

GO 362  
The Politics of Congress

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Office Hours:  
Tu & Th, 1-3 PM  
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### **Course Description**

Few Americans would disagree with the statement that Congress is broken and in need of repair. Whether this view is based on members' propensity to engage in "scandalous" behavior-- ranging from sexual misconduct to financial improprieties to consorting with shady lobbyists who "do know Jack"-- or the institution's apparent failure to discover effective remedies for America's social and economic problems, the conclusion is the same: Congress must reform itself. Yet this widespread disaffection has not prompted members of Congress to alter the basic structures and procedures that have held sway in Congress for at least the past two decades.

The 1994 congressional elections seemed to have broken this inertia and released pent-up energy for reform. The new Republican majority in the House prosecuted significant changes in the committee, staffing, and caucus systems. Change in the Senate was slower due to that chamber's propensity for conservatism and respect for minority rights, but the Republican majority managed to compel the Senate to address issues that it had shunned in the past (e.g., term limits, a balanced budget amendment, line-item veto authority for the president, the elimination of "unfunded mandates," welfare reform, etc.).

Many voters, however, were disappointed in the 104th Congress' performance. The modest achievements realized by the new Republican majority did not meet the expectations generated by the ambitious "Contract with America." Newt Gingrich, the Speaker of the House of Representatives, became a lightning rod for the public's anger about the Republicans' failure to end "politics as usual." Voters' dissatisfaction was registered in the 1996, 1998, and 2000 congressional elections, which saw the Democrats make gains in both the House and the Senate. The GOP, however, rebounded in 2002 and 2004, expanding its majority in the House and gaining control of the Senate. The narrow partisan division in both chambers continues to inspire calls for "bipartisan" cooperation. These calls have thus far, however, failed to bring Democrats and Republicans any closer together. The events of 9/11 did generate a brief spurt of bipartisan cooperation, but this rapidly dissipated in the face of heated debates over a prescription drug benefit for Medicare recipients, tort

reform, judicial nominations, and the Bush administration's economic stimulus package.

This course will examine the forces that have traditionally limited Congress' ability to reform itself and achieve significant policy change. The course begins by tracing the roots of Congress' poor public reputation to the so-called "reelection imperative," which, purportedly, has led members to be overly responsive to their constituents' parochial demands to the detriment of the public interest. The second part of the course will examine the argument that Congress has been organized to maximize members' individual freedom at the expense of effective leadership and coherent public policy. The course's final part will use an assessment of Congress's exercise of its "power of the purse" and prerogatives in foreign and national security policy to draw some conclusions about Congress' strengths and weaknesses as a policy-making institution and to make some predictions about Congress' future.

### **Course Requirements**

The bulk of your final grade (40%) will be determined by your performance on a semester-long simulation of the Senate judicial confirmation process. The final 60% of your course grade will be distributed equally between your performances on a term paper (30%) and an in-class final examination (30%). The final examination will be administered on a date selected by the inscrutable scheduling junta in the Registrar's Office.

### **Attendance Policy**

You are not allowed to miss any of the simulation events. Failure to attend an event will result in a 10% deduction from your grade for the simulation.

I will allow you two (2) excused absences from class. You must, however, provide me with your incontrovertibly legitimate excuse either before or on the day that you miss class. If you know before the class meeting that you absolutely must miss that class (e.g., you and Hillary need to tour the plantation, Duke Cunningham has asked you to perform "Folsom Prison Blues" for him and his new posse, you need to gerrymander your roommate's floor space, etc), then inform me of your planned absence as early in the semester as possible. If you suddenly contract symptoms on Tuesday or Thursday morning that could earn even Dr. House's compassion, then either phone or e-mail me before you expire, or have a friend or your Pilates instructor transport a note to me before 1:00 PM on that day.

I will deduct 2% from your final grade for any unexcused absence after you have expended your two excused absences. I will count tardies as unexcused absences.

You should also keep in mind that according to the *Academic Information Guide*, "any students who miss more than a third of the (class) sessions may expect to be barred from (the final examination). In such cases, the course grade will be recorded as F."

