

Congress in History and in Transition

WINTER 2021

Tu 10am-11:30am; Thurs 10 am-11:30am (Pacific Time)

Instructor: John Lawrence, Ph.D.

Email: john.lawrence@ucdc.edu

Office hours: Following class or by arrangement

Instructor

John Lawrence has taught the Congress research seminar at UCDC since 2013, when he left Capitol Hill after a 38 year career as a staff member in the U.S. House of Representatives, the last eight as Chief of Staff to Speaker Nancy Pelosi He is the author of *The Class of '74: Congress After Watergate and the Roots of Partisanship* (2018, Johns Hopkins University Press) as well as numerous articles on Congress and national politics. He blogs on American politics at **DOMEocracy** (johnlawrence.wordpress.com) and tweets at @johnlawrencedc. He also is the published author of Sherlock Holmes short stories. He has a Ph.D. in History from the University of California (Berkeley), and an undergraduate history degree from Oberlin College.

Description

This course will focus on the organization and operations of Congress, the American government and the electorate during a period of great economic, cultural and political disruption: the coronavirus pandemic and related societal disruptions; the 2020 election and its aftermath; and the sharply divided public attitudes reflected in the hyper-partisan atmosphere of US politics and society more broadly.

Congress and other branches of the U.S. government were designed nearly two and a half centuries ago under circumstances, and reflecting values and philosophies, that bear little resemblance to many aspects of contemporary America. All of these institutions have evolved over time in response to changing conditions domestically and internationally. The American electorate has undergone significant evolution as well, especially in the last half century. All of these developments place dramatic and consequential pressures on government, elected officials and voters. How are they responding and what can we anticipate, based on historical precedent, will change as a result of these unprecedented, simultaneous crises?

Class meetings will involve discussions of recent developments in the political landscape including the November 2020 elections and the transition to a new presidential administration and the 117th Congress; the implications of the election for congressional reorganization and reform; potential new directions for public policy resulting from the 2020 election results; and reform of the political system.

In addition to the instructor, there will be periodic guest presenters including former members of Congress, congressional officers, congressional staff, journalists, congressional scholars and others. Students should have completed all readings and

watched assigned videos for each week *prior to the class* meeting. Groups of students will be assigned to highlight key points from the readings and presentations.

Zoom Policies

This [class/meeting] is being conducted over Zoom. **As the host, I may choose to record a class.** No one else will be able to record through Zoom, and no recording by other means is permitted. Please alert me if you have any concerns about the class being filmed.

Please send me an email (john.lawrence@ucdc.edu) informing me of your consent/disapproval to record the class.

- Unless otherwise arranged, **all students should have their video function activated during the class meeting.**
- If you also prefer to use a pseudonym instead of your name, please let me know what name you will be using so that I know who you are during the session.
- If you would like to ask a question, you may do so privately through the Zoom chat by addressing your chat question to me only (and not to “everyone”), or you may contact me by another private method.
- You may also choose to use a generic Zoom background.
- If you have questions or concerns about these arrangements, please contact me.

Requirements and Evaluation

Course requirements are: (1) regular class attendance and participation; (2) one research paper on an assigned topic; and (3) shorter submissions

Grading

Research Paper): 40%

DUE: TBA

Shorter papers (30%)

DUE: Several Dates

Class Participation (30%)

NOTE: Papers are due at 11:59PM on the due date. Late submissions will be subject to grade reductions unless previously authorized in writing by the instructor. All times are Pacific Standard Time (California).

Module 1

Class Introduction

All students should participate LIVE on Zoom in this introductory class during which we will introduce ourselves and our expectations for the quarter, review readings and assignments, and discuss the syllabus. Zoom access is through Canvas.

Reading

- George F. Will, “Congress Needs to Curb Presidential Power; Here’s How It Can Start To” *WP* (December 17, 2020)
https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/congress-needs-to-curb-presidential-power-heres-how-it-can-start-to/2020/12/15/ffde4c32-3f12-11eb-9453-fc36ba051781_story.html

Module 2

The Lay of the Land: Washington in 2021

Reading

- “‘An Indelible Stain’: How the G.O.P. Tried to Topple a Pillar of Democracy” *NYT* (December 12, 2020)
- [”https://www.nytimes.com/2020/12/12/us/politics/trump-lawsuits-electoral-college.html](https://www.nytimes.com/2020/12/12/us/politics/trump-lawsuits-electoral-college.html)
- “How Democrats Suffered Crushing Down-Ballot Losses Across America” *NYT* November 28, 2020,
<https://www.nytimes.com/2020/11/28/us/politics/democrats-republicans-state-legislatures.html?action=click&module=Top%20Stories&pgtype=Homepage>
- “We’re in the Foxhole Together: House Democrats Reckon with a Diminished Majority” *WP* (November 23, 2020)
https://www.washingtonpost.com/powerpost/house-democrats-biden-election/2020/11/23/c280ad2c-2b4d-11eb-8fa2-06e7cbb145c0_story.html
- Thomas Edsall, “I Fear That We Are Witnessing the End of American Democracy” *NYT* (August 27, 2020)
<https://www.nytimes.com/2020/08/26/opinion/trump-republican-convention-racism.html>

