Legislative Advocacy Module: Narrative

Slide 1: Welcome to the module Legislative Advocacy: a review of U.S. Congress and the legislative process. In this module, we will review the structure of the U.S. Congress, timing of legislation, the basic process, and important committees.

Slide 2: This is the outline for our brief module. At the end of the module, there will be a brief quiz to complete.

Slide 3: As a reminder, there is a U.S. House of Representatives and U.S. Senate. The House is made of 435 members, each in a 2 year term. The Senate has 100 members, 2 from each state, with a 6 year term. One-third of the senators are up for re-election each year.

Slide 4: There are two leaders in the House and the Senate. The Speaker of the House is voted by all the members of the House. This person may not represent the majority party. They determine which legislation is brought to the floor and appoints committee chairs, calls for votes and signs all bills and resolutions passed by the house. The Senate majority leader also controls the floor agenda and represents majority party as the chief spokesperson. This person also schedules debates and votes.

Slide 5: There are also a number of other important leaders in the House of Representatives. The majority leader is selected by a member of the party that controls over 50% of the house. The Whip positions persuade wavering members to vote with their party.

Slide 6: In the Senate, the vice-president is the President of the Senate and can break a tie. The Senate also has a majority and minority whip position.

Slide 7: These are the committees in the House and Senate. The majority party in each house has control over who will become chair of these committees.

Slide 8: Each congress runs for a 2 year period. For example, the 114th Congress will be Jan 2015-Dec 2016. After the end of the 2 year period, all unfinished bills must be reintroduced. Again, the majority party in the Senate and the House has control over the chamber’s schedule.

Slide 9: Any Senator or Representative has the ability to develop a legislative proposal. Once their legislation is introduced, it becomes a bill and receives a number. In the House, all bills start with H.R. and in the Senate, S. The bill’s sponsor or sponsors can recruit other Members to sign on as a co-sponsor. Committee chairs can then choose to hold a hearing on the bill. They also schedule what’s called a “mark-up” of a bill. At this time, committee members can offer amendments of the bill, change it, or send the bill to the House or Senate floor for a vote. The committee can also choose to take no action on the bill. The leader of the House or the Senate can bypass committees and bring the bill directly to the floor for a vote. However, the majority of bills are not passed.
Slide 10: When a bill is brought to the floor, the Senate and the House have different rules. In the House, a simple majority is needed to pass the bill. In the House, there is a limit number of amendments that can be offered to the bill on the floor. And there is a time limit to how long a bill can be debated. In the Senate, any 1 senator can amend, slow down or stop a bill at any time. A filibuster is when a senator stands on the floor and speaks without resting for the entire time in order to delay action on a bill. Only a vote of 60 votes, called a cloture vote, can end a filibuster. If 60 votes are not obtained, the bill is pulled from the floor with no further action.

Slide 11: When the House and Senate pass different version of the same bill, a conference must take place to reconcile the 2 bills into a common text by both the House and the Senate. The leaders of both bodies appoint members to this committee. Only when the agreed upon identical bill passes both chambers, does it go to the President for signature. The President than has 10 days to sign a bill into law or veto the bill.

Slide 12: If the president vetoes the bill, it is sent back to congress. The bill can become a law if it wins 2/3’s approval from the House and Senate.

Slide 13: In the House, health legislation typically goes through the energy and commerce committee or the ways and means committee. The energy and commerce committee, has jurisdiction over Medicare Part B while the Ways and Means Committee has jurisdiction over taxes, Medicare Part A and Part B and provisions of the IRS dealings with health insurance and health care costs. When reviewing key members of the house, often advocates and lobbyist will look at what committee the member sits on.

Slide 14: In the Senate, Health legislation typically goes through the finance committee of the health, education, labor and pensions committee (HELP). The finance committee has jurisdiction over Medicare, Medicaid, and the State Children’s health insurance program. The HELP committee has jurisdiction over public health and health insurance. They also have jurisdiction over health care agencies, including the CDC, FDA, and the NIH

Slide 15: Now follow the link to complete the quiz

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