Chapter 7

1. Which of the following is an example of the *informational* theory of committees?

a. A member on the Agriculture committee fights for subsidies for cotton farmers in her district

\*b. After spending many years on the Foreign Affairs committee, a member becomes an expert on trade issues with China

c. A member of the Budget committee adds extra provisions that benefit his district

d. A Democrat on the Judiciary committee fights to win approval for Obama’s nomination to the Supreme Court

2. Which of the following is an example of the *distributive* theory of committees?

a. Because of his background in finance, a member is appointed to the Financial Services committee

\*b. A member on the Public Works committee fights for a new water treatment plant in her district

c. A Republican on the Oversight and Government Reform committee investigates a scandal in the Secretary of State’s office

d. A small business owner lobbies to join the Small Business committee because of his personal experiences with this issue

3. Which of the following is an example of the *partisan* theory of committees?

a. A member on the Armed Services committee fights for increased funding for the military base in her district

b. A former astronaut is appointed to the Science, Space and Technology committee

\*c. A Republican votes to support a bill introduced by his party’s leadership

d. The Financial Services committee holds hearings on financial regulations after problems in the banking industry

4. Who gets to decide how many seats the *minority* party gets on each committee in the House of Representatives?

a. The President

b. Congressional rules

\*c. The majority party

d. The minority party

5. What are select committees?

a. Committees with members selected by the party leadership

b. Small committees with limited membership

c. Exclusive committees with significant competition for membership

\*d. Temporary committees created for a specific purpose or group

6. Which of the following is *not* a type of committee in Congress?

a. Joint

b. Select

c. Standing

\*d. Partisan

7. Which of the following is true of joint committees?

\*a. They contain members of both chambers

b. They are limited to Republicans only

c. All members are appointed by the Speaker of the House

d. They are typically short lived, lasting 1–2 weeks

8. What is the most desirable committee assignment in the House?

a. Agriculture

\*b. Ways and Means

c. Armed Services

d. Foreign Affairs

9. Which of these committee assignments seems to be least popular among members?

a. Education and the Workforce

b. Finance

c. Appropriations

\*d. Ethics

10. Which of the following is a formalrule that guides House committee assignments?

\*a. Assignments need not follow seniority

b. Assignments must give priority to senior members

c. Party loyalty should be considered in making assignments

d. Assignments must take electoral considerations into account

11. Which of the following is *not* a typical step in committee consideration of a bill?

a. Public hearings

\*b. Refer to President

c. Markups

d. Reports

12. Which of the following is *not* a purpose of committee hearings?

a. Raise visibility of an issue

b. Stake out committee jurisdictions

c. Publicize the role of the committee chair

\*d. Record the final vote on a bill

13. Which of the following is *not* a typical role for committee staff?

\*a. Make speeches at campaign events

b. Negotiating with lobbyists

c. Recruit witnesses for hearings

d. Provide information to legislators

14. Which of the following is a nonpartisan legislative support agency that provides information to members of Congress?

a. Ways and Means Committee

\*b. Government Accountability Office

c. State Department

d. Democratic National Committee

15. Committee chairs in the modern Congress are powerful and almost completely independent from party leaders.

a. True

\*b. False

16. It has become more common to bypass committee consideration in recent years.

\*a. True

b. False

17. The Congressional Research Service operates under strict rules of nonpartisanship.

\*a. True

b. False

18. A committee report is created only if the full committee votes to send the bill to the House or Senate.

\*a. True

b. False

19. According to the informational theory of committees, the purpose of committees is to provide expertise to Congress as a whole.

\*a. True

b. False

20. Standing committees process the majority of Congress’s daily and annual agenda.

\*a. True

b. False

21. Committee assignments are made solely on the basis of seniority.

a. True

\*b. False

22. It is easier to bypass committees in the Senate than in the House.

\*a. True

b. False

23. Republicans, but not Democrats, have term limits for committee leaders in the Senate.

\*a. True

b. False

24. Farm interests are *underrepresented* on the Agriculture committee.

a. True

\*b. False

25. Each policy area is assigned exclusively to only one committee.

a. True

\*b. False

26. Multiple referrals are more common in the House than in the Senate.

\*a. True

b. False

27. Staff members play a minimal role in the markup process because it is very technical.

a. True

\*b. False

28. How do party leaders balance informal criteria in making committee assignments?

\*a. Answers Vary

@Party leaders consider a variety of informal criteria in making committee assignments. Students need not list all these criteria but should discuss some of the following: gender/racial make-up of committee chairs, seniority, party loyalty, substantive expertise, and electoral vulnerability/how committee assignments may affect reelection concerns.

29. What are the duties and responsibilities of committee chairs?

\*a. Answers Vary

@Students should list and discuss some of the following: Committee chairs call meetings, establish agendas, hire and fire staff, arrange hearings, recommend conferees, act as floor managers, allocate funds and rooms, develop legislative strategies, chair hearings and markups, function as the committee’s spokesperson, and regulate the internal organization of the committees. They have significant procedural advantages.

