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House Committee Hearings: Scheduling and Notification

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Each House committee has the authority to hold hearings whether the House is in session, has recessed, or has adjourned (Rule XI, clause 2(m)(1)(A)). 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>].

Whether to Schedule a Hearing

A committee considers 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 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 generally 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 House sessions to minimize interruptions of deliberations and scheduling conflicts for Members, in order to maximize their participation.

House committees may hold hearings at any time, except during a joint session of the House and Senate or during a recess when a joint meeting of the House and Senate is in progress (Rule XI, clause 2(i)). The computerized scheduling service of the House Information Resources (HIR) allows a committee to coordinate its schedule with that of other committees. Further, the rules of the House Republican Conference provide that committee rules should seek to avoid overlapping scheduling of subcommittee sessions. Consequently, the rules of many 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 a House leader or officer.

Joint or field hearings often present additional scheduling issues. Each House committee or subcommittee may conduct hearings jointly with another committee or subcommittee of the House or Senate. 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

The chair of a committee (except Rules) must give at least one week's notice to the public of the date, place, and subject of a hearing (Rule XI, clause 2(g)(3)). (Committees often include additional information, such as expected witnesses.) Hearings may be held with less than one week's notice, if either the chair, with the concurrence of the ranking minority member, or the committee by majority vote, determines a need. When this happens, public notice of the hearing should be given as soon as possible. These public notices of hearings appear in the Daily Digest section of the *Congressional Record* and in the House's computerized committee scheduling service of the HIR.

Often a committee sends advance announcements of a hearing to all its members. Some committee rules also require that specific pre-hearing information be sent to their members or be made available to the public. For instance, several committees require staff to prepare a concise summary of the subject matter under consideration for committee members. House Resources Committee rules specify that committee members are to be provided with a tentative witness list and, to the extent practicable, a memorandum explaining the subject of the hearing. In addition, the chair is to make available to committee members any official reports from departments and agencies on the subject matter of the hearing. The rules of the Small Business Committee provide for public access to proposed testimony of witnesses in electronic form.