

Interpreting Political Cartoons What does this cartoon say about the art of delivering speeches—including the President's State of the Union address?

State of the Union Message

When the Senate is notified that the House of Representatives is organized, a joint committee of the two chambers is appointed and instructed "to wait upon the President of the United States and inform him that a quorum of each House is assembled and that the Congress is ready to receive any communication he may be pleased to make."

Within a few weeks—in late January or early February—the President delivers his annual State of the Union message to a joint session of Congress. The speech is a major political event based on this constitutional command:

FROM THE Constitution "He shall from time to time give to the Congress Information on the State of the Union, and recommend to their Consideration such Measures as he shall judge necessary and expedient . . ."

—Article II, Section 3

From Woodrow Wilson's first message in 1913, the President has almost always presented his annual assessment in person. The members of both houses, together with the members of the Cabinet, the justices of the Supreme Court, the foreign diplomatic corps, and other dignitaries, assemble in the House chamber to hear him.

In his address, the President reports on the state of the nation as he sees it, in both domestic

and foreign policy terms. The message is televised live, and it is followed very closely, both here and abroad. In fact, the President's speech is as much a message to the American people, and to the world, as it is an address to Congress. In it, the President lays out the broad shape of the policies his administration will follow and the course he has charted for the nation. His message regularly includes a number of specific legislative recommendations. It is soon followed by scores of bills drawn up in the executive branch and introduced in the House and Senate by various members of the President's party.

With the conclusion of the President's speech, the joint session is adjourned. Each house turns to the legislative business before it.

The Presiding Officers

The Constitution provides for the presiding officers of each house—the Speaker of the House and the president of the Senate. Article I, Section 2, Clause 5 says "The House of Representatives shall choose their Speaker and other Officers. . . ." And Article I, Section 3, Clause 4 declares: "The Vice President of the United States shall be President of the Senate. . . ."

The Speaker of the House

Of the two positions, the **Speaker of the House** is by far the more important and more powerful within the halls of Congress. This is particularly so because the Speaker is both the elected presiding officer of the House and the acknowledged leader of its majority party.

Although neither the Constitution nor its own rules require it, the House has always chosen the Speaker from among its own members. Today, the post is held by Nancy Pelosi (D., California). The first woman to serve as Speaker, she was originally elected to the House in 1987 and became Speaker in 2007.⁴

The Speaker is expected to preside in a fair and judicious manner, and he regularly does. He is also expected to aid the fortunes of his party and its legislative goals, and he regularly does that, too.

Nearly all of the Speaker's powers revolve around two duties: to preside and to keep order. The Speaker presides over most sessions

of the House, but occasionally appoints another member as temporary presiding officer. No member may speak until he or she is recognized by the Speaker. He interprets and applies the rules, refers bills to committee, rules on points of order (questions of procedure raised by members), puts motions to a vote, and also decides the outcome of most votes taken on the floor of the House. (The Speaker can be overridden by a vote of the House, but that almost never happens.) Importantly, the Speaker also names the members of all select and conference committees and he must sign all bills and resolutions passed by the House.

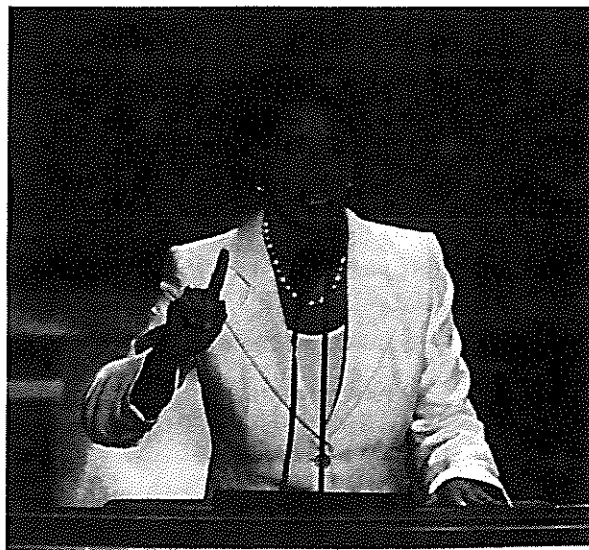
As a member, the Speaker may debate and vote on any matter before the House. If he chooses to do so, however, he must appoint a temporary presiding officer and that member then occupies the Speaker's chair. The Speaker does not often vote, and the House rules say only that he *must* vote to break a tie. Notice then, that because a tie vote defeats a question, the Speaker occasionally votes to cause a tie and so defeat a proposal.

