

Learning About Legislation #36 - Types of Committees

Last week we indicated that we would try to get up information about committee assignments. The [website](#) for the Clerk of the House does not yet show any official committee assignments. And while a few announcements have been made (like that noting that PA-06's Rep. [Chrissy Houlahan](#) will be on the House Armed Services Committee), calls on Friday to various MoC offices revealed that staffers are not yet in a position to definitively say to which committees their MoCs have been placed. As soon as this is official, we'll make it known here.

There are four types of Committees in Congress (excepted from www.ushistory.org):

1. SELECT COMMITTEES are temporarily formed for specific purposes, often to study a particular issue. They usually do not draft legislation. Some, like the select committees to investigate the assassinations of John F. Kennedy and Martin Luther King, are obviously intended to have limited lives. Others, like the Select Committee on Aging and the Select Committee on Indian Affairs, have existed for a number of years actually produce legislation. Sometimes long-standing select committees eventually become standing committees.
2. JOINT COMMITTEES have similar purposes as select committees, but they are made up of members from both the House and the Senate. They are set up to conduct business between the houses and to help focus public attention on major issues. Some joint committees handle routine matters, such as supervising the Library of Congress.
3. CONFERENCE COMMITTEES (*which MoCTrack previously [covered](#), when the GOP was working out the details of their 2017 tax bill*) are specially created when the House and the Senate need to reconcile different versions of the same bill. A conference committee is made up of members from the House and Senate committees that originally considered the bill. Once the committee agrees on a compromise, the revised bill is returned to both houses of Congress for their approval.
4. STANDING COMMITTEES, which continue from one Congress to the next, are probably the most important type because they consider and shape the vast majority of proposed laws. Standing committees can be combined or discontinued but most of them have been around for many years. Standing committees also conduct investigations, such as the Senate Banking Committee's investigation of President Bill Clinton's Whitewater investments.

Standing Committees are what people generally think of when we speak of committee assignments. What follows is a rundown of the current standing committees in each house:

HOUSE COMMITTEES

Agriculture
Appropriations
Armed Services
Banking and Financial Service
Budget
Commerce
Education and the Workforce
Government Reform
House Administration
International Relations
Judiciary
Resources
Rules
Science
Small Business
Standards of Official Conduct
Transportation and Infrastructure
Veterans Affairs
Ways and Means

SENATE COMMITTEES

Agriculture, Nutrition, and Forestry
Appropriations
Armed Services
Banking, Housing, and Urban Affairs
Budget
Commerce, Science, and Transportation
Energy and Natural Resources
Environment and Public Works
Finance
Foreign Relations
Governmental Affairs
Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions
Indian Affairs
Judiciary
Rules and Administration
Small Business
Veterans Affairs

The reason that we here at MoCTrack are so interested in committee assignment is that they do a lot to shape an MoC's tenure in Congress. The bills that our MoCs submit generally have a lot to do with the committees on which they are placed. They spend a great deal of time in their committees and the hearings that they participate in revolve around those topics. Perhaps the most important feature in this political environment, committee placement does a lot to dictate the type of donors that an MoC receives and the businesses that lobby them. As you might imagine, defense contractors spend a lot more time trying to cultivate relationships with the members of the Armed Services Committee than they do those MoCs on the Rules Committee; and big banks are significantly more interested in MoCs on the Senate Finance Committee than they are those on the Agriculture, Nutrition and Forestry Committee. And some committees that have the strongest ties to budgets and purse strings (like Ways and Means, Appropriations, and Budget) are the most coveted assignment, because every lobbyist wants to be in the good graces of the people who write the checks.