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Senate Committee Hearings: Scheduling and Notification

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Senate standing committees and their subcommittees 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.

Whether to Schedule a Hearing

Senators and committee staff consider a variety of issues in deciding whether to schedule a hearing. They must define the information they need, determine the points they wish to communicate, and then evaluate whether a hearing is the best method of achieving these ends. Deciding whether to schedule a hearing is influenced by factors that include the salience of issues to the nation, presidential initiatives, matters of significance to the chair of a committee or other committee members, and the importance of policies to constituents and interest groups. Programs requiring reauthorization often warrant 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 oversight responsibilities as well. In the context of this overall workload, the committee chair, staff, and other members must decide whether holding a particular hearing is the best use of staff resources and funds—and whether and how a hearing would fit into the committee’s 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 so as to minimize interruptions of deliberations and scheduling conflicts for Senators and maximize their participation in all venues.

The timing of committee sessions (except for the Appropriations and Budget committees) is restricted on days on which the Senate is also meeting (Rule XXVI, paragraph 5(a)). A committee may not meet (or continue a meeting that is in progress) after the Senate has been in session for two hours on that day, and it may also not meet after 2:00 p.m. on such a day. In practice, this rule is routinely waived on the Senate floor, typically by unanimous consent, for committees with meetings scheduled in violation of the restrictions. Senate rules also restrict committees to meeting during specified time periods, but committees do not always adhere rigorously to these restrictions (Rule XXVI, paragraph 6). 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 must also 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.¹ 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” to do so. These public notices of hearings appear in the Daily Digest section of the *Congressional Record* and on the Senate’s website (<http://www.senate.gov>).

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

A separate standing order of the Senate (S.Res. 4, 95th Congress) also requires that each Senate committee notify the Senate Daily Digest Office as soon as a hearing is scheduled and include the time, place, and purpose of the hearing in this notification. A committee must also 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 Mondays and Wednesdays.

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¹ For more information on field hearings, see CRS Report RS20928, *Field Hearings: Fact Sheet on Purposes, Rules, Regulations, and Guidelines*, by (name redacted) and (name redacted).

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