

LAW & GOVERNMENT
RESPONSIBILITIES OF CONGRESS ASSIGNMENT.

Balazs

One of the best ways to understand how our government works is to watch it in action. Government has to respond to developments within its sphere of jurisdiction everyday (federal, state, local). Governments also try to be proactive and anticipate problems before they arise.

Today, members of the U.S. Congress in both the House of Representatives and the Senate have to deal with an almost overwhelming range of issues that they are expected to take positions on and make laws about. At the same time, they have to make decisions which represent the will of their constituents but which they themselves can also live with. Lastly, they have to think about getting re-elected.

To deal with the volume of issues, the Congress (both the House and the Senate) has evolved a system of dividing the workload among COMMITTEES.

There are several types of committees:

1. STANDING committees, which stay in existence all the time, and which control the operations of Congress as well as legislation
2. SPECIAL committees, temporary work groups devoted to a specific issue, such as an investigation or a pressing issue,
3. CONFERENCE committees are made up of members of both parties which iron out differences between different versions of bills passed by the two houses.

Each committee also has SUBCOMMITTEES that work on even more specific topics that are related to issues or bills.

For More Information on the Process of Passing Bills in the House of Representatives go to www.house.gov/house/Tying_it_all.shtml (your book has a good schematic diagram of the process as well)

For this class, students you will be a Committee devoted to one of the topics listed below.

1. You will locate and study a bill presently working its' way through Congress (House and Senate). You will then locate and read articles which inform and/or argue for or against the bill. In other words, just like members of Congressional committees, you will be educating yourselves about the topic. Each group will be required to find at least **four** articles on topics relating to the proposed bill your committee is working on. Make sure the articles don't simply repeat the same information over and over. I strongly recommend using at least one Op-Ed piece or journal article. You can also create subcommittees to divide the work further.
Also use the Congressional Research System's report (CRS) that can be found through the Government website listed below.
2. Each group will create a schematic diagram showing who were the original sponsors of the bill,

- a. Why they brought forward the legislation (who in their district/state does it affect. What is the subject matter of the bill and what is it intended to do? (To determine why the bill was brought forward by that specific legislator, you will have to do research and use your judgment) Note whether the legislator was acting in their Trustee, Delegate, Partisan or Politico capacity (it can also be a mix).
 - b. Name no more than **four** co-sponsors and try to determine why those people would co-sponsor the bill(including any and all persons from Connecticut, I do not want 100 co-sponsors names),
 - c. Four committees (standing, select and joint) which were (are) involved in the legislation (in the House and the Senate) and why those committees were involved (what does the subject matter of the bill have to do with that committee?)
 - d. What is the Bill's current status?
 - e. What groups will benefit from the bill? What groups, if any will be hurt by the Bill? How much will this legislation cost the American people, both in total and per capita (divide the cost by the population of the United States 300 million- That's your tax bill!)?
3. Most of your research will be from one body of Congress, however, you will also have to find a corresponding bill in the other body. They are unlikely to be identical bills. Make a judgment on the likelihood the legislation passes through Congress and support your views with facts.
 4. Each person in the committee will produce a letter (typed 1.5 to 2 pages) to the appropriate congressperson/senator urging them to support or vote against the bill. The letter should set forth your strongest reasons why you want him/her to take this action. It should also address why opposing viewpoints should be dismissed.
 5. Each group will prepare a "committee report," also 3 to 5 pages in length, explaining the bill and recommending passage or rejection of the bill. Your group, or "committee," will also present their findings to the class (15 to 20 minutes). You should use visual aids (No PowerPoint slide should have more than 50 words).
 6. Parenthetical or in-text citations required for the report (not the letter)
 7. Works consulted page, listing sources used by any and all committee members to research the bill or the topic.

Three People to a Group

The Topics are:

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|---|--------------------------|
| 1. Security | 5. International Trade |
| 2. Environment | 6. Labor |
| 3. Energy | 7. Education |
| 4. Crime, punishment and the legal system | 8. Health & Medical Care |

We will devote both class and library time to this project over the next two weeks. A schedule for presentations and due dates will be drawn up toward the

end of that period of time. I will also provide you with guidelines for researching the bill as it wends its way through Congress to become a law.

Group Diagram, 3 to 5 page write up and PowerPoint due Thursday, Oct. 15
(must be emailed to stbalazs@darienps.org
Letter to Congressperson/Senator due Monday, October 19

Active legislation

http://www.senate.gov/pagelayout/legislative/b_three_sections_with_teasers/active_leg_page.htm (on this site you can find the Congressional Research Service's write up)

or

<http://www.govtrack.us/congress/subjects.xpd>

Apportionment of Grade

Committee Report – 50 points

Letter to Congressman- 40 points

PowerPoint- 40 points

130 POINT VALUE-wow!

(NOTE ALL MEMBERS OF THE GROUP SHOULD BE FAMILIAR WITH EVERY SLIDE AND NO SLIDE SHOULD BE MORE THAN 50 WORDS)

Remember, that humor is often a valuable device so long as it doesn't demean or degrade specific people. Humor should also not make a mockery of the assignment. This is a civics class and as such if you do demean or degrade anyone the presentation will immediately earn a failing grade.