Basic Government Processes

Heather Sachs, National Down Syndrome Congress
Ricki Sabia, National Down Syndrome Congress
Agenda

• Branches of government
• The legislative branch
• Leadership & Committees
• Budget & Appropriations
• How a bill becomes a law
• State & local governments
3 Branches of Government

- **Constitution** (provides a separation of powers)
  - Legislative (makes laws)
    - Congress
      - Senate: 100 elected senators total; 2 senators per state
      - House of Representatives: 435 elected representatives total; representatives based on each state’s population
  - Executive (carries out laws)
    - President
    - Vice President
    - Cabinet
  - Judicial (evaluates laws)
    - Supreme Court: 9 justices nominated by the president and must be approved by the Senate (with at least 51 votes)
    - Other Federal Courts

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The U.S. Congress

- **Bicameral** – 2 chambers
- **Senate**
  - 100 members
  - 2 per state
  - 6 year term
- **House**
  - 435
  - 2 year term
  - Tied to population of state
Congressional Duties

- Make the laws
- Represent their constituents
Powers of Congress

- Taxes
- Money
- Regulate trade
- Declare war
- Military & national guard
- Post office
- Run all federal property
Elastic Clause and Constitutional Amendments

• Elastic clause confers the power to “make all laws which shall be necessary and proper for carrying into execution the foregoing powers” -- expands the powers of Congress, especially when national laws come into conflict with state laws

• Congress also has power to enforce the key civil rights amendments 13 (slavery), 14 (due process, equal protection of the law) and 15 (voting rights)
### Congressional Leadership - House, 116th Congress

#### Majority (Democrat)
- Speaker – Nancy Pelosi (D-CA)
- Majority Leader – Steny Hoyer (D-MD)
- Majority Whip – James Clyburn (D-SC)
- Ass’t Speaker – Ben Ray Lujan (D-NM)
- Caucus Chairman – Hakeem Jeffries (D-NY)
- Campaign Committee Chair – Cheri Bustos (D-IL)

#### Minority (Republican)
- Minority Leader – Kevin McCarthy (R-CA)
- Whip – Steve Scalise (R-LA)
- Conference Chair – Liz Cheney (R-WY)
- Policy Committee Chairman – Gary Palmer (R-AL)
- Congressional Committee Chair – Tom Emmer (R-MN)
- Conference Secretary – Jason Smith (R – MO)
Congressional Leadership - Senate

Majority (Republican)
- Majority Leader – Sen. Mitch McConnell (R-KY)
- Ass’t Majority Leader – Sen. John Thune (R-SD)

Minority (Democrat)
- Minority Leader – Sen. Chuck Schumer (D-NY)
- Minority Whip – Sen. Dick Durbin (D-IL)
Who are these leaders and why are they important?

• Elected by members of their party at the beginning of each Congress
• Most senior and powerful party members/spokespeople
• Set the agenda (put items on and keep off agenda)
• Count and “whip” votes
• Make committee assignments
• Raise money and funnel into colleagues’ campaigns

ARE YOU A CONSTITUENT OF ANY LEADERS???
Key Committees - Senate

• Appropriations – funding for gov’t programs
• Budget
• Finance – taxation, debt, Social Security (Medicaid, SSI, SSDI)
• Health, Education, Labor & Pensions (HELP)
• Veterans’ Affairs
Key Committees - House

- Appropriations
- Budget
- Education & Labor (“Ed & Workforce”)
- Energy & Commerce (“E&C”)
- Veterans’ Affairs
- Ways & Means – tax-writing
- Rules – sets rules for bills that come to the floor
The Federal Budget

- Budget = plan for saving and spending money
- Appropriations = how the money will be spent (laws may authorize a certain amount of funding, but it still must be appropriated)
- Federal gov’t makes a budget for every year (called “fiscal year”)
  - Fiscal year starts in October and ends in September (different from regular calendar year)

