Congress, Politics and Elections in a Time of Crisis
FALL 2020
Tu 10am-11:30am; Thurs 10 am-11:30am (California time)
Instructor: John Lawrence, Ph.D. Email: john.lawrence@ucdc.edu
Office hours: By arrangement

Instructor

John Lawrence has taught 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 (johnalawrence.wordpress.com) and tweets at @johnalawrencedc. He also is the author of numerous Sherlock Holmes published short stories. He has a Ph.D. in American 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 in which four historic forces are colliding simultaneously: the coronavirus pandemic and related societal disruptions; the widespread political/social responses to multiple incidents that document systemic racism affecting policing and other public policies; the electoral season; and lastly, 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 relationship to contemporary America. All of these institutions have evolved over time in response to changing conditions domestically and internationally. The American electorate had 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 leading up to and following the November 2020 elections; 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.

Class presentation and discussions will include discussion board postings and comments that will be analyzed and critiqued by class members.
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 reading for each week prior to the class meeting and be prepared to ask questions of the instructor and special guest speakers (when appearing live).

**Zoom Policies**

This [class/meeting] is being conducted over Zoom. As the host, I may choose to record a class, and I would like to record the interviews that I conduct with guests. No one else will be able to record through Zoom, and no recording by other means is permitted.

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

- If you have privacy concerns and do not wish to appear in the recording, do not turn on your video.
- 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 this, please contact me.

**Requirements and Evaluation**

Course requirements are: (1) regular class attendance and participation; (2) one research paper on an assigned topic; (3) discussion board postings and comments (4) questions to be prepared for guest speakers.

**Grading**

Research Paper): 30%
  DUE: November 20, 2020
Discussion board postings and comments (20%)
  DUE: Several Dates
Short essays: 30%
  DUE: Several Dates
Class Participation (20%)

NOTE: All times are Pacific (California) times.
Module 1  
**Tuesday, September 21, 10-11:30 AM: 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**


- Robin Wright, “Is America a Myth?” *New Yorker* (September 8, 2020)  
  https://www.newyorker.com/news/our-columnists/is-america-a-myth?utm_source=nl&utm_brand=tny&utm_mailing=TNY_Daily_090820&utm_campaign=aud-dev&utm_medium=email&bxid=5bd672753f92a41245dd6875&cndid=28521238&hasha=af15ef986debda79e48ddc9da0f3e31c&hashb=824ed78d2fe8a858cbb521827cf5c577705b22e4&hashc=029507b3b0f7985f5c86cb06c538db82b22ec27762af42e24ac827a42b9&esrc=AUTO_NYB&utm_term=TNY_DailySeptember 8, 2020

Module 2  
**Thursday, September 23, 10-11:30 AM: Welcome to Washington!**

**Reading**

- The Politics and History of the DC Statehood Vote (Brookings)  
  https://www.brookings.edu/blog/fixgov/2020/06/25/the-politics-and-history-of-the-d-c-statehood-vote/

**Videos: Tour the U.S. Capitol**

- Senate tour: https://www.c-span.org/video/?192302-4/senate-chamber

**Assignment for Discussion Board:** Describe the most interesting fact you learned about the Capitol from the videos.

**Guest Speaker**

Hon. Paul Irving, Sergeant at Arms, U.S House of Representatives
Module 3
Tuesday, September 29, 10-11:30 AM: Is this Election on the Level?

Reading

- Garrett Graff, “8 Big Reasons Election Day 2020 Could Be a Disaster” *Politico Magazine* (July 24, 2020)
- Tim Wirth and Tom Rogers, “How Trump Could Lose the Election -- and Still Remain President,” *Newsweek* (July 3, 2020)
- Barton Gellman, “The Election That Could Break America” *The Atlantic* (September 2020)
  https://americanmind.org/essays/the-coming-coup/
- Jeffrey Davis, “How Donald Trump Could Steal the Election”
- “The Hive Interview: Could Trump Steal the Election?”
- Supplemental Reading: U.S. Department of State, “Pillars of Russia’s Disinformation and Propaganda Ecosystem” (August 2020)
  https://content.govdelivery.com/attachments/USSTATEBPA/2020/08/05/file_attachments/1512230/Pillars%20of%20Russia%20Disinformation%20and%20Propaganda%20Ecosystem_08-04-20%281%29.pdf; U.S. Senate Select Committee on Intelligence Report on Russian Interference,

Video
• John Lawrence interview with former Sen. Tim Wirth (D-CO) and Sen. Tom Udall (D-NM) (September 3, 2020)
  https://drive.google.com/file/d/1nqiT_yrxFVi4yb_Il2RYkZTLKajrjYh4/view?usp=sharing

  ➢ View from 13:34 through 59:15.

**Essay:** Explain why you find the arguments about election interference persuasive or inflated. Do they seem designed to describe realistic scenarios? Influence the voting positively or negatively?

