

CHAPTER 12 Congress in Action

Warmup



Can and should the lawmaking process be improved?

A. What are Congress' most important duties and responsibilities? Consider the list below. Add any job you think should be included. Then circle the three jobs you think are the most important.

- Overseeing executive branch
- Investigating wrongdoing
- Evaluating proposals for and passing laws
- Approving treaties with foreign nations
- Amending the Constitution
- Appropriating federal funds
- Helping constituents deal with the federal bureaucracy
- Bringing federal projects and money to members' States or districts
- Impeachment and trial of federal officials
- Representing the people of members' States or districts
- Electing President or Vice President under unusual circumstances
- Approving presidential appointments
- Other: _____
- Other: _____
- Other: _____

B. Explain why you chose the three jobs circled above.

Exploration

I. Organization of Congress

➔ Find Out

A. Read about congressional organization in your print or online textbook or other sources. Then complete this chart by listing the officers in each house and a brief description of the duties of each.

SENATE	
<u>Presiding Officers</u>	
Vice President	

<u>Party Officers</u>	
Majority Leader	Minority Leader
_____	_____
Majority Whip	Minority Whip
_____	_____
_____	_____

HOUSE	
<u>Presiding Officer</u>	

<u>Party Officers</u>	
Majority Leader	Minority Leader
_____	_____
Majority Whip	Minority Whip
_____	_____
_____	_____

B. What is the seniority rule? What are some pros and cons of this system?

C. What changes have been made to the seniority rule in recent years?

What Do You Think?

D. Do you think the reliance on seniority is good or bad for Congress and for the country? Explain.

II. The Work of Committees

➔ Find Out

A. Read in your print or online textbook about how bills are assigned to committee. How can the authors of a bill try to influence its assignment? Who makes the assignment? What options does the assigner have?

B. Standing committees have great power to control what bills become laws under their jurisdictions. Read about committees in Congress in your print or online textbook or other sources. Then use the organizer below to list the options a committee has when it votes on the status of a bill, and describe circumstances under which each option might be used.

Option	Description	Circumstances
1.		
2.	refuse to report bill	
3.		
4.		
5.		None of the proposed bills was adequate.

C. Congress has developed several types of committees to serve different purposes. Use the table below to organize information about the four types of committees.

	Standing	Joint	Conference	Select
Members From		<i>both houses of Congress</i>		
Operating Time Frame				<i>usually temporary</i>
Purpose				