See toolkit for self-advocates developed by Autistic Self-Advocacy Network

Follow the Money: The U.S. Budget and You

https://autisticadvocacy.org/policy/toolkits/budget/
The Budget Process

• President submits his budget proposal to Congress
  – Funding levels for federal agencies
  – Changes to mandatory programs (Medicaid, SSI, etc)
  – Changes to tax code
• House & Senate writes and votes on budget resolutions
• House and Senate budget committees pass bills
  – Typically must go to a conference committee to reach agreement
• Congress is not required to reach an agreement on budget amount
• President does not need to approve budget resolution
• Congress gets to make the final decision about the federal budget
The Appropriations Process

• After budget process completed (or stalled), House & Senate begin to determine how the $ will be spent on things like education, health care, transportation, etc.
• Congress is “appropriating” money to different departments and programs
  – Need to pass 12 different appropriations bills (or an Omnibus bill)
• Spending decisions start in subcommittees and work through process (committee, floor vote, conference between chambers)
• Once both House and Senate reach agreement, final bill goes to the President for signature or veto
What if Congress can’t agree on budget?

- Budget bills must be signed by October 1 (for the following year) or else risk of government shutdown
- Without a budget, the government runs out of money
- When it runs out of money, it has to close. This is a SHUTDOWN.
  - Many gov’t services stop in a shutdown
  - Most people who work for the federal government will not get paid
  - Some have to work without pay (“essential services” like air traffic controllers) while others are not allowed to come to work
- To make sure the gov’t doesn’t run out of money, Congress can pass a CONTINUING RESOLUTION (“CR”)
  - A CR says that gov’t can keep paying the same amount for everything for a little while
How a Bill Becomes a Law

Schoolhouse Rock video:

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2nKyihov9z8
Step 1: An Idea

• Each “bill” starts out as an idea
• These ideas can come from Congress, private citizens or from the White House (i.e. The President)
• Special Interest Groups (groups of individuals who try to influence Congress) may also present ideas to Congress that may become bills.
Step 2: Introduction

- The idea is “drafted” (written) as a bill.

- The bill must be **introduced by a Senator or House Member**.

- Every bill is given a title and number when it is introduced – **H.R.1** or **S.1**
Step 3: Committee

• After it is introduced, each “bill” is then sent to the committee that seems most qualified to handle it.
• Committees and subcommittees research, revise and debate bills.
  – Hearings, briefings
• Choices:
  – Reject it immediately
  – Sit on it
  – Approve it (with or without changes)
Step 4: Floor Debate

• Bill approved by committee goes to the “floor” to be voted on by the full House of Representatives or the full Senate.
• Members of Congress debate pros and cons
• Add amendments, riders (a completely unrelated item to the bill - Senate only)
• Filibuster (Senate only) – Senator ties to “talk a bill to death”
Step 5: Vote

• A simple **majority vote** is all that is needed to pass a bill.

• If either chamber refuses to pass it, the bill dies.

• Bills passed in each chamber must be identical.

• If different versions are passed in each chamber, the bill goes to a “conference committee” which results in a compromise bill.
Step 6: Presidential Action

- **Approval:**
  - Sign bill into law
  - Do nothing: approval after 10 days if Congress in session

- **Rejection:**
  - Veto
  - Do nothing: “Pocket veto” after 10 days

- **Note:** 2/3 of Congress can override a veto!
State Governments

• The primary responsibilities of state governments are:
  – education
  – public health
  – transportation
  – economic development
  – criminal justice
  – the licensing and regulation of professions (teachers, social workers, doctors, lawyers, barbers/stylists, architects, etc.)

• Governors are the chief executive officers of the states
State Legislatures

• Most states are bicameral (2 chambers)
• Mostly part-time; session length varies (30 days – 12 months – 2 years)
• Most meet annually; some meet bi-annually
• Process varies by state but generally similar to federal process
Local Governments

• Public administration of towns, cities, counties & districts
• Get their authority from the state constitution
• Primary responsibilities
  – City utilities
  – Libraries
  – Fire departments
  – Local law enforcement
  – Parks

• Local governments have some or all of the following decision-making positions:
  – Elected executive: mayor, village president
  – Elected council or commission: city council, school board, county board.
  – Appointed manager: city manager, school superintendent.
Thank you!

Heather Sachs – heather@ndsccenter.org

Ricki Sabia – ricki@ndsccenter.org