30. Seniority used to be the rule in selecting committee chairs. Which factors are more important today?

\*a. Answers Vary

@Students should discuss the role of party loyalty, fund-raising skills, and legislative skills.

31. What are the purposes of committee hearings?

\*a. Answers Vary

@Students should describe some of these purposes: These hearings are a way for lawmakers to learn about and keep updated on policy and oversight issues important to their committees. They can also be a way to raise attention in the media and garner support for (or against) a bill. They allow committee members to be heard and publicize their own positions on issues. They could also explore the need for legislation, stake out committee jurisdictions, review executive implementation of laws, provide a forum for citizen grievances, and raise the visibility of an issue.

32. What are some of the costs and benefits of overlapping jurisdictions?

\*a. Answers Vary

@This means that any broad subject will overlap multiple committees. This can have benefits, such as allowing members to develop expertise in several policy fields, preventing one group from dominating a topic, and promoting healthy competition among committees. Costs include the potential for turf battles and other clashes among committees that may make decision making more time consuming or difficult.

33. How has the committee system evolved over time?

\*a. Answers Vary

@Early Congresses typically created temporary panels to complete specific tasks. In the early 1800s, both chambers created permanent (standing) committees to deal with larger membership and a wider scope of congressional business. Over time, committees became increasingly self-reliant and resistant to party control. However in the 1960s and 1970s, an influx of new members to Congress shifted power toward parties so that today committees and committee chairs must abide by party rules and are generally less independent than they once were.

34. Committees serve two broad purposes: individual and institutional. Define these purposes and give an example of a situation that illustrates each purpose.

\*a. Answers Vary

@The two broad purposes are individual (that is, lawmakers using committee assignments to benefit their constituents and develop personal expertise) and institutional (that is, dividing up the work of Congress and acting as the centers of policy making, oversight, and educational hearings). Examples will vary, including the following: An individual example would be a member who uses his appointment on the Agriculture committee to fight for a subsidy for corn farmers, since a large proportion of his constituents are corn farmers. An institutional example would be the Veteran’s Affairs committee holding hearings on the provision of health benefits to veterans.

35. What is meant by the “safety valve” function of congressional committees?  
\*a. Answers Vary

@This is the idea that committees are important outlets for national debates and controversies. These debates can help the public vent, absorb, and perhaps resolve emerging and ongoing tensions. Hearings can help citizens learn about public problems and feel like their voices are heard and they are able to participate in the political process.

36. Which goals of lawmakers influence the committee assignments sought by members? Give an example of how these goals might influence a committee assignment in a specific case.

\*a. Answers Vary

@The three goals Fenno identified are reelection, influence within the House, and good public policy. Examples will vary, but one possible example might include an influence-oriented member wanting membership on Ways and Means in order to gain more prominence and influence in the chamber.

37. Legislation must be passed by the House and Senate in identical form before being signed by the President. How does Congress reconcile differences in House and Senate bills before sending them to the President?

\*a. Answers Vary

@One way is through a conference committee. These committees are created with members of both parties to reconcile the versions of a bill passed by each chamber. However, these have declined in use in recent years for partisan and political reasons. Another option is the amendment exchange method, where the House and Senate send amendments back and forth between chambers until matters of disagreement are resolved.

38. Why are select committees created?

\*a. Answers Vary

@There are various reasons here; good answers should describe at least two. Options include the following: to accommodate the concerns of a specific member/provide publicity for a specific member, create an access point for interest groups, to supplement the standing committee system to deal with an issue that the permanent committees are unable or unwilling to spend their time on, or to highlight an issue of importance to the majority party.

39. Scholars have developed three major theories for explaining the development of the committee system. Compare and contrast these three theories, and explain which you think is most relevant to the modern Congress.

\*a. Answers Vary

@Students should define and describe the distributive, informational, and partisan theories of committees and provide one or more examples that explicitly compares the theories. They should then make an argument about which is most relevant to the modern Congress, using evidence and concepts from the text.

40. How does the policy environment influence committees? Which of these influences do you view as most important in the modern Congress?

\*a. Answers Vary

@Students should describe and discuss the role of environmental factors in shaping the content of public policies/the likelihood these policies will be accepted by the full chamber, fostering mutual alliances, establishing decision-making objectives/guidelines, and influencing the level of partisanship. They should then make a case for which of these factors is most important and provide evidence from the text.

41. Select a House or Senate committee of interest to you. Do the members seem to have been appointed for distributive, informational, or partisan purposes? What types of activities has the committee recently engaged in, and how do these fit with the different purposes of congressional committees?

\*a. Answers Vary

@Students should select a committee and research its members and recent activities using news and governmental sources. They should consider the membership and activity of the committee in light of concepts and theories in the text. The best papers with draw together this information under a common theme/argument.