## Committees 101

An introduction to the congressional committee process

March 5, 2019

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<tr>
<th>committee</th>
<th>/kəˈmɪdiə/</th>
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<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>A group of people appointed for a specific function, typically consisting of members of a larger group.</td>
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<td>2</td>
<td>A small, specialized group of legislators, with expertise in issue areas, that consider and make recommendations concerning bills, resolutions and other related matters.</td>
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Legislative process: how a bill becomes a law

**Representative**
- Introduces bill in the House

**Senator**
- Introduces bill in the Senate

**House committee/subcommittee**
- Bill is debated and amended
- Simple majority needed to proceed

**Senate committee/subcommittee**
- Bill is debated and amended
- Simple majority needed to proceed

**House floor**
- Bill is debated and amended
- *Speaker must allow a floor vote*
- Simple majority needed to pass

**Senate floor**
- Bill is debated and amended
- *3/5 majority needed to end debate*
- Simple majority needed to pass

**Final votes/conference committee**
- If both chambers pass an identical bill, the bill is sent directly to the president
- If each chamber passes a similar bill with some differences, a conference committee is formed to reach compromise and combine the bills

**President**
- The president can sign bills that have been passed by both chambers into law
- The president can reject a bill with a veto; Congress can override a veto by passing the bill in each chamber with a 2/3 majority

The types of congressional committees

**Standing committee**
Permanent legislative committees in both the US House of Representatives and Senate. These committees specialize in the debate surrounding, and legislation for, particular issue areas. There are currently 16 standing committees in the Senate and 20 standing committees in the House.

**Joint committees**
Committees including membership from both the House and Senate. Joint committees usually have narrow jurisdictions in an issue area and lack authority to report legislation. Joint committees are typically permanent committees, although some may be formed to address a specific issue.

**Special/Select committees**
Committee established for a specified time period to perform a particular study, investigation, or point of oversight that is beyond the authority of an established standing committee. Some special or select committees have the authority to draft legislation.

Sources: Senate.gov.
Committee markup process

1. **Beginning the markup**
   - A committee markup begins with the chair calling the committee to order and announcing the matters being considered. The initial actions of the markup process include:
     - A first reading of the text of the bill (which can be waived by unanimous consent)
     - Opening statements of members on the bill

2. **Offering and debating amendments**
   - After the initial reading, the committee proceeds to offer amendments. Committee members are not voting for amendments; rather, they are voting on which amendments should be recommended for the full Congress to adopt. Actions during this process can include:
     - Offering amendments to the bill
     - Debating amendments to be included in the bill

3. **Concluding debate on amendments**
   - When the committee decides that it has concluded debate on amendments, it has two options:
     - A “motion to order the previous question,” which ends debate and if the motion passes, leads to an immediate vote
     - A “motion to close debate,” which ends debate on the amendment but does not lead to a vote on the considered amendment

4. **Motions and procedures**
   - In addition to providing amendments, members have other motions and parliamentary procedures during the markup process. These include:
     - Ordinary motions used in Congress, such as motion to table and motion to reconsider
     - Demanding a quorum, which requires the majority of the committee to be present to precede with any consideration of business
     - Motioning for various voting procedures, including voice, division, or record votes
     - Points of order, which allows a committee member to address the chair about procedural requirements being violated

5. **Motions to conclude markups**
   - While committees do not have the authority to change the text of a bill or decide whether or not to approve the merits of a bill, committees will vote on what markups should be included in the bill when it is sent to Congress.

6. **Concluding debate on amendments**
   - The chair will recognize a majority party member to move that the committee order the bill reported to Congress with the accompanying markups.