The Speaker of the House follows the Vice President in the line of succession to the presidency. That fact is a considerable testimony to the power and importance of both the office and the person who holds it.

The President of the Senate

The Constitution makes the Vice President the **president of the Senate**, the Senate's presiding officer. This fact means that (1) unlike the House, the Senate does not choose its own presiding officer and (2) unlike the Speaker of the House, the Senate's presiding officer is not in fact a member of that body. Indeed, the Vice President might not even be a member of the party that controls the Senate.

All of this adds up to the major reason why the Vice President plays a much less powerful role in the Senate than that played by the



▲ Nancy Pelosi (D., California) became the first woman to serve as Speaker of the House in 2007. **Critical Thinking** How does the role of the Speaker differ from the role of the president of the Senate?

Speaker of the House. Also note this important point: the Vice President's career path, the route he has traveled to his current post, is a much different path than the one the Speaker has followed. In short, the Vice President has not become the Senate's presiding officer out of long service in that body. He has, instead, come to the post out of a much different process—as you will see when we take a longer look at the vice presidency in Chapter 13.

The president of the Senate does have the usual powers of a presiding officer: to recognize members, put questions to a vote, and so on. However, the Vice President cannot take the floor to speak or debate and may vote *only* to break a tie.

Any influence a Vice President may have in the Senate is largely the result of personal abilities and relationships. Several of the more recent Vice Presidents came to that office from the Senate: Harry Truman, Alben Barkley, Richard Nixon, Lyndon Johnson, Hubert Humphrey, Walter Mondale, Dan Quayle, and Al Gore. Each of them was able to build at least some power into the position out of that earlier experience.

The Senate does have another presiding officer, the **president pro tempore**, who serves in the Vice President's absence. The president *pro tempore*, or president *pro tem* for short, is elected by the Senate itself and is always a leading member of the majority party—usually its longest serving member. Today, the post is occupied by

⁴Speaker Pelosi is the 52nd person to hold the post. The first Speaker, elected by the House in 1789, was Frederick A. C. Muhlenburg, a Federalist from Pennsylvania. Sam Rayburn (D., Texas) held the office for a record 17 years, 62 days in the period from 1940 to 1961. Ms. Pelosi succeeded Dennis Hastert (R., Illinois). Only two Republicans—Newt Gingrich of Georgia (1995-1999) and Mr. Hastert (1999-2007)—have held the Speakership over the past 50 years.

Leadership in the 110th Congress

HOUSE		SENATE	
PRESIDING OFFICER AND PARTY LEADER <div style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 5px; margin: 5px;"> Speaker of the House Nancy Pelosi (D., California) Year Elected 1986 </div>		PRESIDING OFFICERS	
PARTY OFFICERS		PARTY OFFICERS	
<div style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 5px; margin: 5px;"> Majority Floor Leader Steny Hoyer (D., Maryland) Year Elected 1981 </div>	<div style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 5px; margin: 5px;"> Minority Floor Leader John Boehner (R., Ohio) Year Elected 1990 </div>	<div style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 5px; margin: 5px;"> Majority Floor Leader Harry Reid (D., Nevada) Year Elected 1986 </div>	<div style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 5px; margin: 5px;"> Minority Floor Leader Mitch McConnell (R., Kentucky) Year Elected 1984 </div>
<div style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 5px; margin: 5px;"> Majority Whip James Clyburn (D., South Carolina) Year Elected 1992 </div>	<div style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 5px; margin: 5px;"> Minority Whip Roy Blunt (R., Missouri) Year Elected 1996 </div>	<div style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 5px; margin: 5px;"> Majority Whip Dick Durbin (D., Illinois) Year Elected 1996 </div>	<div style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 5px; margin: 5px;"> Minority Whip Trent Lott (R., Mississippi) Year Elected 1988 </div>



Interpreting Charts This chart shows the major leadership posts, both official and party, in both houses of Congress and the people who hold these positions today. **How can you tell which party holds power in the Senate?**

Senator Robert C. Byrd (D., West Virginia). Senator Byrd, who was elected to his first term in the upper house in 1958, became president *pro tem* in 2007.