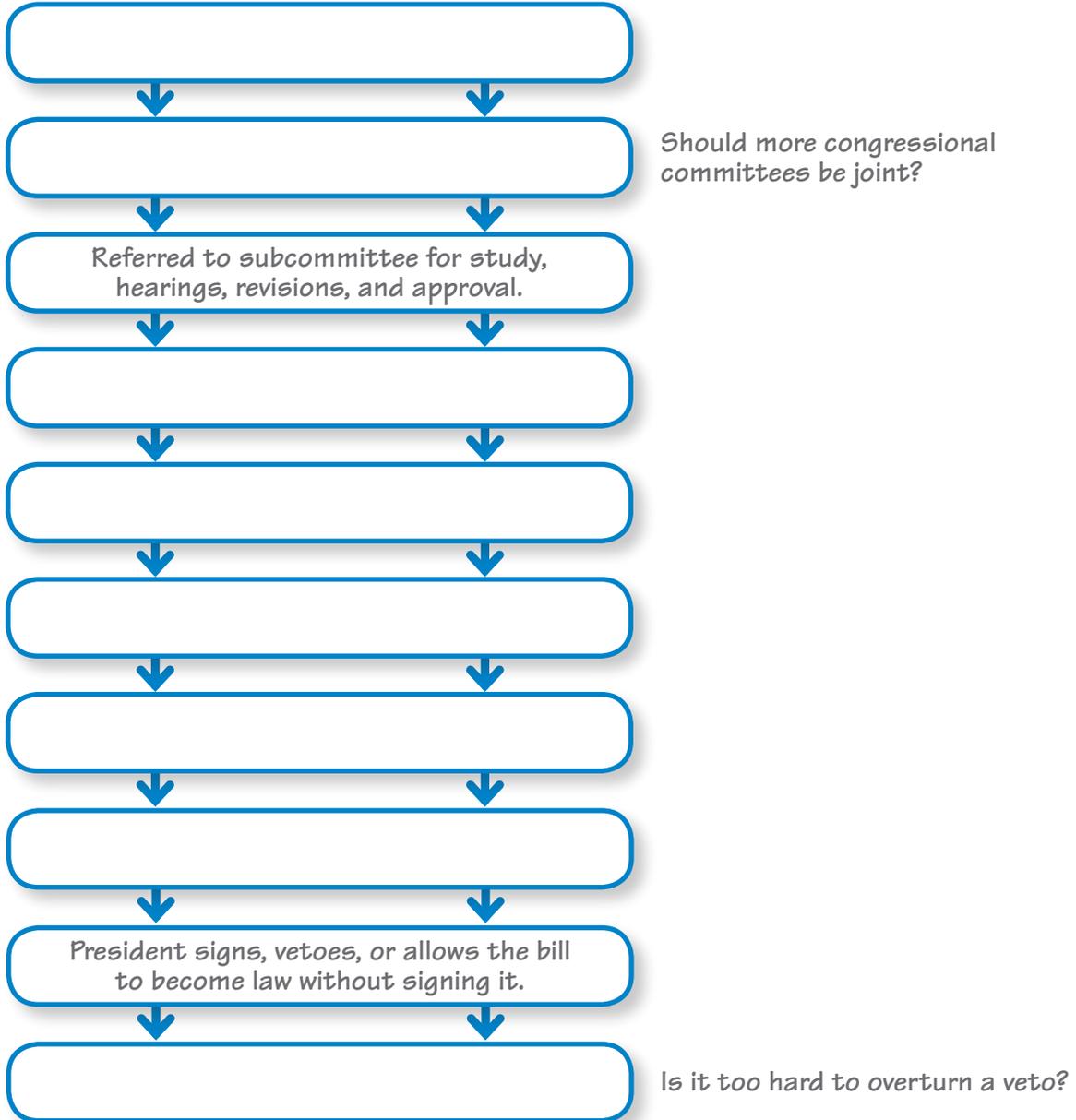
 **What Do You Think?**

D. What problem(s) was the committee system designed to solve? Are there drawbacks to the committee system as it now exists? Are there changes that could be made that would improve the system? Explain your answers.

III. Making Laws

→ Find Out

A. Review the lawmaking process in your print or online textbook or other sources. Then use the flowchart below to map the progress of a bill through the House. At each point, use the margin to jot down your questions and thoughts about the process.



👤 What Do You Think?

B. As you have learned, very few bills become law. Do you think it might be worthwhile to reduce the time Congress spends drafting, defending, and reviewing so many doomed bills? If so, how? If not, why not? Answer on a separate sheet of paper.

IV. Debate in the Senate

➔ Find Out

A. The Senate has a longstanding tradition of unlimited debate, which was intended to foster careful consideration of every issue. Review your print or online textbook and other sources to learn about debate in the Senate. Then mark each statement below with a T or an F to show if you think it is true or false.

- ___ 1. The Constitution guarantees unlimited debate in the Senate.
- ___ 2. The purpose of a filibuster is to delay or defeat a measure that would pass if put to a vote.
- ___ 3. The “two-speech rule” is a mechanism to make filibustering easier.
- ___ 4. The cloture rule was passed after a World-War-I-era filibuster that outraged the public and the President.
- ___ 5. Cloture requires a two-thirds vote of the Senate.
- ___ 6. Filibusters have become common in recent years.

👤 What Do You Think?

B. There are both advantages and disadvantages to the filibuster. Use the table to list its pros and cons. Then write a statement explaining your view on this question: Is the filibuster an outmoded institution or an important tradition that should be preserved?

The Filibuster	
Pros	Cons
<i>can prevent hasty decision-making</i>	
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____

V. Compare and Contrast the House and Senate

Find Out

A. Review your print or online textbook or other sources on differences between the House and the Senate. Then put an S before the statement below if it applies mainly to the Senate and an H before it if it applies mainly to the House.

- | | |
|--|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Great power for committee chairs | <input type="checkbox"/> Less power for committee chairs |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Shorter terms of office | <input type="checkbox"/> Longer terms of office |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Complex rules | <input type="checkbox"/> Informal rules |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Almost unlimited debate | <input type="checkbox"/> Limited debate |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Great power for presiding officer | <input type="checkbox"/> Less power for presiding officer |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Always introduces tax bills | <input type="checkbox"/> Never introduces tax bills |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Continuous body | <input type="checkbox"/> Reconstitutes itself each term |

Write a short summary of the differences between the House and Senate.

What Do You Think?

B. Write three reasons why Congress does not always work with the greatest speed and efficiency. Then answer the following question: Should Congress work with greater speed and efficiency? Explain your answer.

Apply What You've Learned Activity

As you have learned, real lawmaking does not always follow the neat steps depicted in textbook charts of the process. Use the graphic organizers and questions below to help you record your research and complete the Apply What You've Learned Activity in your print or online textbook.

- A.** Summarize information about the two recent bills you chose for your activity. You may consider looking for bills on the legislative information Web site from the Library of Congress, known as "Thomas."

	Bill 1	Bill 2
Official Number		
Short Title		
Sponsor		
Purpose		
Final Status		

- B.** On a separate sheet of paper, draw simple flowcharts to illustrate the progress of your two bills. Add as many steps as you need to for each bill.
- C.** Which stages progressed well for each bill? At which stages, if any, did each bill do poorly?

- D.** Write your answer to question 12 from your print or online textbook, below. Use additional sheets of paper as necessary.

Essay



Can and should the lawmaking process be improved?

Each house of Congress makes its own process rules and is free to change them “*within the limits of the Constitution.*” In addition, the Framers provided ways to amend the U.S. Constitution, if necessary. As you think about your answer to the Chapter Essential Question, consider the observations of two congressional scholars describing what Congress should do.

If I could do one thing procedurally to heal the House and Senate and begin to restore some semblance of its deliberative role, I would . . . force it into a two weeks on/two weeks off schedule. . . . They would spend more time around their colleagues, seeing them as human beings and not as the enemy.

— Norman Ornstein, *Want to Fix Congress?*

Extensive debate is written into the very structure of our congressional system. At every level [in Congress], . . . there is the presumption of discussion, debate, disagreement and even argument. Our Founders understood the importance of conflict in the system, both as a way for all views to be represented, and as a process for building common ground among them.

— Lee Hamilton, *Debate Is Good For Our System*

What Do You Think?

What is your opinion? Write a response to the Essential Question, **Can and should the lawmaking process be improved?** Consider your thoughts on the quotations above, the Guiding Questions in your textbook, and the activities you have done in your Journal. See page 219 for a rubric on writing an Essential Question essay.



Don't Forget

Your answer to this question will help you think about the Unit 3 Essential Question: **What makes a successful Congress?**