



Course Learning Outcomes for Unit V

Upon completion of this unit, students should be able to:

1. Perceive the evolution of Congress members' goals and the steps they take to maintain their offices.
2. Identify the roles of prominent members of the legislative branch.
3. Discuss the different forms of committees and their focus.
4. Elaborate on the procedure a bill follows as it becomes a law.
5. Discuss the role Congress plays as a policymaker.
6. Interpret the actual role of the president in the U. S. government.
7. Explain how the president and members of his or her staff are chosen.
8. Determine the various factors that affect how well the president leads the nation.

Reading Assignment

Chapter 11:

Congress: Balancing National Goals and Local Interests

Chapter 12:

The Presidency: Leading the Nation

Unit Lesson

From the moment a politician is elected to office, they spend much of their time trying to get re-elected. They are shaking hands, kissing babies, and attempting to raise as much money as possible for the next election cycle. The job of a politician is never easy. When making or passing laws, they must take into consideration not only the good of the people, but also the will of the people. In the end, they must face the voters of their constituency to get re-elected. When President Obama was first elected to the presidency in 2008, the Democrats were in control of the House and Senate. Due to the bailouts and other legislation passed that many people did not like, there was a large turnover in elected officials when voters went to the polls at mid-term election time in 2010. Since the mid-1980s, it has been harder and harder to get the work of Congress done due to a larger and larger partisan divide. For example, the 2010 health care reform bill was passed without a single Republican vote.

Congress is the preeminent branch of government with the power to make laws. Patterson tells us, "No executive agency or lower court can exist unless authorized by Congress" (2013, p 268). Those elected to Congress in both the House of Representative and the Senate have a responsibility to the interests of the people.

While it is true that during times of extreme swings in voter satisfaction there will be larger than usual upsets, an incumbent usually has around a 90% chance of getting re-elected. Those already in the office have many advantages over candidates who want to run against them. Senators and representatives have staff members who spend all of their time working on issues brought to their attention by the constituency of a state or district. Members of Congress will fight hard and fight dirty for pork projects attached to various bills that will help their constituencies. Congressional members are allowed to fly home for free and also have the ability to send out free mailings (informing the people what they have done for them while in office). Press releases also give members of Congress face recognition the next time elections come up. Incumbents also have the advantage when raising money for their campaigns, since they have already run for office and have lists of those willing to contribute. Most PACs are more than willing to back the incumbent over the challenger.

Sometimes, an incumbent runs into problems if they want to run for reelection. Redistricting (re-drawing of voting districts) can raise issues for an incumbent if the state has lost seats in the House of Representatives

due to a loss of population. If the voters become angry with the party in office and believe a change should be made (as in the mid-term elections in 2010) and personal misconduct of a sitting member of Congress can also affect an incumbent's chances at reelection. Many politicians have ruined their careers with personal misconduct, such as taking bribes, adultery and other ethical problems.

Because there is so much work to do in Congress, the load must be divided to get any of it done. The Constitution specifies that the House of Representatives will be presided over by a Speaker (elected by members of the House). While the Senate has a majority leader, the Constitution holds that the presiding officer of the Senate is the Vice President of the United States. The vice president can only vote in the case of a tie, so he or she does not usually attend but has a stand-in called the president pro tempore. These leaders are, in turn, helped by the majority whips in both houses and the minority leaders and whips in both houses.

Committees do all of the work in the House and Senate. Standing committees are made up of both permanent committees (such as the Armed Services Committee) and select committees that have

responsibilities but do not produce legislation. Congress will also use joint committees that have members of both the House and Senate to take care of things like the Library of Congress. They also have conference committees, which are joint committees used to hammer out differences of legislation being voted on.

Committees are broken down into subcommittees made up of smaller groups and they have committee staffs that help draft legislation and gather information. Committees have a fixed number of seats, and most House members sit on no more than two, while Senate members will often be on anywhere between two and four. Most congressional members look to be on committees that are important to their constituencies. Some committees, such as that of the Armed Services committee, can be very prestigious, and the position of committee chair is a powerful one. Legislation can be left to die within a committee and never see a vote if the committee chair and members want that to happen.

One of the most confusing things to voters is how the President of the United States becomes the president. As one of the visible politicians in the United States, the president must weather lots of ups and downs. In the

Constitution, the president has very modest formal powers, although he or she is considered the commander-in-chief of the armed forces and the chief executive. The president's power depends on circumstances and the charisma/political savvy of the person in the office. Over time, the powers of the president have expanded beyond what the framers of the Constitution imagined.

