

# Congress In Action

Magruder Chapter 12

# CHAPTER 12—CONGRESS IN ACTION

## SEC. 1—ORGANIZATION OF CONGRESS

### CONGRESS CONVENES:

- Congress begins a new term every 2 years on January 3 of every odd-numbered year (following federal elections in November)
- President gives State of the Union Message in late January—required by Art. II, Sec. 3



# CHAPTER 12—CONGRESS IN ACTION

## SEC. 1—ORGANIZATION OF CONGRESS

### PRESIDING OFFICERS:

#### SPEAKER OF THE HOUSE:

- Elected presiding leader of the House and leader of majority party
- Most important duties are to preside and keep order.
- Follows Vice-President in line of succession to President (2<sup>nd</sup> in line)
- Nancy Pelosi is first woman Speaker of the House.



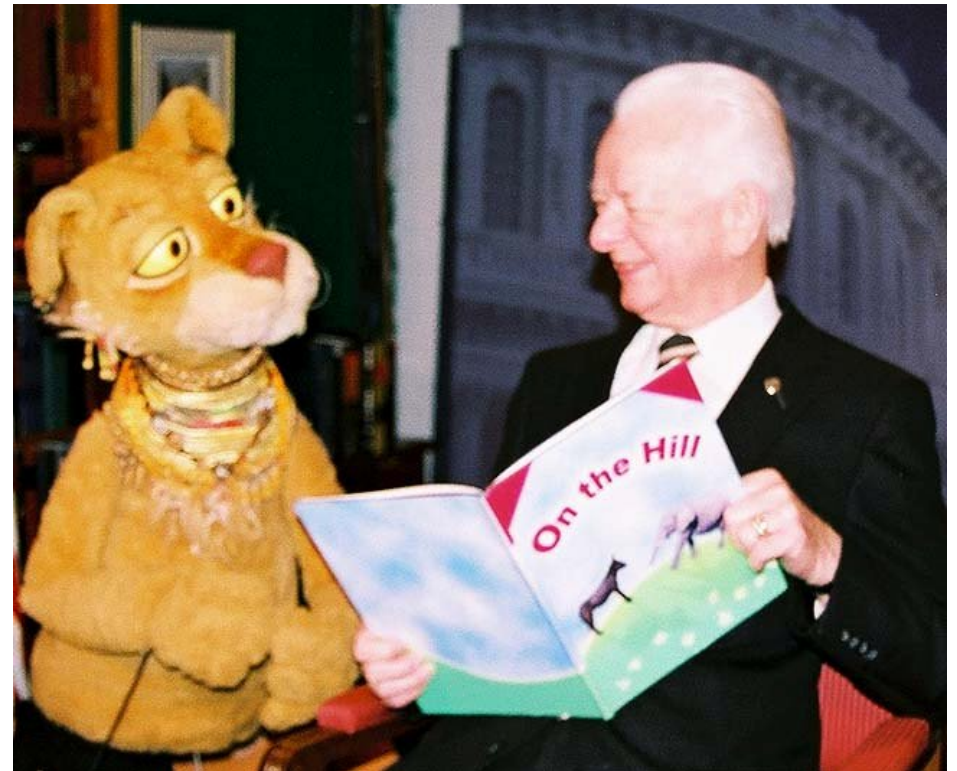
# CHAPTER 12—CONGRESS IN ACTION

## SEC. 1—ORGANIZATION OF CONGRESS

### PRESIDING OFFICERS:

#### PRESIDENT OF THE SENATE:

- Constitution makes the Vice-President the president of the Senate.
- Vice-President presides sometimes and may only vote to break a tie
- Any influence the Vice-President has in Senate is result of personal abilities and relationships
- President Pro Tempore presides in VP's absence:
  - Elected by Senate
  - Leading member of majority party
  - Third in line to be President after VP and Speaker of the House
  - Currently Senator Daniel Inouye , Democrat from Hawaii



# CHAPTER 12—CONGRESS IN ACTION

## SEC. 1—ORGANIZATION OF CONGRESS

### POLITICAL PARTY

#### OFFICERS:

- Both houses of Congress are organized along **political party lines**
- The Party Caucus is a closed meeting of the members of each party in each house. It deals with matters of **party organization** and **questions of committee membership** and **sometimes takes stands on particular bills** (but cannot force members to vote for bills).



