

CONGRESS IN ACTION

Roles of Members of Congress

- ① 1) Legislators (make the laws)
- ② 2) Representatives of their constituents
- ③ 3) Committee members
- ④ 4) Servants of their constituents
- ⑤ 5) Politicians

Representatives

- ⦿ How do they represent the people?
- ⦿ How do they decide which votes to cast?
- ⦿ Should they follow what people in their district want?
- ⦿ Should they take positions that disagree with their constituents?

Voting Options

- ⦿ Trustees
- ⦿ Delegates
- ⦿ Partisans
- ⦿ Politicos

Trustees

- Believe that each question should be decided on its merits
- Guided by their own conscience and judgment
- They do not follow the opinions of their constituents or interest groups

Delegates

- Believe that they should vote based on what their constituents want
- Pay no attention to party leaders, colleagues, or special interests when making a decision

Partisans

- ⦿ These representatives follow their political party
- ⦿ Most studies of legislators' voting behavior show that partisanship is the leading factor influencing their votes on most important measures

Politicos

- Try to balance the elements of the Trustee, Delegate, and Partisan roles

Powers of Congress

⦿ Tax

⦿ Borrow

- Constitution does not limit the amount that Congress can borrow
- Debt limit is set by Congress—Congress is having difficulty agreeing to move the debt ceiling up
- “Super Committee” expected to fail to make cuts

Powers of Congress

- ⦿ Commerce Power—power to regulate interstate and foreign trade
- ⦿ Currency Power—power to print money
- ⦿ Regulate Bankruptcies
- ⦿ War Powers—only Congress may declare war
 - Last time Congress declared war was when?

Congress In Action

- ◎ Who runs the House and Senate?
- ◎ Speaker of the House
 - Presides over most sessions of the House
 - Current speaker: John Boehner (R) Ohio
- ◎ President of the Senate
 - Vice President is the presiding officer
 - May vote only to break a tie
 - President Pro Tempore (Pro tem) is elected to run the senate when the VP is absent

Other Important Positions

- ⦿ Floor leaders—party officers try to get work done for their political party
 - Majority leader
 - Minority leader
- ⦿ Whips—assistant floor leaders
 - Majority Whip
 - Minority Whip
- ⦿ Committee Chairmen

Committees

⦿ House Committees

- Rules
- Ways and Means
- Appropriations
- Armed Services
- Judiciary
- International Relations
- Agriculture

Senate Committees

- Foreign Relations
- Appropriations
- Finance
- Judiciary
- Armed Services
- Banking
- Housing
- Urban Affairs

Special Committees

- “Select Committees”—panels of lawmakers set up for a specific purpose and for a limited amount of time
- Joint Committee—made up of members of both houses of Congress
- Conference Committees—temporary committee to produce a compromise bill when the Senate and House pass different versions of the same bill