**Module 4**
Thursday, October 1, 10-11:30 AM: Why Run?

**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; Adjunct Professor, Graduate School of Political Management at George Washington University, Adjunct faculty at Brookings Institution's Executive Education

**Please prepare questions for Rep. Carr**

**Module 5**
Tuesday, October 6, 10-11:30 AM: What do they do?

**Reading**

Guest speaker
Teresa Leger Fernandez, Democratic Nominee for Congress (NM-3)

Please prepare questions for Ms, Leger Fernandez

Module 6
Thursday, October 8, 2020: What We They Thinking? Designing Congress

Reading


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

Written Assignment: You are a member of the Constitutional Convention in 1788. Knowing what we have learned about the United States in the last 232 years, what would you change in the original Constitution; would your change have been acceptable to the Framers; how would it have produced a “more perfect Union”? Be sure to explain what you are changing, why it was included in the first place, and whether your change would have helped or complicated securing ratification. Due: Monday, October 12

Module 7
Tuesday, October 13, 2020, 10-11:30 AM: The Modern Congress

Reading


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) (pre-recorded)
Module 8
Thursday, October 15, 10-11:30 AM: How Is Congress Organized?

Reading

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

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

Assignment for Discussion Board: At C-Span Library, https://www.c-span.org/30years/ find a hearing (legislative or oversight, House or Senate); watch a portion of it. Explain the topic, legislative/oversight, witnesses, participation. Was the hearing balanced? Informative? Is there a likely outcome? Due: October 20

Module 9
Tuesday, October 20, 2020 10-11:30 AM: Diversity on the Hill: Is Congress Changing, and Does It Matter?

Reading

• Michele Swers, “Gender and Party Politics in a Polarized Era,”
• 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/
• Readings from Black Americans in Congress and Hispanics in Congress

Video

From the beginning to 21:52

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

**Discussion Board:** Describe an issue that benefits by the diversity of membership in Congress; how does diversity complicate resolution of the issue; what differences between the House and Senate complicate reaching agreement on such issues?

**Module 10**
**Thursday, October 22, 10-11:30 AM: Lobbying the Hill**

**Reading**
- Smith, et al., “Congress, Lobbyists and Interest Groups” in *The American Congress*, pp. 335-361

**Module 11**
**Thursday, October 27, 10-11:30 AM: Should the Majority Decide It? The Filibuster**

**Reading**

**Video**
• “History of the Filibuster” https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lK9rGQcwI7Y
• John Lawrence interview with former Sen. Tim Wirth (D-CO) and Sen. Tom Udall (D-NM) (September 3, 2020) https://drive.google.com/file/d/1nqiT_yrxFVi4yb_IL2RYkZTLKajrjYh4/view?usp=sharing View from 59:16-1:15:00.

**Guest speaker**
Ambassador Ira Shapiro, former Chief U.S. Trade Negotiator with Japan and Canada; former Senate staff; author, *The Last Great Senate and Broken: Can the Senate Save Itself and the Country?*

**Written Assignment:** You are an incoming member of the U.S. Senate from a marginal seat. One of your first votes will be whether to modify the filibuster rule. If you vote yes, you will appear to diminish the traditional rights given to the minority, which could help your opponents to label you a run-of-the-mill partisan. If you vote against a change, it is likely you will be unable to achieve any of the legislative goals you promised voters you would deliver. Write a blog post to your constituents explaining your vote and your reasoning. **Due: Monday, October 28**

**Module 12**
**Tuesday, October 29, 10-11:30 AM:** Differentiation and Denunciation

**Reading**

• Schudson, Michael, “Congress and the Media,” in Zelizer, American Congress, pp.650-662
• Trump Messaging 2016, 2020:
  1. https://www.nytimes.com/2016/01/05/us/politics/campaign%20has%20spent%20almost%20$20%20million%20over%20the%20last%2020%20days%20on%20that%20ad%20and%20two%20other%20similar%20onesin-first-ad-donald-trump-plays-to-fears-on-immigration-and-isis.html;
  4. Trump 2020: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OXiPAI-_gyE
• Biden Messaging

- Independent Messaging

**Congressional ads** (illustrative)

- Mark Kelly for Senate (Arizona)
  https://www.washingtonpost.com/video/politics/mark-kelly-full-speed-ahead--campaign-2020/2019/02/12/b3760a42-a1d7-4a84-8300-f6697a5e769e_video.html
- Martha McSally for Senate (Arizona)
  https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fmLEZL5akbk
  https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5ldwO7horU
  http://www.mcsallyforsenate.com/

**In Class:** Be prepared to critique ads for and against a congressional candidate; What are the ads trying to do? Are they successful? Are they explaining the candidate’s strength or criticizing the opponent?