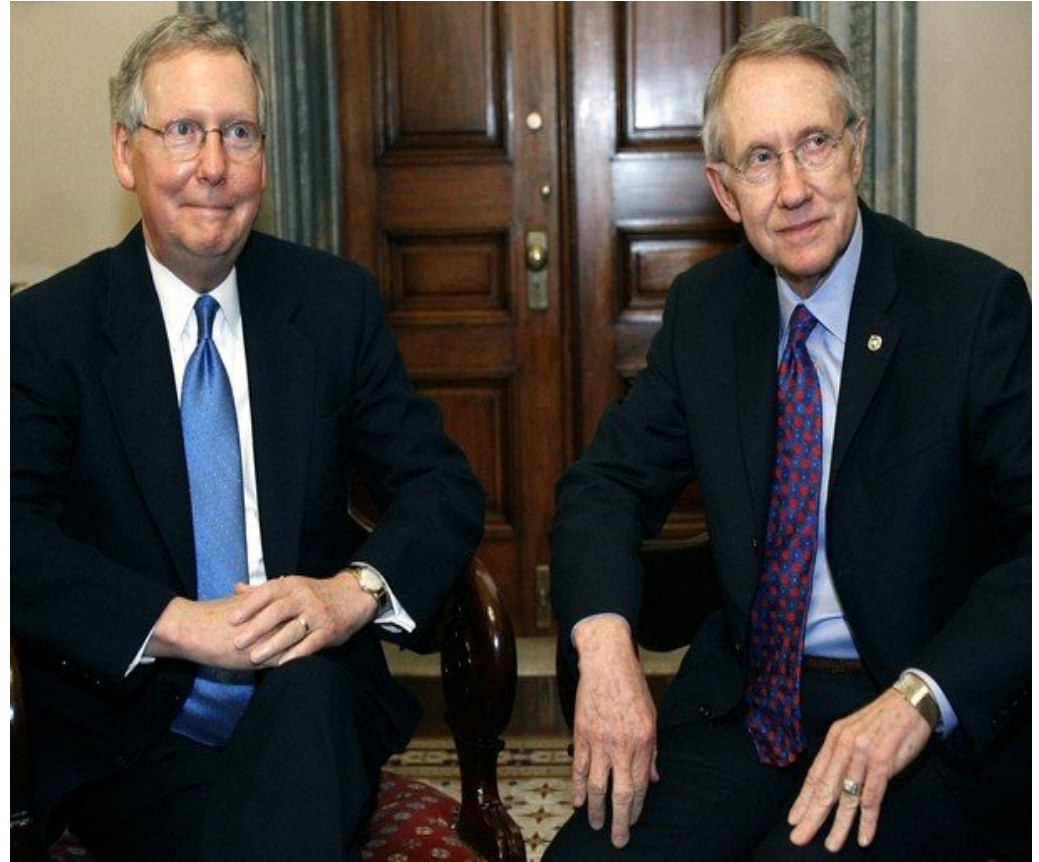
# CHAPTER 12—CONGRESS IN ACTION

## SEC. 1—ORGANIZATION OF CONGRESS

### POLITICAL PARTY OFFICERS:

### THE FLOOR LEADERS

- For majority and minority parties—chosen by party members
- Most important officers next to Speaker of the House
- In charge of legislative strategy, chief party spokesperson
- Majority leader controls order of business on floor
- Senate Majority Leader is **Harry Reid**.
- Senate Minority Leader is **Mitch McConnell from Kentucky**
- House Majority Leader is **Steny Hoyer**
- House Minority Leader is **John Boehner**



# CHAPTER 12—CONGRESS IN ACTION

## SEC. 1—ORGANIZATION OF CONGRESS

### POLITICAL PARTY OFFICERS:

#### THE WHIPS

- For majority and minority parties—chosen by party caucus
- Serve as a liaison between party leaders and the rank and file (ordinary) members.
- Also make sure members are present for votes



# CHAPTER 12—CONGRESS IN ACTION

## SEC. 1—ORGANIZATION OF CONGRESS

### COMMITTEE CHAIRMEN:

- Most of Congress' work is done in committees
- **Committee chairmen are chosen from majority party by the caucus**
- **Seniority Rule:** The most important positions are held by those with the longest service in Congress—applies to committee chairmen
- **Seniority Rule is controversial**—some say it brings power and experience, others say it results in chairmen who are out of touch with the public and won't listen.





# CHAPTER 12—CONGRESS IN ACTION

## SEC. 2—COMMITTEES IN CONGRESS

1. **STANDING COMMITTEES:**
  - **Permanent committees** which consider all bills of a particular type
  - Most bills receive the most **thorough consideration** in committee
  - Committee settles disputes over two versions of the same bill
  - **The fate of a bill is determined by whether the committee votes to bring it to the floor for debate**
  - **Majority party** always holds a **majority of seats** on committee
  - **HOUSE RULES COMMITTEE** : The “traffic cop” in the House. Has to grant a “rule” before bill can be brought to floor for debate/vote.



# CHAPTER 12—CONGRESS IN ACTION

## SEC. 2—COMMITTEES IN CONGRESS

### OTHER TYPES OF COMMITTEES:

1. **Select Committees**—set up for a specific purpose and limited time, usually to investigate a matter.
2. **Joint Committees**—composed of members from House and Senate—some select, some permanent, some investigative
3. **Conference Committees**—Created to resolve differences between House and Senate version of a bill. Creates a compromise bill.
4. **Subcommittees**—divisions of existing committees formed to address specific issues. Most committee work is done through these. (In Sec. 3)