Module 3

The Transition, the New Congress and the Electoral Vote

Reading

- Congressional Management Foundation, *Setting Course*, Chapter 1 “Transitioning to Congress and Setting Up Your Office” and Chapter 2, “Selecting Committee Assignments,” pp. 3-26

file:///Users/johnalanlawrence/Downloads/cmf_settingcourse_116thcongress_web%20(2).pdf

- John Lawrence, “Advice to Tuesday’s Winners: Your Aides Aren’t Decoration,” *Roll Call* (November 2, 2018)
<https://www.rollcall.com/news/opinion/advicewinners-aides-decoration>

Guest speaker

Phil Schiliro, former director, White House Office of Legislative Affairs under President Barack Obama

Module 4

The U.S. Capitol

Videos: Tour the U.S. Capitol

- Senate tour: <https://www.c-span.org/video/?192302-4/senate-chamber>
- House tour: <https://www.c-span.org/video/?192301-2/capitol-us-house-representatives> From 17:42-1:35:20

Guest Speaker

Hon. Paul Irving, Sergeant at Arms, U.S House of Representatives

Module 5

The Imperial Presidency and the Resurgent Congress

Reading

- Emily Bazelon, “What Happens When a President and Congress Go to War?” *NYT Magazine* (November 5, 2019)
https://www.nytimes.com/2019/11/05/magazine/congress-president-impeachment.html?rref=collection%2Fbyline%2Ffamily-bazelon&action=click&contentCollection=undefined®ion=stream&module=stream_unit&version=latest&contentPlacement=1&pgtype=collection
- “Rewriting the Limits on Presidential Power,” CBS News (August 12, 2020) <https://www.cbsnews.com/news/rewriting-the-limits-of-presidential-powers/>
- James Surowiecki, “The Perils of Executive Action” *New Yorker* (August 8&15, 2016) <http://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2016/08/08/the-perils-of-executive-action>
- Ellen Nakashima, “‘It breeds resistance’: Even among conservatives, Trump’s use of presidential power causes alarm” *WP* (September 29, 2018) https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/national-security/it-breeds-resistance-even-among-conservatives-trumps-use-of-presidential-power-causes-alarm/2018/09/29/1769991a-bdbf-11e8-b7d2-0773aa1e33da_story.html?utm_term=.85b390b6dfc3

- Elizabeth Slattery and Andrew Kloster, *An Executive Unbound: The Obama Administration's Unilateral Actions* (Heritage, 2014)
<http://www.heritage.org/research/reports/2014/02/an-executive-unbound-the-obama-administrations-unilateral-actions>

Module 6

Why Do People Run For Congress?

Reading

- Bonior Chapter 1
- Clark Chapter 6
- Clem, Chapter 1
- Jenrette Chapter 6
- Lawrence Chapter 3
- Loomis Chapter 8
- O'Neill Chapter 5
- Ramey and Haley, Chapters 17-18


Guest Speaker

Hon. Bob Carr (D-MI), Congressman 1975-1981; 1983-1993
Professor, Graduate School of Political Management at George Washington University,
Adjunct faculty at Brookings Institution's Executive Education

Module 7

What Do Members of Congress Actually Do?

Reading

- Life in Congress: The Member Perspective," Congressional Management Foundation. Download the file and click on the report:<http://congressfoundation.org/projects/life-in-congress/the-member-perspective>.  "Life in Congress: The Member Perspective" (PDF - 2.37 MB)

Module 8

Early National Origins of American Government

Reading

- Jack N. Rakove, "From the Old Congress to the New," in Julian Zelizer, *The American Congress*, New York, NY: Houghton Mifflin. 2-22.

Guest speaker

Professor Richard D. Brown, Board of Trustees Distinguished Professor, History, University of Connecticut

Module 9**Czar Reed to Czar Cannon: The Rose and Fall of the Strong Speaker****Reading**

- Ron Elving, "Czars And Firebrands: A Brief History Of Power In The House" NPR (October 15, 2015)
<https://www.npr.org/sections/itsallpolitics/2015/10/16/449136598/czars-and-firebrands-a-brief-history-of-power-in-the-house>

Module 10**The Modern Congress Since 1974****Reading**

- Eric Rauchway, "The Transformation of the Congressional Experience," in Zelizer, 319-334.

