Congress

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Congress

- Conflicting Views
  - We disdain the “Institution” of Congress
  - We “love” our individual members
Comparison to Other Legislatures (Parliamentary Democracies)

- Selection of the Chief Executive
- Level of Control by Party Leadership
Two basic concerns of the Founders:

- Concentration of Political Power
- Protection of States’ interests
Some Basic Facts

- Powers of Congress

- Terms of Office
  - How do differences in terms influence decisions made by each member? (Trustee vs Delegate)
The Power of Incumbency

- Franking Privilege
- Free trips back to their districts
- Local and national support staff
- Media opportunities
- Pork-Barrel Politics
- PAC support
Organization of Congress

- Senate - Key Players:
  - Vice-President
  - President Pro Tempore
  - Majority Leader
  - Minority Leader
  - Majority Whip
  - Minority Whip
  - Other Key Actors
Organization of Congress

- House - Key Players:
  - Speaker
  - Majority Leader
  - Minority Leader
  - Majority Whip
  - Minority Whip
Committee Structure

- **Standing** committees
- **Select** committees
- **Joint** committees
- **Conference** committees
The “Dance” of Legislation

- Referred to a standing committee/subcommittee
  - The bill is researched, investigated, deliberated upon
  - Public hearings may be held
  - Other evidence is gathered (interest group input)
  - Revisions/additions are made to the bill
  - The committee/subcommittee votes on the bill - if a majority approve, it will go to the full House or Senate
The “Dance” of Legislation

- IF... the bill reaches the floor, it is debated.
  - Perhaps even more revisions/additions are made ("riders")

- IF...the bill is passed, it has to go to the other House for consideration.

- IF...the bill makes it out of the other House, but in a different form, a conference committee must be formed.
The “Dance” of Legislation

- IF...these differences are ironed out; the bill goes Back to both Houses.
  - Both Houses have to approve the Conference Committee report.

- IF...both Houses approve, the bill goes to the President.

- IF...the President vetoes, it takes 2/3's majority in both Houses to override - if not, the bill dies.
The Role of Staff

- Congressional Staffers

- Other Staff agencies
  - CRS
  - GAO
  - CBO
A Persistent Problem for Congress

- Individual Responsiveness & Collective Irresponsibility

- The factors that help members get re-elected lead to collectively larger spending by government has a whole
Term Limits for Congress?

- Background
Term Limits for Congress?

- Arguments For:
  - You become out of touch with your constituents?
  - Power of Incumbency
    - Terms limits would help bring more women and minorities into politics; might also help reduce campaign expenditures
  - Allows you to vote your conscience
Term Limits: Arguments Against

- They deprive voters of the opportunity to re-elect good people.
- They would deprive Congress of institutional knowledge and expertise; give more power to other institutional actors.
- Amateurs would always be learning the ropes, thus making for poor policy.
- States with term limits might be at a disadvantage when compared to states without term limits. Why?
The Missouri General Assembly

- Basic Facts
- Similarities/Differences when compared to Congress