The president *pro tem* follows the Speaker in the line of presidential succession. Other senators occasionally preside over the Senate, on a temporary basis; newly elected members regularly do so early in their terms.

Party Officers

Congress is a political body. This is so for two leading reasons: (1) because Congress is the nation's central policy-making body, and (2) because of its partisan makeup. Reflecting its political complexion, both houses of Congress are organized along party lines. This organization creates some very powerful positions.

The Party Caucus

The **party caucus** is a closed meeting of the members of each party in each house. It meets just before Congress convenes in January and occasionally during a session. In recent years the Republicans have called their caucus in each

house the party conference, and the Democrats now use this term in the Senate, too.

The caucus deals mostly with matters of party organization, such as the selection of the party's floor leaders and questions of committee membership. It sometimes takes stands on particular bills, but neither party tries to force its members to follow its caucus decisions, nor can it.⁵

The policy committee, composed of the party's top leadership, acts as an executive committee for the caucus. Strictly speaking, that body is known as the policy committee in each party's structure in the Senate and in the Republicans' organization in the House. However, it is called the steering and policy committee by the Democrats in the lower chamber.

The Floor Leaders

Next to the Speaker, the majority and minority **floor leaders** in the House and Senate are the most important officers in Congress. They do

⁵A number of informal groupings of members of Congress meet to discuss matters of mutual interest. Some are partisan, others are bipartisan, and several use the word *caucus* in their titles. Some of these informal groups include, for example, the Congressional Black Caucus, the House Republican Study Committee, the Pro-Life Caucus, and the Congressional Hispanic Caucus.

not hold official positions in either chamber. Rather, they are party officers, picked for their posts by their party colleagues.

The floor leaders are legislative strategists. They try to carry out the decisions of their parties' caucuses and steer floor action to their parties' benefit. Each of them is also the chief spokesman for his party in his chamber. All of that calls for political skills of a high order.

The majority leader's post is the more powerful in each house—for the obvious reason that the majority party has more seats (more votes) than the other party has. And, the majority leader very largely controls the order of business on the floor in his chamber.

The two floor leaders in each house are assisted by party **whips**. The majority whip and the minority whip are, in effect, assistant floor leaders. Each of them is chosen by the party caucus, almost always at the floor leader's recommendation. A number of assistant whips serve in the House, and the floor leaders in both houses have a paid staff.

Whips serve as a liaison—a two-way link—between the party's leadership and its rank-and-file members.⁶ The whips check with party members and tell the floor leader which members,

and how many votes, can be counted on in any particular matter. The whips also see that all members of the party are present for important votes and that they vote with the party leadership. If a member must be absent for some reason, a whip sees that that member is paired with a member of the other party who will also be absent that day or who agrees not to vote on certain measures at that day's session—so one nonvote cancels out another.

Committee Chairmen

The bulk of the work of Congress, especially in the House, is really done in committee. Thus, **committee chairmen**—those members who head the standing committees in each chamber—also hold strategic posts. The chairman⁷ of each of

⁶The term was borrowed from British politics. There, it came from the "whipper-in" in a fox hunt, the rider who is supposed to keep the hounds bunched in a pack.

⁷The title *chairman* is used here because this is the form used in both houses of Congress, both officially and informally. Only 13 women (five in the Senate, eight in the House) have ever chaired a standing committee. Five standing committees (two in the Senate, three in the House) are chaired by women today; see the tables on pages 331 and 332, where the current chairmen of the standing committees in both houses are identified.

Party Strength (at beginning of term)

HOUSE 435 MEMBERS		Years	SENATE 100 MEMBERS		
277	158	1979 - 1981		58	41
242	192	1981 - 1983	1	46	53
269	166	1983 - 1985		46	54
253	182	1985 - 1987		47	53
258	177	1987 - 1989		55	45
260	175	1989 - 1991		55	45
267	167	1991 - 1993	1	56	44
258	176	1993 - 1995	1	57	43
204	230	1995 - 1997	1	48	52
207	227	1997 - 1999	1	45	55
211	223	1999 - 2001	1	45	55
212	221	2001 - 2003	2	50	50
205	229	2003 - 2005	1	48	51
202	232	2005 - 2007	1	44	55
233	202	2007 - 2009		49	49

SOURCE: Clerk of the House, Congressional Quarterly

¹Two independent senators regularly vote with the Democratic majority.

