

V. THE CONGRESSIONAL PROCESS

A. A **bill** is a *proposed law*, drafted in precise, legal language.

1. Anyone can draft a bill, but only members of the House or Senate can formally submit a bill for consideration. The White House and interest groups are common *sources* of bills.
2. Most bills are quietly killed off early in the legislative process.
3. Congress is typically reactive and cumbersome
4. Party leaders are most involved in the process.

B. Presidents and Congress: partners and protagonists.

1. Presidents are *partners* with Congress in the legislative process, but all presidents are also Congress' *adversaries* in the struggle to control legislative outcomes.
2. Presidents have their own *legislative agenda*, based in part on their party's platform and their electoral coalition. Political scientists sometimes call the president the **chief legislator**; the president's task is to persuade Congress that his agenda should also be Congress' agenda.
3. Presidents have many resources with which to influence Congress. They may try to influence members directly, but more often will leave White House lobbying to the congressional liaison office and work primarily through regular meetings with the party's leaders in the House and Senate.
4. Rather than *creating* the conditions for important shifts in public policy, an effective president is a **facilitator**, who works at the margins of coalition building to recognize and exploit opportunities presented by a favorable configuration of political forces.

C. Party, constituency, and ideology.

1. Party influence.

a. Parties are *most cohesive* when Congress is *electing its official leaders*. A vote for the Speaker of the House is a straight party-line vote. On other issues, the party coalition may not stick together. Votes on issues like civil rights have shown deep divisions within each party.

b. Differences between the parties are sharpest on questions of social welfare and economic policy.

2. Polarized politics.

a. In the last few decades, Congress has become more ideologically polarized and more likely to vote according to the two party lines.

b. As the parties pulled apart ideologically, they also became more homogeneous internally. This has resulted in an increased difficulty in reaching a compromise.

c. The increased ideological distance between the parties is primarily due to the increasingly divergent electoral coalitions. As supporters of each party have matched their partisan and ideological views, they made the difference between the parties more distinctive.

3. Constituency versus ideology.

a. There are a variety of views concerning how members of Congress should fulfill their function of *representation*.

(1) The eighteenth-century English legislator Sir Edmund Burke favored

the concept of legislators as **trustees**, using their *best judgment* to make policy in the interests of the people.

(2) The concept of representatives as **instructed delegates** calls for representatives to *mirror the preferences of their constituents*.

(3) Members of Congress are actually **politicos**, *combining the trustee*

and instructed delegate roles as they attempt to be both representatives and policymakers.

D. Lobbyists and interest groups.

1. **Lobbyists**—some of them former members of Congress—represent the interests of their organization. They also can provide legislators with crucial information, and often can give assurances of financial aid in the next campaign.

2. There are more than 35,000 individuals in Washington representing 12,000 organizations. The bigger the issue, the more lobbyists are involved in it.

3. Paid lobbyists whose principal purpose is to influence or defeat legislation must *register* and *file reports* with the secretary of the Senate and the clerk of the House.

a. A 1995 lobbyist regulation law requires anyone hired to lobby members of

Congress, congressional staff members, White House officials, and federal agencies to report what issues they were seeking to influence, how much they were spending on the effort, and the identities of their clients.

b. In theory, the disclosure requirements would prevent shady deals and curb the influence of special interests.

VI. UNDERSTANDING CONGRESS

A. Congress and democracy.

1. In a large democracy, the success of democratic government depends on the quality of representation.

2. Congress clearly has some undemocratic and unrepresentative features: its members are an American elite; its leadership is chosen by its own members; voters have little direct influence over the people who chair key committees or lead congressional parties.

3. There is also evidence to support the view that Congress is representative: Congress does try to listen to the American people; the election does make a difference in how votes turn out; which party is in power affects policies; linkage institutions do link voters to policymakers. Members of Congress are responsive to the people, if the people make clear what they want.

B. Representativeness versus effectiveness.

1. The central legislative dilemma for Congress is combining the faithful *representation of constituents* with the making of *effective public policy*.

2. Supporters see Congress as a forum in which many interests compete for a spot on the policy agenda and over the form of a particular policy (as the founders intended).

3. Critics wonder if Congress is so responsive to so many interests that policy is too uncoordinated, fragmented, and decentralized. Some observers feel that Congress is so representative that it is *incapable of taking decisive action* to deal with difficult problems.

C. Congress and the scope of government.

1. Americans have contradictory preferences regarding public policy. They want to balance the budget and pay low taxes, but they also support most government programs. These *contradictory preferences* may help explain the pervasive ticket splitting in national elections, which has frequently led to divided government.

2. Big government helps members of Congress get reelected and even gives them good reason to support making it bigger. However, Congress does not impose programs on a reluctant public; instead, it responds to the public's demands for them.

KEY TERMS AND CONCEPTS

Bicameral legislature: a legislature that is divided into two chambers.

Bill: a proposed law, drafted in precise, legal language.

Casework: helping constituents as individuals cut through bureaucratic red tape to receive their rightful benefits.

Caucus: a grouping of members of Congress sharing some interest or characteristic.

Committee chairs: the most important influences on the congressional agenda; they schedule hearings, hire staff, appoint subcommittees, and manage committee bills.

Conference committee: a special committee formed when each chamber passes a bill in different forms, composed of members of each chamber who were appointed by each chamber's leaders to work out a compromise bill.

Filibuster: is unlimited debate, is unique to the Senate, and can only be ended by a vote for cloture by 60 members.

House Rules Committee: a committee unique to the House, which is appointed by the Speaker of the House, reviews most bills coming from a House committee for a floor vote, and which gives each bill a rule.

Incumbents: people who already hold office.

Joint committees: special committees composed of members from each chamber.

Legislative oversight: the process of monitoring the bureaucracy and its administration of policy.

Majority leader: the Speaker's principal partisan ally who is responsible for soliciting support for the party's position on legislation.

Minority leader: is the minority party's counterpart to the majority party's leadership.

Pork barrel: list of federal projects, grants, and contracts available to cities, businesses, colleges, and institutions.

Select committees: appointed for a specific purpose.

Seniority system: a system used until the 1970s where majority party members who had served on their committees the longest, regardless of party loyalty, mental state, or competence, were automatically appointed chair of the committee.

Speaker of the House: as mandated by the Constitution, is next in line after the vice president to succeed a president who is unable to fulfill his/her term and who presides over the House.

Standing committees: committees formed in each chamber to handle bills in different policy areas.

Whip: The majority or minority leader's principle tool for securing support for legislation and who lobby partisans for support.

