

An hourglass-shaped graphic with a globe in the top bulb and another globe in the bottom bulb. The hourglass is light blue and has a dark blue cap at the top. The globe in the top bulb is dark blue, and the globe in the bottom bulb is light blue. The text is centered within the hourglass.

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Senate Committee Hearings: Scheduling and Notification

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February 22, 2007

Abstract. Each Senate standing committee has authority to hold hearings whether the Senate is in session, has recessed, or has adjourned (Rule XXVI, paragraph 1). Regardless of the type of hearing, or whether a hearing is held in or outside of Washington, hearings share common aspects of planning and preparation.

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Summary

Senate standing committees have authority to hold hearings whether the Senate is in session, has recessed, or has adjourned (Rule XXVI, paragraph 1). Regardless of the type of hearing, or whether a hearing is held in or outside of Washington, hearings share common aspects of planning and preparation. For more information on legislative process, see <http://www.crs.gov/products/guides/guidehome.shtml>.

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Whether to Schedule a Hearing

Senate committees consider a variety of issues in deciding whether to schedule a hearing. A committee must define the information it needs, and determine the points it wishes to communicate, then evaluate whether a hearing is the best method of achieving these ends. Deciding whether to schedule a hearing is influenced by factors including the salience of issues to the nation, presidential initiatives, matters of significance to particular committee members, and the importance of policies to constituents and interest groups. Programs requiring reauthorization generally require committee hearings, as do allegations of waste, fraud, or abuse in agency activities.

Each committee receives dozens or even hundreds of legislative proposals for possible examination, and has other responsibilities such as oversight. In the context of this overall workload, a committee must decide whether holding a particular hearing is the best use of staff resources and funds. A committee also considers whether and how a hearing would fit into its overall schedule of planned activities.

Scheduling Requirements and Practices

The committee chair exercises control over the hearing schedule and determines the agenda. However, a variety of rules and other factors affect the scheduling of a hearing. Many of these rules and related practices aim to coordinate committee hearings with other committee meetings or Senate sessions to minimize interruptions of deliberations and scheduling conflicts for Senators, in order to maximize their participation.

Committee sessions (except of Appropriations and Budget) are restricted when the Senate also is meeting (Rule XXVI, paragraph 5(a)). A committee may not meet on any day after the Senate has been in session for two hours, or after 2:00 p.m. when the Senate is in session, whichever is earlier. In practice the rule is routinely waived, usually by unanimous consent, but it also may be waived by joint agreement of the party leaders. Senate rules also restrict committees to meeting during specified time periods. Committees, however, do not always adhere rigorously to these restrictions (Rule XXVI, paragraph 6).

The computerized scheduling service of the Senate allows a committee to coordinate its schedule with that of other committees. Further, the rules of some committees contain provisions requiring subcommittee coordination in scheduling hearings.

Paramount in scheduling a hearing is choosing a date and time convenient for committee leaders. A committee also must check the availability of its hearing rooms before scheduling a hearing. If a committee's own rooms are unavailable, it may be possible to borrow a room from another committee or Senate leader or officer.

Joint or field hearings often present additional scheduling issues. All Senate committees or subcommittees may conduct hearings jointly with another committee or subcommittee of the Senate or House. Panels meeting jointly must agree on common rules of procedure and determine logistical questions, such as coordinating meeting times. Similarly, a committee or subcommittee may hold field hearings outside Washington. Scheduling issues include choosing a desirable time for committee members to travel and securing a meeting room on location.

Notification Requirements and Practices

Each committee (except Appropriations and Budget) must give at least one week's notice to the public of the date, place, and subject of a hearing (Rule XXVI, paragraph 4(a)). A committee may hold a hearing with less than one week's notice if it determines that there is "good cause." These public notices of hearings appear in the Daily Digest section of the *Congressional Record* and on the Senate's Web site.

In practice, committees often include additional information in the public notice, such as the time and location of the hearing and expected witnesses. And while the one-week notice rule may be waived, a few committees generally prohibit holding hearings with less than a 24-hour public notice. Often a committee sends advance announcements of a hearing to all its members. Some committees also require that specific pre-hearing information be sent to their members or be made available to the public.

Although the Senate rule requires *a one week public notice*, a separate standing order of the Senate requires each Senate committee to notify the Daily Digest Office *as soon as a hearing is scheduled* (S.Res. 4, 95th Congress). When a hearing is scheduled, notification should include the time, place, and purpose of the hearing; a committee also must notify the Daily Digest Office of any changes or cancellations as they occur. This information is printed in the Extension of Remarks section of the *Congressional Record* on Monday and Wednesday of each week.

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