

CRS Report for Congress

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House Subcommittees: Assignment Process

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House rules, Republican Conference and Democratic Caucus rules, and individual committee rules, all address the subcommittee assignment process, although to varying degrees. Under House Rule X, clause 5(d), no committee, except Appropriations and Government Reform, can create more than five subcommittees. In addition, pursuant to Rule X, clause 5(b)(2)(A), Members are limited to service on no more than four subcommittees, although exceptions are provided. Committee chairs are generally prohibited from chairing a subcommittee of that committee, and all committee and subcommittee chairs are limited by House Rule X, clause 5(c)(2) as well as Republican Conference Rule 14, to no more than three consecutive terms as chair, beginning with the 104th Congress.

Many subcommittee assignment decisions are affected by the full committee assignment process. Information on that is provided in CRS Report 98-151, *House Committees: Categories and Rules for Committee Assignments*, and CRS Report 98-367, *House Committees: Assignment Process*.

Size and Ratio

Subcommittee sizes and party ratios are determined by the full committee, usually in concert with the party leadership. Although negotiations are often held with the minority, the prerogative remains with the majority. Generally, subcommittee ratios reflect the same ratio as that of a full committee, which in turn reflects the ratio of majority to minority members in the full House. Discussions on subcommittee sizes and ratios traditionally begin soon after the November election, and often are completed by the convening of the early organization meetings, usually held in November or December. Final decisions are made after committee assignments are ratified on the House floor. Seat changes within a Congress can necessitate adjusting subcommittee sizes and ratios.

Democratic Caucus Rule 26, which addresses subcommittees "when the Democratic party is the majority," states that no subcommittee can be more than 60% of the size of a full committee. It further states that the resident commissioner and delegates should not be counted in determining subcommittee (or committee) size. Republican Conference rules are silent on subcommittee size and ratio issues.

Chair and Ranking Member Selection

Under Republican Conference rules, each committee chair determines and provides to other Republican members of the committee the method for selecting subcommittee chairs. However, a majority of the Republican members of the full committee can disapprove the selection procedure. Under House rules, subcommittee chairs are limited to six years of service. Republicans also limit members to a single committee or subcommittee chairmanship, although the Committee on Standards of Official Conduct and House Administration Committee are exempt. Finally, Republican Conference rules prohibit a full-committee chair from leading a subcommittee of the committee he or she heads.

House Democrats allow each committee member to bid, in order of seniority, for available subcommittee leadership slots. For all committees, except Appropriations, this is done by full-committee seniority; for Appropriations, it is done by subcommittee seniority. Caucus rules generally limit members to rank on only one full committee or one subcommittee with legislative jurisdiction. Subcommittee leaders selected for the Appropriations Committee and Ways and Means Committee require full Democratic Caucus approval.

Subcommittee Assignments

Under House rules, Members are limited to service on four subcommittees, although there are some exceptions. House rules are silent on how subcommittee assignments are made. Rather, subcommittee assignments are governed by respective party rules and practices.

Republicans generally leave the decisions on the subcommittee assignment process to the committee leader to determine, although most committees employ a bidding approach that allows members, in order of seniority, to select subcommittee slots. Committee and party leaders also try to suggest certain subcommittee configurations in order to retain more experienced members on key subcommittees.

Democrats formally provide in their caucus rules for a bidding process based on seniority, whereby each member selects one choice before any member receives a second assignment.

Pursuant to House Rule X, clause 5(b)(2)(B), chairs and ranking minority members of full committees may serve as ex officio members of subcommittees of their committee without that service counting against the limitation of no more than four subcommittees per member. Some committees address in their committee rules the authority to vote by ex officio members. Some panels allow voting by ex officio members, others do not.