In an attempt to limit the power of the executive office, the framers came up with the plan to elect the president through an electoral vote system (Electoral College). In this plan, each state would have one elector for each member of Congress, and these electors, who were picked by their state, would

TABLE 11-2 | The Standing Committees of Congress

House of Representatives	Senate
Agriculture	Agriculture, Nutrition, and Forestry
Appropriations	Appropriations
Armed Services	Armed Services
Budget	Banking, Housing, and Urban Affairs
Education and the Workforce	Budget
Energy and Commerce	Commerce, Science, and Transportation
Ethics	Energy and Natural Resources
Financial Services	Environment and Public Works
Foreign Affairs	Finance
Homeland Security	Foreign Relations
House Administration	Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions
Judiciary	Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs
Natural Resources	Judiciary
Oversight and Government Reform	Rules and Administration
Rules	Small Business and Entrepreneurship
Science and Technology	Veterans' Affairs
Small Business	
Transportation and Infrastructure	
Veterans' Affairs	
Ways and Means	

Standing Committees of Congress (Patterson, 2012)

TABLE 12-2 | The Four Systems of Presidential Selection

Selection System	Period	Features
1. Original	1788–1828	Party nominees are chosen in congressional caucuses. Electoral College members act somewhat independently in their presidential voting.
2. Party convention	1832–1900	Party nominees are chosen in national party conventions by delegates selected by state and local party organizations. Electoral College members cast their ballots for the popular-vote winner in their respective estates.
3. Party convention, primary	1904–1968	As in system 2, except that a <i>minority</i> of national convention delegates are chosen through primary elections (the majority still being chosen by party organizations).
4. Party primary, open caucus	1972–present	As in system 2, except that a <i>majority</i> of national caucus convention delegates are chosen through primary elections.

Presidential Selection (Patterson, 2012)

elect the president. This system was modified in 1828 when Andrew Jackson championed the system we still use today, where the candidate who wins a state's popular vote gets the electoral votes of that state and must have 270 electoral votes to win the election. Since this variation was started, only four presidents have won the office without winning the popular vote.

Once a president is elected, the process begins to gear up for the next election. Millions of dollars must be raised for each stage of the election process. According to the Federal Election Campaign Act of 1974, candidates that raise at least \$5000 dollars from at least 20 states are eligible for matching funds. Those who accept matching funds must agree to limit how much they spend on the race. Candidates who are chosen to be the candidate for their party are then allowed accept or decline more matching funds. According to the Washington Post (Dec. 2012), President Obama raised \$1.2 billion and spent \$1.11 billion while his opponent, Mitt Romney, raised \$1.18 billion and spent \$928 million dollars. One of the biggest expenses for any campaign is airtime on both television and radio.

The Vice President of the United States is chosen by the presidential candidate and voted for as part of the presidential ticket. The only president of the United State not to be elected by the people was Gerald Ford. He was picked by Nixon to replace Vice President Spiro Agnew when he was forced to resign. When President Nixon was then forced to resign office, Ford became president without having ever been voted on by the people. The president determines the vice president's duties, and each president has been different in what they ask of their vice president.

The president is given a staff known as the Executive Office of the President (EOP), and this staff helps to coordinate the activities of the executive branch. Within this organization, the White House Office (WHO) consists of the president's personal assistants and others who do the legwork and information gathering. The president also has his or her advisors in the cabinet, which holds the heads of the fifteen executive departments, such as the secretary of state. These advisors are appointed by the president but must be confirmed by Congress.

All presidents come to the office with an agenda or strategic vision. It is a hard fact that they will not get much of what they want and must use the arts of compromise and bullying to get any work done. In order to get things done, the president must have the support in Congress and a good standing with the American people.

Presidents must look at the bigger picture. They must not only consider the issues present on the home front, but they must also consider America's place within the world. It is one president doing the work of two presidencies (domestic and foreign). Only twice has a president collided so badly with Congress that impeachment proceedings were brought about (both times they were acquitted). President Nixon left office before the process could be started because he knew that he would not win. In the end, the president is often given too much credit for the good things that happen in the country and too much blame for the bad.

Click here to view a virtual tour of the United States Capitol Building.
<http://www.senate.gov/vtour/>

Click here to view an interactive tour of the White House.
<http://www.whitehouse.gov/about/inside-white-house/interactive-tour>

References

Patterson, T. (2013). *The American democracy* (11th ed.). New York, NY: McGraw-Hill, Inc.

Washington Post (2012). *2012 Presidential Campaign Finance Explorer*. Retrieved from www.washingtonpost.com/wp-srv/special/politics/campaign-finance/

Suggested Reading

Click [here](#) to view a PDF of the Chapter 11 presentation.

Click [here](#) to view a PDF of the Chapter 12 presentation.

"The Electoral College" by William C. Kimberling found here: www.fec.gov/pdf/eleccoll.pdf