Guest Speaker

Professor Julian Zelizer, Princeton University, author, *Burning Down the House: Newt Gingrich, the Fall of a Speaker, and the Rise of the New Republican Party* (2020)

Module 11**Congressional Organization: Leadership, Caucuses, Committees****Reading**

- Roger Davidson, Walter Oleszek, Frances Lee. *Congress and Its Members*. Chapter 8, "Congressional Rules and Procedures," 215-251

Guest speaker

Charles Johnson, Former Parliamentarian, U.S. House of Representatives

Module 12**Committee and Floor: Key concepts and procedures****Reading**

- Politico Guide to the Legislative Process (July 30, 2019)
https://www.politicopro.com/blog/guide-to-legislation?cid=promkt_19q3_corenews_legg

- Richard Arenberg, “Unintended consequences of killing the filibuster” *The Hill* (August 18, 2020) <https://thehill.com/opinion/white-house/512512-unintended-consequences-of-killing-the-filibuster>

Guest Speaker

- Ambassador Ira Shapiro, “The Polarized Senate and the Biden Presidency” <https://montgomerycollege.zoom.us/rec/share/jbLHt4U9EvDBGgL-sT1kzx0d58LCSWdPy5acyTV-8TwHGtwK6nhKJAyfZtcENYt8.BxEjM-7gzLy7Aayh>

Module 14

Bean Counting 101: Budgets, Appropriations, Entitlements, CRs, Omnibuses, Minibuses, Sequestration, Fiscal Cliffs, Earmarks and Reconciliation

Reading

- Eric Patashnik, “Congress and the Budget Since 1974,” in Zelizer, *American Congress*, 668-686
- “The Dead Earmarks Society” *The Hill*, Feb. 15, 2019 <https://www.rollcall.com/news/congress/pork-earmarks-making-comeback>
- David Winston, “As Budget Blues Set In, Get Ready For A Democratic Food Fight” *Roll Call* (July 1, 2020) <https://www.rollcall.com/2020/07/01/budet-blues-set-get-ready-democratic-food-fight/>
- Asawin Suensaeng And Lachlan Markay, “Trump on Coming Debt Crisis: ‘I Won’t Be Here’ When It Blows Up” *Daily Beast* (December 5, 2018) <https://www.thedailybeast.com/trump-on-coming-debt-crisis-i-wont-be-here-when-it-blows-up>

Guest speakers

Thomas S. Kahn

Professor, George Washington University Graduate School for Political Management; former Staff Director, House Budget Committee

Module 15

Diversity on the Hill

Reading

- Michele Swers, *Women in the Club: Gender and Policy Making in the Senate*, pp 1-23 <https://books.google.com/books?hl=en&lr=&id=NnQ-es6oHWAC&oi=fnd&pg=PR7&dq=Michele+Swers+gender&ots=lHiz-y9nh5&sig=fOjYla9fsn51drY3UwdrBghrY78#v=onepage&q=Michele%20Swers%20gender&f=false>
- Kathryn Lyons, “Demeaned, overlooked, fighting back: What it’s like to be a woman in Congress” *Roll Call* (August 5, 2020)

<https://www.rollcall.com/2020/08/05/demeaned-overlooked-fighting-women-congress-aoc/>

- Bridget Bowman, “House members are more diverse, but does the same go for staff? *Roll Call* (January 25, 2019)
<https://www.rollcall.com/news/congress/house-members-diverse-go-staff>
- Readings from *Black Americans in Congress and Hispanics in Congress*
- DeSipio, Louis, “Demanding Equal Political Voice...And Accepting Nothing Less: The Quest for Latino Political Inclusion,” in *American Latinos and the Making of the United States: A Theme Study*, pp. 273-287.
- Claudine Gay, *The Effect of Minority Districts and Minority Representation on Political Participation in California*, (2001), Public Policy Institute of California http://www.ppic.org/content/pubs/report/R_601CGR.pdf

Guest speaker

Professor Menna Demessie, Ph.D., Vice President of Policy Analysis and Research, Congressional Black Caucus Foundation; Visiting Professor, UCDC

Module 16

Lobbying the Hill

Reading

- Smith, et al., “Congress, Lobbyists and Interest Groups” in *The American Congress*, pp. 335-361
- Thomas Spulak, “What’s So Bad About Lobbyists Anyway?” *The Hill* (January 13, 2009) <https://thehill.com/business-a-lobbying/k-street-insiders/k-street-insiders/20174-whats-so-bad-about-lobbyists-anyway>

