

An hourglass-shaped graphic with a globe inside. The top bulb is dark blue, and the bottom bulb is light blue. The globe is a darker shade of blue. The hourglass is centered on the page.

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Report 98-489

Senate Committee Hearings: Preparation

Betsy Palmer, Government and Finance Division

February 22, 2007

Abstract. Committee hearings afford Senators an opportunity to gather information on, and draw attention to, legislation and issues within a committee's purview, conduct oversight of programs or agencies, and investigate allegations of wrongdoing. This checklist identifies many of the tasks that need to be performed by a full committee and, in most cases, subcommittees in advance of a hearing.

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Summary

Committee hearings allow Senators an opportunity to gather information on, and draw attention to, legislation and issues within a committee's purview, conduct oversight of programs or agencies, and investigate allegations of wrongdoing.

This checklist identifies, primarily for staff, many of the tasks that need to be performed by a full committee and, in most cases, subcommittees in advance of a hearing. Some of these tasks are required by Senate or committee rules; others are common committee practice. Some tasks are usually the responsibility of the committee's majority staff, some are shared by majority and minority staff, and some are performed by a Senator's personal office staff. For more information on legislative process, see <http://www.crs.gov/products/guides/guidehome.shtml>.

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Preliminary Decisions

- Prepare a memorandum for the chair (and perhaps for other committee members) outlining the need for and scope of the hearing, the expected outcome (hearing only, committee print, preparation of legislation), possible witnesses, number of hearing days anticipated, and political considerations.
- Obtain the chair's approval to hold the hearing.
- Check the schedule of the chair and ranking minority member, determine availability of and reserve committee hearing room, set date, arrange for an official reporter, and confirm availability of "essential" witnesses.
- Several days prior to the hearing, brief committee members and staff, and send them a memorandum confirming date, time, location, and topic.
- The day before the hearing, call Senators to determine expected attendance and ascertain that a quorum (usually a single Senator) will be present to hear testimony. Check for possible conflicts between hearing times and Senate floor schedule. Senate Rule XXVI, paragraph 5, generally prohibits committee meetings (except Appropriations and Budget meetings) after the Senate has been in session for two hours, or after 2:00 p.m. when the Senate is in session. This rule may be waived. Anticipate the need for possible recesses while Senators leave for floor votes.
- Prepare an opening statement for the chair, ranking member, and other Senators.

Witness Selection

- Select witnesses in conjunction with committee leaders, executive branch officials, and issue leaders. Senate Rule XXVI, paragraph 4(d), provides that, except for the Appropriations Committee, the minority is entitled to call its own witnesses on at least one day of the hearing.
- Invite witnesses by phone, then by formal letter from the chair, providing hearing information and requesting pertinent information. Invitation letters may include date, time, location, and subject; a copy of pertinent Senate and committee rules; reimbursement information (if applicable); deadline for submitting written statements and the number of copies required; and the name and phone number of a staff aide.
- Where appropriate, interview, depose, or subpoena witnesses.

- Obtain required number of copies of each witness's written statement.

Media Concerns

- Provide committee press secretary with material for announcements of events and activities, and the committee website.
- In conjunction with the press secretary, work with the Senate Press Galleries to coordinate media space and coverage. Information about the Senate's media galleries is at <http://www.senate.gov/galleries/>.
- In consultation with the press secretary, assemble media kits, and arrange interviews or press conferences with the chair and other Senators.
- On the hearing day and in consultation with the committee press secretary, distribute press releases, witness statements, and the witness list.

Final Preparations

- Prepare Senators' briefing books that include: a description of the subject, scope, and purpose of the hearing; copies and comparisons of measures under consideration; pertinent statutes and regulations, court decisions, and articles; a chronology of major events; questions or talking points; and a list of witnesses, biographical information, and copies or summaries of written testimony. Briefing book material may be augmented as needed.
- Assemble materials on the dais, including a gavel and block (for the chair), briefing books, Senate and committee rules (for staff), cups and water, and paper and pencils.
- Place cups, water, and nameplates on the witness table.
- Provide the official reporter with the witness list and statements and committee members' opening statements.

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