KEY ■ Democrat ■ Republican ■ Other



Interpreting Graphs This graph indicates party strength in Congress over recent years. Which party controlled the House of Representatives for most of the 1980s? Which party controlled the House of Representatives for the second half of the 1990s?

these permanent committees is chosen from the majority party by the majority party caucus. Committee chairmen decide when their committees will meet, which bills they will take up, whether they will hold public hearings, and what witnesses the committee should call. When a committee's bill has been reported to the floor, the chairman usually manages the debate and tries to steer it to final passage.

You will take a closer look at committees and their chairs in a moment. But, first, consider the fabled seniority rule.

Seniority Rule

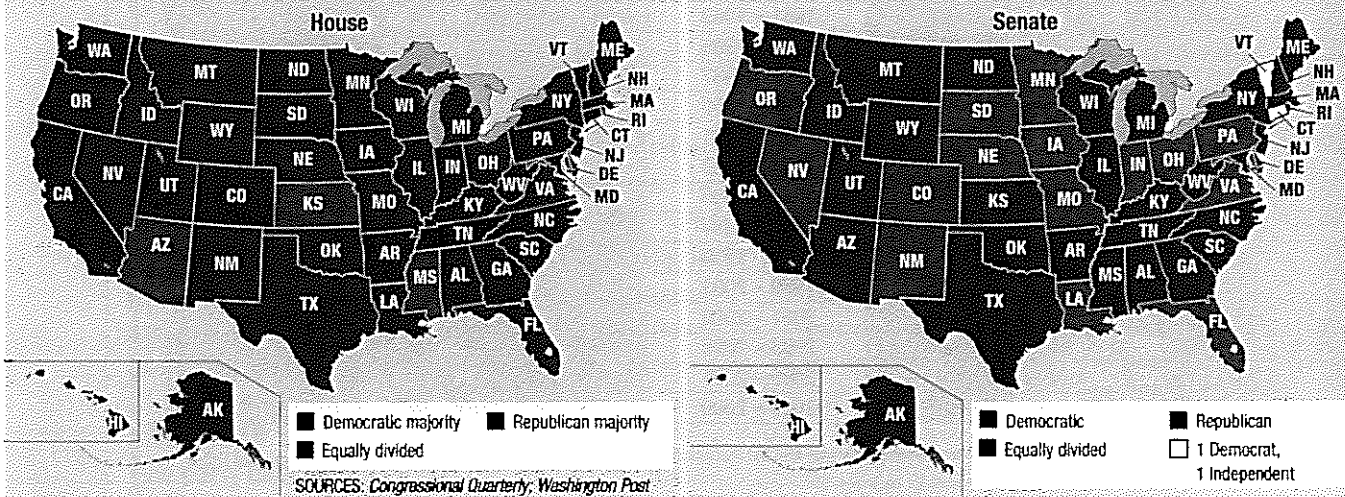
The **seniority rule** is, in fact, an unwritten custom. It dates from the late 1800s, and is still closely followed in both houses today. The seniority rule provides that the most important posts, in both the formal and the party organization, will be held by those party members with the longest records of service in Congress.

The rule is applied most strictly to the choice of committee chairmen. The head of each committee is almost always the longest-serving majority party member of that committee.

