

# Briefing on Congressional Leadership and Organization for CIGIE

Presented by  
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# Congress organized?

A seminar sponsored by Congressional Quarterly has taken on what seems to us to be an extremely frustrating if not impossible task. Its topic is understanding how Congress is organized.

Congressional Quarterly assumes that Congress is organized. You have to wonder where they got the idea.

Congress is to organization what Chanel No. 5 is to hogs. Certainly they're august hogs, given the offensive line of the professional football franchise in the nation's capital.

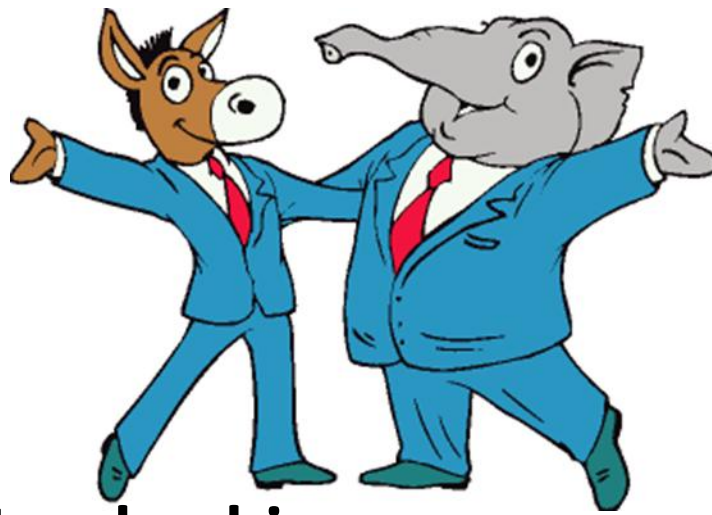
Disorganization in Congress is probably good. Organization tends to cause trouble. And the chances are good that democracy has survived as well as it has because Congress has remained in a state of confusion.

If those at the seminar become aware that Congress is not organized, it is to be hoped that they will not try to do anything about it.

Congress, after all, is very good at doing little about anything. Some may argue that Congress has a corner on the nothing-doing market.

The Soviet Union is organized. Cuba is organized. If Congress were to organize, disaster would follow. The Quarterly should call off that seminar





## • Political Party Leadership

- Speaker of the House = constitutional job, elected by majority of those present and voting in the full House
- All other positions chosen **by secret ballot within parties**
- Senate Majority Leader more like “majority pleader”
- President pro-tem subs for V.P., who can only vote to break ties
- Chuck Grassley (R-IA) = Pres pro-tem and Judiciary chair
- U.S. legislative leaders weaker than most of their international counterparts because candidates do NOT need party’s approval to seek reelection

# Role of the Speaker

- Constitutional or Statutory:
- Preside over the chamber
- Recognize those wishing to speak
- Behind the Vice President in the line of succession
- House Rules/Informal:
- Weighted vote on Steering Committee
- Proposes roster of committee chairs
- Top fundraiser
- Negotiates in budget battles
- Can create select committees
- Appoints Members to Rules, Ethics, Intel
- Allocates office space



# Political Party Top Leadership Role

- House
  - Speaker: Power from informal powers > formal ones. Controls agenda via Rules Committee
  - Majority Leader: COO, power of timing.
  - Minority Leader: Shadow Speaker. “Pray, b\*tch, and moan.” Rules make it tough.
  - Chief Whips: Count votes, corral their Members, serve as conduit between leaders and rank and file Members.
- Senate
  - Majority Leader: Unlike Speaker, not a constitutional office. First to be recognized on the floor by precedent.
  - Minority Leader: Slightly better than in the House IF party has at least 41. Extract concessions by threatening to filibuster.
  - Whips = somewhat tougher job in Senate, fewer tools.





What does the “Chief Whip” do?

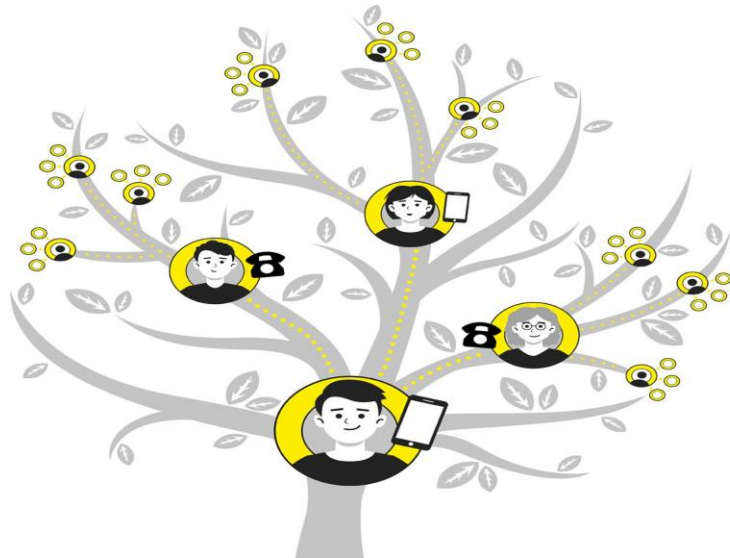
2-way communications conduit:

Leaders’ priorities to membership

Count votes and report to leadership

Assisted by whip team

Corrals Dem Caucus or Repub Conference



## HOUSE:

- Speaker Mike Johnson (R-LA)
- Majority Leader Steve Scalise (R-LA)
- Majority Whip Tom Emmer (R-MN)
- Conference Chair Lisa McClain (R-MI)
  
- Minority Leader Hakeem Jeffries (D-NY)
- Minority Whip Katherine Clark (D-MA)
- Caucus Chair Pete Aguilar (D-CA)
- Asst Minority Leader Jim Clyburn (D-SC)

