “traffic cop” for whether or not a bill makes it

The House Rules Committee is MUCH more powerful than the Senate.

Chair: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

http://www.house.gov/rules/

Ways and Means

Raises Revenue for the Government

First stop for ALL revenue bills

The “Cadillac” of committees

*NOT* taking is at least as important as giving…

Exemptions, credits, loopholes

Chair: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

http://waysandmeans.house.gov/

House Appropriations

Spends money to fund government

Appropriation: the legal authorization to expend governmental funds

12 subcommittees!

Oink, oink, oink…

Chair: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

http://appropriations.house.gov/

Senate Committees

The Big Three

Senate Appropriations

“Court of Appeals” – they add and delete from the original spending plan sent over from the House (Then they conference!)

“Byrd droppings”

Chair: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

Vice Chair: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

http://appropriations.senate.gov/

Finance

The Tax Committee for the Senate

The two certainties of life:

Death

Taxes

Chair: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

Ranking Member: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

http://finance.senate.gov/

Senate Foreign Relations

Confirms ambassadors

Ratifies treaties

Is the “check and balance” for executive foreign policy powers.

Former Chair: Joe Biden (DE)

Former Chair: John Kerry (MA)

Chair: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

Ranking Member: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

http://foreign.senate.gov/

Bipartisan – both parties support the idea

A Bad Reputation is Hard to Shake

These hardy knaves and stupid fools,

Some apish and pragmatic mules,

Some servile, acquiescing tools, these, these compose the Congress!

When Jove resolved to send a curse,

and all the woes of life rehearse,

Not plague, not famine, but much worse –

He cursed us with a Congress

(Ode to the Continental Congress of 1776)

I’m Just a Bill

Next: Paths to Power

Political Organization and the Powers of Congress