Representation by State, 110th Congress

	House		Senate			House		Senate			House		Senate	
	D	R	D	R		D	R	D	R		D	R	D	R
Alabama	2	5	0	2	Louisiana	2	5	1	1	Ohio	7	11	1	1
Alaska	0	1	0	2	Maine	2	0	0	2	Oklahoma	1	4	0	2
Arizona	4	4	0	2	Maryland	6	2	2	0	Oregon	4	1	1	1
Arkansas	3	1	2	0	Massachusetts	10	0	2	0	Pennsylvania	11	8	1	1
California	34	19	2	0	Michigan	6	9	2	0	Rhode Island	2	0	2	0
Colorado	4	3	1	1	Minnesota	5	3	1	1	South Carolina	2	4	0	2
Connecticut	4	1	1	0	Mississippi	2	2	0	2	South Dakota	1	0	1	1
Delaware	0	1	2	0	Missouri	4	5	1	1	Tennessee	5	4	0	2
Florida	9	16	1	1	Montana	0	1	2	0	Texas	13	19	0	2
Georgia	6	7	0	2	Nebraska	0	3	1	1	Utah	1	2	0	2
Hawaii	2	0	2	0	Nevada	1	2	1	1	Vermont	1	0	1	0
Idaho	0	2	0	2	New Hampshire	2	0	0	2	Virginia	3	8	1	1
Illinois	10	9	2	0	New Jersey	7	6	2	0	Washington	6	3	2	0
Indiana	5	4	1	1	New Mexico	1	2	1	1	West Virginia	2	1	2	0
Iowa	3	2	1	1	New York	23	6	2	0	Wisconsin	5	3	2	0
Kansas	2	2	0	2	North Carolina	7	6	0	2	Wyoming	0	1	0	2
Kentucky	2	4	0	2	North Dakota	1	0	2	0					

* 1 Independent



Interpreting Maps The map and the chart show State-by-State representation in the House and Senate. **Identify five States that regularly send (a) a majority of Republicans and (b) a majority of Democrats to both houses of Congress.**

Committees in Congress

Section Preview

OBJECTIVES

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

WHY IT MATTERS

The lawmaking process in both houses is built around committees, and these bodies play a major role in shaping the public policies of the United States.

POLITICAL DICTIONARY

- ★ standing committee
- ★ select committee
- ★ joint committee
- ★ conference committee

Do you know the phrase “a division of labor”? Roughly explained, it means dividing the work to be done, assigning the several parts of the overall task to various members of the group.

The House and the Senate are both so large, and the business they each face is so great, that both chambers must rely on a division of labor. That is to say, much of the work that Congress does is in fact done by committees. Indeed, Representative Clem Miller (D., Calif.) once described Congress as “a collection of committees that comes together periodically to approve one another’s actions.”

Standing Committees

In 1789 the House and Senate each adopted the practice of naming a special committee to consider each bill as it was introduced. By 1794 there were more than 300 committees in each chamber. Each house then began to set up permanent panels, known as **standing committees**, to which all similar bills could be sent.

Committee Assignments

The number of these committees has varied over the years. The graphic on page 330 lists the 20 standing committees in the House and the 16 in the Senate today. Each House committee has from 10 to as many as 75 members, and each Senate committee has from 14 to 28. Representatives are normally assigned to one or two standing committees and senators to three

or four. The pivotal role these committees play in the lawmaking process cannot be overstated. Most bills receive their most thorough consideration in these bodies. Members of both houses regularly respect the decisions and follow the recommendations they make. Thus, the fate of most bills is decided in the various standing committees, not on the floor of either house. More than a century ago, Woodrow Wilson described “Congress in its committee rooms” as “Congress at work,” and that remains the fact of the matter today.

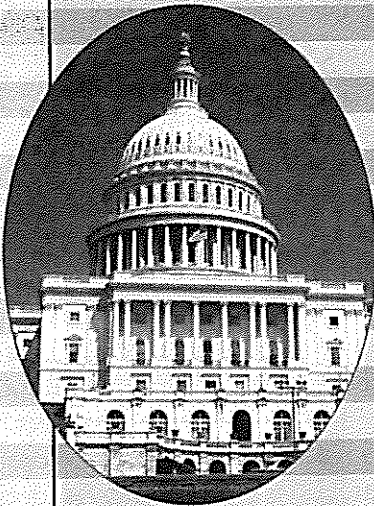
Some panels are more prominent and more influential than others. As you would expect, most members try to win assignments to these important panels. The leading committees in the House are the Rules, Ways and Means, Appropriations, Armed Services, Judiciary, International Relations, and Agriculture committees. In the Senate, senators usually compete for places on the Foreign Relations, Appropriations, Finance, Judiciary, Armed Services, and Banking, Housing, and Urban Affairs committees. Of course, some of the other committees are particularly attractive to some members. Thus, a representative whose district lies wholly within a major city might want to sit on the

► The House Committee on Banking and Financial Services considers bills that affect finance, including the proposal that led to the golden dollar coin.