Guest Speaker

Stephanie Vance, founding partner, Advocacy Associates

Module 17

Press Coverage of the Hill

- “How reporters for niche publications conquered Capitol Hill” *WP* (August 23, 2019) https://www.washingtonpost.com/lifestyle/magazine/how-reporters-for-niche-publications-conquered-capitol-hill/2019/08/23/fc6e5822-ad68-11e9-a0c9-6d2d7818f3da_story.html
- “The 8 Types of Capitol Hill Reporters” *Roll Call* (May 16, 2014)
<https://www.rollcall.com/2014/05/16/the-8-types-of-capitol-hill-reporters-2/>
- “Taking You Behind the scenes” <https://www.daytondailynews.com/blog/jamie-dupree/taking-you-behind-the-scenes-for-reporters-capitol-hill/gJMdD4KxQ1303k1iHoADWO/>

Guest Speaker

Marianne LeVine, *Politico* Senate reporter

Module 18**Polling and Messaging: Differentiation and Denunciation****Reading**

- David Graham, "The Polling Crisis Is a Catastrophe for American Democracy" *The Atlantic* (November 4, 2020) <https://www.theatlantic.com/ideas/archive/2020/11/polling-catastrophe/616986/>
- Schudson, Michael, "Congress and the Media," in Zelizer, *American Congress*, pp.650-662
- Susan Milligan, "Scare Tactics: Trump Focuses on Fear to Win" *U.S. News* (July 24, 2020) <https://www.usnews.com/news/elections/articles/2020-07-24/trump-focuses-on-fear-to-win-over-voters>

Guest speaker

Mark Mellman, president, The Mellman Group

Module 19**The Disappearing Middle: Polarization and Partisanship****Reading**

- Finkel, et al., "Political Sectarianism in America," *Science* (October 30, 2020) <https://pcl.stanford.edu/research/2020/finkel-science-political.pdf>; for articles cited, see: <http://science.sciencemag.org/content/370/6516/533#BIBL>
- Stewart Spencer, "We Lost the Battle for the Republican Party's Soul Long Ago" *NYT* (July 29, 2020) https://www.nytimes.com/2020/07/29/opinion/trump-republican-party-racism.html?campaign_id=39&emc=edit_ty_20200729&instance_id=20737&nl=opinion-today®i_id=73194429&segment_id=34627&te=1&user_id=705d1752109a90521ae844fd01fe91d5
- Drew DeSilver, "The Polarized Congress Of Today Has Its Roots In The 1970s," *Pew* (June 12, 2014) <http://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2014/06/12/polarized-politics-in-congress-began-in-the-1970s-and-has-been-getting-worse-ever-since/>
- Michael Grunwald, "How Everything Became the Culture War" *Politico Magazine* (Nov-Dec, 2018) <https://www.politico.com/magazine/story/2018/11/02/culture-war-liberals-conservatives-trump-2018-222095>
- Gerald Seib, "The Two Parties Aren't Crazy, Just Changed" <https://www.wsj.com/articles/the-two-parties-arent-crazy-just-changed-1444673977>

Guest speaker

Professor Frances E. Lee, Ph.D., Princeton University; author, *Insecure Majorities, Beyond Ideology, Sizing Up the Senate, The Limits of Party: Congress and Lawmaking in a Polarized Age* (2016)

Module 20**Congressional Reform: Bold Plans and Unintended Consequences****Reading**

- Readings from the Select Committee on the Modernization of Congress
[https://modernizecongress.house.gov/imo/media/doc/ModernizationCommittee_10152020r1Compressed%20\(newest%20gpo%20report\).pdf](https://modernizecongress.house.gov/imo/media/doc/ModernizationCommittee_10152020r1Compressed%20(newest%20gpo%20report).pdf)
- John A. Lawrence, “Cleaning House: Watergate and the Limits of Reform” *Foreign Affairs* (January/February 2021)
<https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/united-states/2020-12-08/cleaning-house>
- “How to Fix Politics in America” *Politico Magazine* (September 20, 2019)
<https://www.politico.com/interactives/2019/how-to-fix-politics-in-america/>
- Lee Hamilton, William S. Cohen and Alton Frye, “How Congress can stop gerrymandering: Deny seats to states that do it” *WP* (July 17, 2020)
https://www.washingtonpost.com/outlook/gerrymandering-redistricting-census-congress/2020/07/17/d1002146-c6f5-11ea-8ffe-372be8d82298_story.html
- Congressional Problem Solvers Caucus, “Break the Gridlock” proposals (2018) https://www.nolabels.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/07/break_the_gridlock_packet.pdf
- Tom Davis, Martin Frost, and Richard Cohen, “The Way Forward” in *The Partisan Divide: Congress in Crisis*, 271-286.
- Frank Newport, “Bringing About More Compromise in Congress” Gallup (October 10, 2018) <https://news.gallup.com/opinion/polling-matters/243566/bringing-compromise-congress.aspx>

Guest speaker

Rep. Derek Kilmer (D-WA), chairman, House Select Committee on the Modernization of Congress