

LECTURE / DISCUSSION / DEBATE
THE CONGRESS: INSTITUTIONS AND PROCESSES

Terms and concepts to know:

Party affiliation / discipline	Seniority / procedure
Gerrymandering	Nonpartisan biases
Congressional “attitudes”	Majority leadership
Minority leadership	Committees
Standing committees	Joint / Select committees
Party committees	GAO / CRS / CBO
Sources of legislation	Legislative procedure
Filibuster	Legislative “oversight”
Congressional ethics	Term limits
PAC’s	Hyperpluralism

Study and discussion questions:

1. Describe in greater detail what Heineman means when he notes that “[a]lthough members of Congress pride themselves on being close to the people, Congress as a whole does not closely reflect the population characteristics of the nation.” Would you agree or disagree with his assessment?
2. Summarize Parenti’s positions on how the US Congress operate and in whose interest from *Democracy for the Few*. Explain whether you would agree or disagree with his overall thesis and why.
3. Author Dave Johnson notes the various ways that Congress members can enhance their own personal wealth in ways that ordinary Americans can’t. Describe the ways this can be done and whether you agree with some of the solutions he offers.
4. What situations constitute a “crisis” to the U.S. Congress? According to whose interests are crisis situations determined?
5. What evidence does Berg provide that corporations use our political system to exercise their hegemony?
6. With regard to the essay by Common Cause on the Medicare and prescription drug reform bill, why do you think there is such a gulf between the appearance and reality of how a bill becomes a law within the U.S. Congress? Would citizenship be improved if the truth were more widely known? Explain.
7. Discuss Berg’s use of the term *hegemony* and hegemonic interests. Do you agree that such forces are at work in the Congress, and if so, what theory of American government best accounts for this?

Readings:

Heineman. *American Government*, Chapter 8.
WEB – Readings from “The Congress” links.

Video: *Money, Power and Wall Street*.