## **Books**

The following books can be purchased at The Skidmore Shop for less than it cost Jack Abramoff to purchase studio time to cover "Cherokee People":

Earl Black and Merle Black, *The Rise of Southern Republicans*  
Roger Davidson and Walter Oleszek, *Congress and its Members*  
John Farrell, *Tip O'Neill and the Democratic Century*  
Paul Herrnson, *Congressional Elections*  
Walter Oleszek, *Congressional Procedures and the Policy Process*

## **Weekly Topics and Reading Assignments**

(Note: an asterisk (\*) denotes a reading to be distributed in class)

### Week 1 (January 24-26): From Permanent Minority to Permanent Majority?

Readings: Black and Black, Chapter 1  
Farrell, Prologue

### Week 2 (January 31-February 2): The Changing South and the New Republican Majority

Readings: Black and Black, Chapters 7 and 11  
\*Dan Balz and Ronald Brownstein, "The Long March," from *Storming the Gates*

### Week 3 (February 7-9): Congressional Elections I: Launching a Campaign

Readings: Herrnson, Chapters 2  
\*Mark Monmonier, "Twist and Clout," from *Bushman and Bullwinkles*  
\*Gregory Giroux, "The Hidden Election: Day of the Mapmaker,"  
*Congressional Quarterly* (February 19, 2000)  
Farrell, Chapters 6 and 7

### Week 4 (February 14-16): Congressional Elections II: Raising Money

Readings: Herrnson, Chapters 4 and 5

\*Thomas Mann, "Linking Knowledge and Action: Political Science and Campaign Finance Reform," *Perspectives on Politics*, 1(1) (March 2003)

\*Seth Gitell, "The Democratic Party Suicide Bill," *The Atlantic Monthly* (July/August 2003)

Farrell, Chapters 8 and 9

### **First Simulation Event: Nukes or No Nukes? Debate**

Week 5 (February 21-23): Congressional Elections III: Winning Votes

Readings: Herrnson, Chapters 7 and 8

Farrell, Chapter 12

### **Part II: The Policy-Making Process**

Week 6 (March 28-March 2): The Problem of Pork

Readings: \*Jonathan Cohn, "Roll Out the Barrel," *The New Republic* (April 20, 1998)

\*John Cochran and Andrew Taylor, "Earmarks: The Booming Way Bring Home the Bacon," *Congressional Quarterly Weekly* (February 7, 2004)

Farrell, Chapter 13

### **Simulation Paper Due: March 2**

Week 7 (March 7-9): Lobbying Congress

Readings: Davidson and Oleszek, Chapter 13

\*Karen Foerstel, "Grass is Greener after Congress," *Congressional Quarterly* (March 11, 2000)

Farrell, Chapter 17

### **SPRING BREAK**

Week 8 (March 21-23): The Committee System

Readings: Davidson and Oleszek, Chapter 7

\*Veronika Oleksyn, "Seniority, Loyalty, and Political Needs Shape Makeup of Committees," *Congressional Quarterly* (April 11, 2005)

Farrell, Chapter 18

Week 9 (March 28-30): Rules and Procedures in the House of Representatives

Readings: Oleszek, Chapters 4 and 5

### **Second Simulation Event: Debating Janice Rogers Brown**

Week 10 (April 4-6): Rules and Procedures in the Senate

Readings: Oleszek, Chapters 6 and 7

Week 11 (April 11-13): Party Leadership

Readings: Davidson and Oleszek, Chapter 6

\*Jackie Koszczuk, "The Slow Decline of a GOP 'Godfather,'" *Congressional Quarterly* (October 3, 2005)

\*John Cochran, "Two Years In, Frist Struggles to Tame an Unruly Senate," *Congressional Quarterly* (October 16, 2004)

Farrell, Chapters 19 and 20

**Third Simulation Event: Debating Lawrence Tribe**

Part III: The Policy Output

Week 12 (April 18-20): The Power of the Purse

Readings: Davidson and Oleszek, pp. 401-417

John Crawford, "The Deficit's Hard Truths," *Congressional Quarterly* (September 26, 2005) to

Farrell, Chapters 23 and 24

**Term Paper Due: April 20**

Week 13 (April 25-27): Congress and the World

Readings: Davidson and Oleszek, Chapter 15

\*Noah Feldman, "Who Can Check the President?" *The New York Times Magazine* (January 8, 2006)

Farrell, Chapter 26

Week 14 (May 2): Review for the Final Examination

Readings: No Reading

**Final Simulation Event: Floor Statements and Vote**

**FINAL EXAMINATION-- TBA**

