Part III: The Institutions of Government

Chapter 9: Congress

I. The evolution of Congress
   A. Constitutional powers 
   B. Intent of the framers: Congress would be the more dominant, but checked by the combined powers of the other two branches
   C. Evolution
      1. This was generally so until the Civil War (except for Washington, Jefferson, & Jackson)
      2. The U.S. Supreme Court was often dominant from the 1870s-1930s (except for T. Roosevelt & Wilson)
      3. With the Great Depression, WWII, and the Cold War, the executive branch became increasingly dominant from 1933-72
      4. With the end of the Cold War, we have had more balance between the 3 branches
      5. But with the “war on terror” and the “great recession” we’ve had more activist presidents

II. Who is in the Congress?
   A. Personal characteristics: region, age, class, religion, sex, and race: Table 9.1, p. 199 becoming more representative – except for class – education, income, and occupation
   B. Years of service: greatly increasing – now a life-long career for many members
   C. Party
      2. Senate: http://www.senate.gov/pagelayout/history/one_item_and_teasers/partydiv.htm

III. Getting elected to Congress
   A. Plurality election: except runoff primary in South
   B. Personalized and issue-based campaigns

IV. The informal organization of Congress 
   A. Party organization: party voting: majority of Rep. v. majority of Dem. – increasing polarization
   B. Interests (caucuses)
      1. Congressional Black Caucus
      2. Democratic Study Group
      3. Conservative Democratic Forum: boll weevils
      4. Wednesday Group: gypsy moths

V. The formal organization of Congress
   A. Committees
      1. Standing Box, p. 208; Box, p. 210
      2. Select
      3. Joint
      4. Conference
   B. Staffs and specialized offices
      1. Tasks of staff members
      2. Staff agencies
         a. Congressional Research Service
         b. General Accounting Office
         c. Congressional Budget Office

VI. How a bill becomes a law
   A. Introducing a bill
      1. Bills
      2. Joint resolutions:
         a. Propose Const. amendments
         b. State Congress’s position on for. pol./nat. sec. (Tonkin Gulf, War Powers, Persian Gulf)
   B. Study by committees
   C. Floor debate
      1. House
      2. Senate
   D. Methods of voting
      1. Not recorded: voice or division (standing)
      2. Recorded: teller or roll call – electronic in House
   1. Definition: provision that directs approved funds to be spent on specific projects or that directs specific exemptions from taxes or mandated fees.
   2. Pros & cons:

VII. How members vote
   A. Representational view: cues from constituents (delegate model)
   B. Organizational view: cues from colleagues
   C. Attitudinal view: cues from own ideology (trustee model)
   D. Mix of all three: (politic model)

VIII. A polarized Congress in an un-polarized nation
   A. Congressional redistricting
   B. Cues to voters
   C. Seniority and safe districts

IX. Ethics and Congress
   A. Constitutional checks and balances
   B. Congressional ethics code (Box, p. 222)
   C. Reducing powers and perks
      1. Pork-barrel legislation
      2. Franking privilege
      3. Placing Congress under law (Box, p. 226)

D. Imposing term limits
   1. Historical precedents for imposing term limits on Congress
   2. Arguments
      a. For
         (1) Increase election competition
         (2) Improve candidate pool
         (3) Reduce corruption in office
         (4) Increase Congressional responsiveness to voters
         (5) Reduce gridlock with executive branch
      b. Against
         (1) Term limits are anti-democratic
         (2) Increase the influence of media and money in Congressional elections
         (3) Increase the number of unresponsive “lame ducks”
         (4) Increase the influence of unelected Congressional staff
         (5) Increase the influence of unelected executive bureaucrats
   3. Partisan differences
      a. Which party now favors term limits? Neither
      b. Why? Both parties have too many career politicians that oppose term limits.
   4. Constitutional issue
      a. Conflicting grants of power over Congressional elections
         (1) Article I, section 4: time, place, and manner of elections prescribed by state legislatures
         (2) Article I, section 5: qualifications of members judged by each house of Congress
      b. In U.S. Term Limits v. Thorton (1995) the U.S. Supreme Court struck down all state-imposed (SC & 22 others) term limits on Congress; the Court ruled that adding to the Constitutionally specified qualifications for members of Congress will require a Constitutional amendment.
   5. Problem: no one definition of term limits is agreed upon by those who favor term limits (see handout at: [http://people.uncw.edu/lowery/pls101/wilson_chapter_outlines/C8_term_limits.PDF](http://people.uncw.edu/lowery/pls101/wilson_chapter_outlines/C8_term_limits.PDF))
      a. How many terms are allowed? most common in the state legislatures = 6 for H & 2 for S = 12 years
      b. Are the limits on contiguous terms only or on all terms served?
      c. How many offices are affected?

X. The power of Congress
   A. Relative to the executive branch
      1. President
      2. Bureaucracy
   B. Relative to judicial

XI. What it all means
   A. Localized viewpoint
   B. Decentralized process
   C. Little party discipline
   D. Heavy committee workload with little floor deliberation