**Discussion Board:** Write an ad for a specific candidate that you think would work and explain why.

**Guest speaker**
Mark Mellman, president, The Mellman Group

**Module 13**
**Tuesday, November 3, 2020, 10-11:30 AM: Election Day**

**Reading**

- Review of late polling
- “Seven Election Day Nightmares” *NYT* (September 9, 2020)
- Amy Gardner, “Barring a landslide, what’s probably not coming on Nov. 3? A result in the race for the White House” *Washington Post* (June 22, 2020)

• Hannah Klain, Kevin Morris, Max Feldman, and Rebecca Ayala, “Waiting to Vote Racial Disparities in Election Day Experiences” Brennan Center at NYU (June 3, 2020 ) https://www.brennancenter.org/sites/default/files/-06/6_02_WaitingtoVote_FINAL.pdf

Module 14

Reading

• “Dem group warns of apparent Trump Election Day landslide” Axios (September 1, 2020); be sure to watch the video: https://www.axios.com/bloomberg-group-trump-election-night-scenarios-a554e8f5-9702-437e-ae75-d2be478d42bb.html


Guest speakers
Norm Ornstein, American Enterprise Institute
Marianne LeVine, Senate reporter, Politico

Class discussion: What was the biggest surprise – positively or negatively -- of the election, and why? How did the outcome influence your view of government?

Module 15
Tuesday, November 10, 2020: “What Do We Do Now”? Transition to Power
Congressional Reorganization (leadership, committees, rules, etc.); potential presidential transition

Video
Excerpt from “The Candidate” https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=myEpap3TxVs
**Reading**

- John Lawrence, “Advice to Tuesday’s Winners: Your Aides Aren’t Decoration,” *Roll Call* (November 2, 2018)
- Reading from the Transition Integrity Project

**Guest speakers**

Phil Schiliro, former director, White House Office of Legislative Affairs under President Barack Obama
Stacy Kerr, former executive assistant, Speaker Nancy Pelosi; Michael Steel, former communications director, Speaker John Boehner

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**Module 16**

**Thursday, November 12, 2020, 10-11:30 AM: Should the Majority Decide II? The Electoral College**

**Reading**

- Lawrence Lessig, “Confused Electoral College Crises: Replying to Wirth/Rogers in Newsweek” *Medium* (July 4, 2020)
  [https://medium.com/@lessig/confused-electoral-college-crises-replying-to-wirth-rogers-in-newsweek-9e1be5aa0339]
- “Abolishing The Electoral College Would Be More Complicated Than It May Seem” *NPR* (March 22, 2019)
  [https://www.npr.org/2019/03/22/705627996/abolishing-the-electoral-college-would-be-more-complicated-than-it-may-seem]
- Jesse Wegman, “The electoral college will destroy America” *NYT* (September 9, 2020)

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**Module 17**

**Tuesday, November 17, 2020, 10-11:30 AM: The Disappearing Middle: Polarization and Partisanship**

**Reading**

**Audio**


**Optional Video**

- View John Lawrence presentation at the Wilson Center https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=y-7HenDxsVc Minutes: 31:49-41:58; 54:40:00-59:00

**Guest speaker**


**Module 18**

**Thursday, November 19, 2020:** Bean Counting 101: Budgets, Appropriations, Entitlements, CRs, Omnibuses, Minibuses, Sequestration, Fiscal Cliffs and Reconciliation

**Reading**

• “The Dead Earmarks Society” *The Hill*, Feb. 15, 2019  
• David Winston, “As budget blues set in, get ready for a Democratic food fight” *Roll Call* (July 1, 2020)  
• Asawin Suensaeng And Lachlan Markay, “Trump on Coming Debt Crisis: ‘I Won’t Be Here’ When It Blows Up” *Daily Beast* (December 5, 2018)  

**Guest speakers**
Hon. Rosa DeLauro (D-CT), Member of the Appropriations Committee and candidate for chairman
Thomas S. Kahn, Professor, George Washington University Graduate School for Political Management; former Staff Director, House Budget Committee

**** Paper Due: November 20, 2020 ****

- No Classes the Week of November 23 -- Thanksgiving

**Module 19**
**Tuesday, December 1, 2020: 10-11:30AM: The Imperial Presidency and the Resurgent Congress**

**Reading**

• Emily Bazelon, “What Happens When a President and Congress Go to War?” *New York Times Magazine* (November 5, 2019)  

• “Rewriting the Limits on Presidential Power,” CBS News (August 12, 2020)  

• 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 *Washington Post*” (September 29, 2018)  
https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/national-security/it-breeds-resistance-even-among-conservatives-trumps-use-of-
Module 20
Thursday, December 3, 2020: Module: Can This System Be Saved?

Reading

- Readings from the Select Committee on the Modernization of Congress website https://modernizecongress.house.gov/about/membership

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

Assignment for Discussion Board: After reading the material for the week, prepare and post 2 questions for Rep. Kilmer. Due: Wednesday, December 2.