

## 8.8 The Committee System

Due to the high volume and complexity of its work, Congress divides its tasks among approximately 250 committees and subcommittees. The House and Senate each has its own committee system, which are similar. Within chamber guidelines, however, each committee adopts its own rules.

Standing committees generally have legislative jurisdiction and most operate with subcommittees that handle a committee's work in specific areas. Select and joint committees are chiefly for oversight or housekeeping tasks.

The chair of each committee and a majority of its members come from the majority party. The chair primarily controls a committee's business. Each party is predominantly responsible for assigning its members to committees, and each committee distributes its members among its subcommittees. There are limits on the number and types of panels any one member may serve on and chair.

Committees receive varying levels of operating funds and employ varying numbers of aides. Each hires and fires its own staff. Several thousand measures are referred to committees during each Congress. Committees select a small percentage for consideration, and those not addressed often receive no further action. Determining the fate of measures and, in effect, helping to set a chamber's agenda make committees powerful.

When a committee or subcommittee favors a measure, it usually takes four actions. First, it asks relevant executive agencies for written comments on the measure. Second, it holds hearings to gather information and views from noncommittee experts. Third, a committee meets to perfect the measure through amendments, and noncommittee members sometimes attempt to influence the language. Fourth, when language is agreed upon, the committee sends the measure back to the chamber, usually along with a written report describing its purposes and provisions and the work of the committee thereon.

The influence of committees over measures extends to their enactment into law. A committee that considers a measure will manage the full chamber's deliberation on it. Also, its members will be appointed to any conference committee created to reconcile the two chambers' differing versions of a measure.

Source: The Committee System in the U.S. Congress, Congressional Research Service, Library of Congress.

Answer the following questions.

1. Describe the different types of committees and their work. \_\_\_\_\_

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2. Name the four actions committees take when the committee favors a measure.

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3. Why are committees powerful? \_\_\_\_\_

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