Permanent Committees of Congress

HOUSE STANDING COMMITTEES	JOINT COMMITTEES OF CONGRESS	SENATE STANDING COMMITTEES
Agriculture	Economic	Agriculture, Nutrition, and Forestry
Appropriations	The Library	Appropriations
Armed Services	Printing	Armed Services
Budget	Taxation	Banking, Housing, and Urban Affairs
Education and the Workforce		Budget
Energy and Commerce		Commerce, Science, and Transportation
Financial Services		Energy and Natural Resources
Government Reform		Environment and Public Works
Homeland Security		Finance
House Administration		Foreign Relations
International Relations		Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs
Judiciary		Judiciary
Resources		Health, Education, Labor and Pensions
Rules		Rules and Administration
Science		Small Business and Entrepreneurship
Small Business		Veterans' Affairs
Standards of Official Conduct		
Transportation and Infrastructure		
Veterans' Affairs		
Ways and Means		



Interpreting Tables Most legislation is considered in standing committees, and party politics can shape those panels. *What considerations might lead a member of Congress to want to serve on a particular committee?*

House Committee on Education and the Workforce. A senator from one of the western States might angle for assignment to the Senate's Committee on Energy and Natural Resources.

Most of the standing committees handle bills dealing with particular policy matters, such as veterans' affairs. There are three standing committees that do not operate as subject-matter bodies, however: in the House the Rules Committee and the Committee on Standards of Official Conduct, and in the Senate the Committee on Rules and Administration.

When a bill is introduced in either house, the Speaker or the president of the Senate refers the measure to the appropriate standing committee. Thus, the Speaker sends all tax measures to the House Ways and Means Committee; in the Senate tax measures go to the Finance Committee. A bill dealing with, say, enlistments in the armed forces goes to the Armed Services Committee in the House and to the Armed Services Committee in the Senate.

Recall that the chairman of each of the standing committees is chosen according to the seniority rule. To see the point, look at the tables on pages 331 and 332. Notice that most committee chairmen have served in Congress for at least 12 years and some much longer. The seniority rule is also applied closely in each house when it elects the other members of each of its committees.

The members of each standing committee are formally elected by a floor vote at the beginning of each term of Congress. In fact, each party has already drawn up its own committee roster before the vote, and the floor vote merely ratifies those party choices.

The majority party always holds a majority of the seats on each standing committee.⁸ The other party is well represented, however.

⁸The only exception is the House Committee on Standards of Official Conduct, with five Democrats and five Republicans. Often called the House Ethics Committee, it investigates allegations of misconduct by House members. In the Senate, a six-member bipartisan Select Committee on Ethics plays a similar role.

Most standing committees are divided into subcommittees, and each subcommittee is responsible for a particular slice of the committee's overall workload. There are now some 150 subcommittees in the two houses; nearly 70 in the Senate and 80 in the House.

To illustrate, the Senate's 24-member Committee on Armed Services does much of its work in six subcommittees. Each member serves on at least two of them, and the subcommittee titles generally describe their focus: the Subcommittee on Emerging Threats and Capabilities; the Subcommittee on Airland Forces; the Subcommittee on Personnel; the Subcommittee on Readiness and Management Support; the Subcommittee on Seapower; and the Subcommittee on Strategic Forces.

The House Rules Committee

The House Committee on Rules is sometimes called the "traffic cop" in the lower house. So many measures are introduced in the House each term that some sort of screening is necessary.

Most bills die in the committees to which they are referred. Still, several hundred are reported out every year. So, before most of these bills can reach the floor of the House, they must also clear the Rules Committee.

Normally, a bill gets to the floor only if it has been granted a rule—been scheduled for floor consideration—by the Rules Committee. The committee decides whether and under what conditions the full House will consider a measure. As you will see, this means that the potent 13-member Rules Committee can speed, delay, or even prevent House action on a measure.

In the Senate, where the process is not so closely regulated, the majority floor leader controls the appearance of bills on the floor.

