Behind the Bill

How congressional committees shape policy

SS24.USG.4b "Identify the types of congressional committees and explain their roles in policy-making."

NAME _____ DATE _____

1 READ AND MARK

Read it twice

YOUR JOB Underline the four types of congressional committees in the passage. Circle one action each type can take, then connect each underlined type to its circled action.

A Flood Insurance Bill Takes Shape

1 When repeated coastal floods raise questions about federal insurance, a bill does not usually move straight from introduction to a vote by the full House or Senate. Lawmakers often send it to a standing committee, a permanent group focused on a subject such as banking or transportation. Members can hold hearings, question witnesses, revise a bill, and decide whether to report it to the full chamber. A standing committee may also examine how agencies carry out laws already in force. Its work shapes which proposals advance and what those proposals say, although the full chamber can still make changes.

2 Suppose lawmakers want a concentrated investigation of why flood claims are taking months to settle. A select committee can be created for a particular task, often an investigation, and may be temporary. It can gather testimony and publish findings that inform later proposals. Its authority depends on the resolution that creates it, so do not assume every select committee can rewrite a bill. A joint committee includes members of both the House and Senate. Joint committees commonly study an issue or oversee a shared function, then offer information that legislators can use when drafting policy; they generally do not move bills through the normal committee process.

3 Now imagine the House and Senate each pass a flood insurance bill, but the versions set different payment deadlines. Congress may form a conference committee with members appointed from both chambers to resolve the differences. If its members agree, they submit a conference report proposing a single compromise text. Each chamber must then approve the identical text before the bill can go to the president. The president may sign it, veto it, or let it become law without signing if constitutional conditions are met. Unlike a standing committee's ongoing work, this committee handles differences between particular House and Senate bills.

2 ANSWER WITH EVIDENCE

Use the passage

1. Which type of committee would usually receive the flood insurance bill for hearings and revisions, and how could its work affect the bill?

2. Which committee type fits an investigation of delayed flood claims? Explain how its findings could affect policy and why its authority to rewrite a bill is not guaranteed.

3. If lawmakers in both chambers want to study flood insurance together, which committee type fits that goal, and how would its work differ from moving a bill through committee?

4. If the House and Senate pass different payment deadlines, which committee type could address the conflict, and what must happen to its proposed compromise?

3 YOUR TURN

Your own words

Imagine Congress is considering a bill to replace lead water pipes, investigating delayed federal inspections, seeking a study by members of both chambers, and resolving different House and Senate versions of the bill. In 80 to 110 words, explain how each of the four committee types could help and what Congress must do with a negotiated compromise.

ANSWER KEY

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GRADE 12 · SS24.USG.4b

PART 1 · READ AND MARK

Underline the four types of congressional committees in the passage. Circle one action each type can take, then connect each underlined type to its circled action. Accept any marking that follows this job and points at the right text.

PART 2 · ANSWERS

#	QUESTION	ANSWER
1	Which type of committee would usually receive the flood insurance bill for hearings and revisions, and how could its work affect the bill?	**A standing committee could hold hearings, revise the bill, and decide whether to report it to the full chamber, shaping its text and whether it advances.**
2	Which committee type fits an investigation of delayed flood claims? Explain how its findings could affect policy and why its authority to rewrite a bill is not guaranteed.	**A select committee could gather testimony and publish findings that inform later proposals. Its authority depends on the resolution that creates it.**
3	If lawmakers in both chambers want to study flood insurance together, which committee type fits that goal, and how would its work differ from moving a bill through committee?	**A joint committee could study the issue and provide information for drafting policy. Joint committees generally do not move bills through the normal committee process.**
4	If the House and Senate pass different payment deadlines, which committee type could address the conflict, and what must happen to its proposed compromise?	**A conference committee could negotiate a compromise. Both chambers must approve the identical text before it goes to the president.**

PART 3 · YOUR TURN (SAMPLE ANSWER)

A standing committee focused on the relevant subject could hear testimony, revise the lead-pipe bill, and decide whether to report it to its chamber. A select committee assigned to investigate delayed inspections could gather evidence and publish findings to guide later changes. A joint committee could bring members of both chambers together to study pipe replacement and share findings for future legislation. If the House and Senate passed different versions, a conference committee could negotiate a compromise and submit a report if members agree. Both chambers would then need to approve identical text before the bill goes to the president.

Accept other plausible roles consistent with each committee's authority. The response must distinguish the joint committee's study from the conference committee's work on differing bill versions.