## SENATE:

- Majority Leader John Thune (R-SD)
- Majority Whip John Barrasso (R-WY)
- Conference Chair Tom Cotton (R-AR)
- Policy Chair Shelley Capito (R-WV)
  
- Democratic Leader Chuck Schumer (D-NY)
- Democratic Whip Dick Durbin (D-IL)
- Policy Chair Amy Klobuchar (D-MN)
- Outreach Chair Cory Booker (D-NJ)



# Leaders operate in context.

## 119th Party Ratios & Key Numbers today

- House:
- **220** Republicans, **213** Democrats, **\_2\_ V**
- Majority needed to pass legislation **IF** all are present and voting: **217**
- Senate: **53** Republicans, **47** Democrats  
(including 2 Indeps who vote w/ Ds)
- Majority required to confirm presidential appointees to judic and exec branch: **51**
- Majority required to end filibuster: **60**

# Stats about the 119<sup>th</sup> Congress

- Average size of House District = 782,000
- Most diverse Congress ever, 29% H, 16% Sen BIPOC
- Women: 129 House, 26 Senate, record #
- Veterans: about 20%
- Average length of service:
  - House: 8.6 years (decreasing since 2007)
  - Senate: 11.2 years (increasing since 2017)
- Average age:
  - House: 57.5
  - Senate: 64.7
- Incumbents House who lost: 15 reps (9 R, 6 D), Senate 3 all D
- New Members:
  - House: 63 (33 R, 30 D)
  - Senate: 12 (8 R, 4 D)

Members not seeking reelection in 2024:

Senate: \_\_4\_\_ D, \_\_4\_\_ R

House: \_24\_\_D, \_21\_\_ R



Article I allows both chambers to Determine their own rules. Both rely on the committee system and political party structure.

- **Committee System**

- All committees comprised of both Democrats and Republicans
- Size varies, but unlikely to change much
- Full committees are further divided into subcommittees
- Ratios generally reflect those of the full chamber
- Chair = majority party, “ranking member” = minority; both usually determined by seniority, and fundraising prowess
- Republicans limit chairs/rankings to 6 years, Democrats don’t
- Repositories of Member & staff expertise, institutional memory
- Craft legislation, hold hearings, conduct oversight
- Committee assignments = huge part of Members’ identity
- Jurisdiction is power, turf battles are frequent and fierce

# Committees in the 119<sup>th</sup> Congress

- House
  - Agriculture
  - Appropriations
  - Armed Services
  - Budget
  - Education & the Workforce
  - Energy & Commerce
  - Financial Services
  - Foreign Affairs
  - Homeland Security
  - House Administration
  - Judiciary
  - Natural Resources
  - Oversight & Accountability
  - Science, Space, and Technology
  - Small Business
  - Transportation & Infrastructure
  - Veterans' Affairs
  - Ways & Means
  - 
  - Ethics
  - Intelligence (HPSCI)
  - Rules
- Senate
  - Agriculture, Nutrition, & Forestry
  - Appropriations
  - Armed Services
  - Banking, Housing, & Urban Affairs
  - Budget
  - Commerce, Science, & Transportation
  - Energy & Natural Resources
  - Environment & Public Works
  - Finance
  - Foreign Relations
  - Health, Education, Labor, & Pensions
  - Homeland Security & Governmental Affairs
  - Indian Affairs
  - Judiciary
  - Rules & Administration
  - Small Business & Entrepreneurship
  - Veterans' Affairs
  - 
  - Ethics
  - Intelligence (SSCI)
  - Aging

# How do members get on committees?



- House: Party **Steering Committees** confer committee assignments. Subcommittees are comprised of Members on the full committee. A Member's tenure on a committee parallels their tenure in the chamber. Representatives typically serve on 2 or 3 committees.
- Senate: Assignments are based on **seniority** in the chamber, leaders have less influence. Most senators serve on 4 or 5 committees.



# Considerations when demand exceeds supply



- Personal experience
- Legislative experience
- Endorsements
- Lobbyists
- Pre-Election promises
- Fundraising prowess
- Diversity
- Geographic Representation
- Constituent involvement
- Counterintuitively, Electoral Vulnerability

# All Committees are not created equal!

- But appeal varies, beauty is in the eye of the beholder
- House “exclusive” committees:
  - Appropriations, Ways & Means, Energy & Commerce, Rules\*, Financial Services
- Authorizers (permission) vs. Appropriators (\$)
- But Appropriations ain’t what it used to be...



- “Super A” committees in the Senate: Appropriations, Finance, Armed Services. Rs (but not Ds) treat Foreign Relations as a “Super A” as well.

# What about “Select” Committees?



- Created by the Speaker
- Designed to focus on a specific topic, e.g.,
  - “Mod Con,” Jan 6, Benghazi, Climate Change
  - “Weaponization of Fed Govt,” COVID
- Theoretically temporary, last for just one Congress\*
- Members “selected” by Speaker and Minority Leader
- Hold hearings, subpoena witnesses, issue press releases, make recommendations, but: CAN’T LEGISLATE.\*\*
- \*Can become permanent, e.g., Homeland Security, Intelligence.
- \*\*Intelligence Committees are the exception and DO have authority to legislate.



## Caucuses:

Informal groups, vary in influence, membership is voluntary, advisory role only

**Break the Gridlock**



**Problem Solvers Caucus**



(NB: Ds also call all their members the House or Senate D “caucus” while Rs call theirs the House or Senate R “conference.”)



# Looking Ahead...

- How long will Mike Johnson remain Speaker?
- What issues show divisions within each party?
- What impact will presidential campaigns have on Congress
- Will the Senate abolish the filibuster?