Select Committees

At times, each house finds need for a **select committee**. These groups are sometimes called special committees; they are panels set up for some specific purpose and, most often, for a

House Committee Chairs, 2007

Committee	Name	Age*	Year Elected to House	Party Affiliation and State
Agriculture	Collin Peterson	63	1990	D., Minnesota
Appropriations	David Obey	69	1969	D., Wisconsin
Armed Services	Ike Skelton	76	1976	D., Missouri
Budget	John M. Spratt, Jr.	65	1982	D., South Carolina
Education and the Workforce	George Miller	62	1974	D., California
Energy and Commerce	John D. Dingell	81	1955	D., Michigan
Financial Services	Barney Frank	67	1980	D., Massachusetts
Foreign Affairs	Tom Lantos	79	1980	D., California
Homeland Security	Bennie G. Thompson	59	1993	D., Mississippi
House Administration	Juanita Millender-McDonald	69	1996	D., California
Judiciary	John Conyers, Jr.	78	1964	D., Michigan
Natural Resources	Nick Rahall	58	1976	D., West Virginia
Oversight and Government Reform	Henry A. Waxman	68	1974	D., California
Rules	Louise Slaughter	78	1986	D., New York
Science and Technology	Bart Gordon	58	1984	D., Tennessee
Small Business	Nydia Velazquez	54	1992	D., New York
Standards of Official Conduct	Stephanie Tubbs Jones	58	1998	D., Ohio
Transportation and Infrastructure	James L. Oberstar	73	1974	D., Minnesota
Veterans' Affairs	Bob Filner	65	1992	D., California
Ways and Means	Charles B. Rangel	77	1970	D., New York

SOURCES: Congressional Directory and the Clerk of the House

*As of birth date in 2007.



Interpreting Tables Committee chairs have what amounts to life-or-death power over bills referred to their committee. *What do the data in this table tell you about the post each of these members holds?*

limited time. The Speaker of the House or the president of the Senate appoints the members of these special committees, with the advice of the majority and minority leaders.

Most select committees are formed to investigate a current matter. The congressional power to investigate is an essential part of the lawmaking function. Congress must decide on the need for new laws and gauge the adequacy of those already on the books. It also must exercise its vital oversight function, to ensure that federal agencies are following the laws it has already passed. At times, too, a committee may conduct an investigation of an issue—for example, the threat of domestic terrorism—in order to focus public attention on that matter.

Most investigations are conducted by standing committees or by their subcommittees. Select committees occasionally do that work, however. Thus, the Senate's Special Committee on Aging conducts an ongoing study of the elderly. It holds hearings in Washington and around the country, issues reports and press releases, and otherwise tries to bring greater public and governmental attention to the problems facing older Americans.

At times, a select committee becomes a spectacularly important body. This happened, for example, with the Senate's Select Committee on Presidential Campaign Activities, popularly known as the Senate Watergate Committee. As the Watergate scandal began to unfold in 1973, the Senate created that committee. Chaired by Senator Sam Ervin (D., North Carolina), its job was to investigate "the extent, if any, to which illegal, improper, or unethical activities were engaged in by any persons . . . in the presidential election of 1972." Its sensational hearings riveted the nation for months. Eventually, they formed a key link in the chain of events that led to President Richard Nixon's resignation from office in 1974.

Since then, the most notable instance came in 1987, with the work of two panels: the Senate's Select Committee on Secret Military Assistance to Iran and the Nicaraguan Opposition, and the House Select Committee to Investigate Covert Arms Transactions with Iran. These twin committees, often referred to as the Iran-Contra Committee, probed the Reagan administration's conduct of two highly secret projects abroad:

Senate Committee Chairs, 2007

Committee	Name	Age*	Year Elected to Senate	Party Affiliation and State
Agriculture, Nutrition, and Forestry	Tom Harkin	68	1984	D., Iowa
Appropriations	Robert C. Byrd	90	1958	D., West Virginia
Armed Services	Carl Levin	73	1978	D., Michigan
Banking, Housing, and Urban Affairs	Christopher C. Dodd	63	1980	D., Connecticut
Budget	Kent Conrad	59	1986	D., North Dakota
Commerce, Science, and Transportation	Daniel K. Inouye	83	1962	D., Hawaii
Energy and Natural Resources	Jeff Bingaman	64	1982	D., New Mexico
Environment and Public Works	Barbara Boxer	66	1992	D., California
Finance	Max Baucus	66	1978	D., Montana
Foreign Relations	Joseph R. Biden, Jr.	65	1972	D., Delaware
Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions	Edward M. Kennedy	75	1962	D., Massachusetts
Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs	Joseph L. Lieberman	65	1988	I., Connecticut
Judiciary	Patrick T. Leahy	67	1974	D., Vermont
Rules and Administration	Dianne Feinstein	74	1992	D., California
Small Business and Entrepreneurship	John F. Kerry	64	1984	D., Massachusetts
Veterans' Affairs	Daniel K. Akaka	83	1990	D., Hawaii

SOURCES: Congressional Directory and Secretary of the Senate

* As of birthdate in 2007



Interpreting Tables Critics complain that the seniority system discourages younger members of Congress. **How does this table demonstrate the importance of seniority in the United States Senate?**

the covert sale of arms to Iran and clandestine efforts to give military aid to the Contra rebels in Nicaragua. The operation in Iran was intended, at least in part, as an arms-for-hostages deal, and it failed. The aid to the Contras was funded in part with money from the Iranian arms sales, despite an act of Congress that expressly prohibited such aid by the United States.

Most congressional investigations are not nearly so visible, nor so historic. Their more usual shape can be seen when, for example, the House Committee on Agriculture looks at the spruce budworm problem, an infestation affecting trees in the Pacific Northwest.

Joint and Conference Committees

A **joint committee** is one composed of members of both houses. You may recall them from the chart on page 330. Some are select committees set up to serve some temporary purpose. Most are permanent groups that serve on a regular basis. Because the standing committees of the two houses often duplicate one another's work, many have long urged that Congress make much greater use of the joint committee device.

Some joint committees are investigative in nature and issue periodic reports to the House and Senate—for example, the Joint Economic Committee. Most often they perform more routine duties, however—for example, the Joint Committee on Printing and the Joint Committee on the Library of Congress.

Before a bill may be sent to the President, each house must pass it in identical form. Sometimes, the two houses pass differing versions, and the first house will not agree to the changes the other has made. When this happens, a **conference committee**—a temporary, joint body—is created to iron out the differences in the bill. Its job is to produce a compromise bill that both houses will accept—as you will see shortly.

Government Online

The Library of Congress Picture 530 miles of bookshelves—roughly the distance between St. Louis and Atlanta. That's what it takes to hold the 18 million books, 54 million manuscripts, 12 million photos, 4.5 million maps, and 2.5 million recordings on store at the world's largest library, the Library of Congress.

The library was founded in 1800 and is housed today in three buildings on Capitol Hill, in Washington, DC. Its basic job is to do research for Congress. Each year, it answers a half million questions and produces about 1,000 reports for its members and their various committees. Over time, though, it has also become America's library, welcoming scholars, scientists, teachers, and students.

Among its many attractions: the private papers and letters of 23 U.S. Presidents and thousands of famous Americans, and the maps and atlases used by explorers to chart the earth and outer space. You will find everything from the earliest movies to the latest databases—from the 2,100 early (1887–1914) baseball cards donated by the poet Carl Sandburg, to a joking letter sent to Alexander Graham Bell's father-in-law by Mark Twain, complaining about his telephone service.

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Use Web Code mqd-3127 to find out more about the Library of Congress and for help in answering the following question:

The Library of Congress houses a variety of correspondence to Alexander Graham Bell. How do such materials enhance the library?

Section 2 Assessment

Key Terms and Main Ideas

1. What is a **standing committee** and why are such committees called "subject-matter" committees?
2. What is the usual role of **select committees** in the House and Senate?
3. How do **joint committees** differ from **conference committees**?

Critical Thinking

4. **Testing Conclusions** Explain why you agree or disagree with the following statement: The Committee on Rules is the most powerful committee in the House.

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5. **Drawing Conclusions** Woodrow Wilson once noted that Congress in its committee rooms is Congress at work. Explain the meaning of this statement in your own words.
6. **Recognizing Cause and Effect** How does the majority party manage to control all the committees in its house, and why does it do so?

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