

# CRS Report for Congress

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## House Committee Hearings: Preparation

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Committee hearings afford Representatives 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 full committees and, in most cases, subcommittees in advance of a hearing. Some of these tasks are required by House or committee rules; others are common committee practice.

### Preliminary Decisions

- Prepare a memorandum for the chair (and perhaps for other committee members) outlining the need for and scope of the hearing, 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 dates, 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 members to determine expected attendance and ascertain that a quorum, usually two committee members, will be present to hear testimony. Check for possible conflicts between hearing times and House floor schedule.
- Prepare an opening statement for the chair, ranking member, and other members.

## **Witness Selection**

- Select witnesses in conjunction with committee leaders, executive branch officials, and issue leaders. House Rule XI, clause 2 provides that 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 might include date, time, location, and subject; a copy of pertinent House and committee rules; reimbursement information (if applicable); deadline for submitting written statements and quantity 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**

- Review House Rule XI, clause 4, and pertinent committee rules that provide guidance on broadcasting committee hearings.
- Provide committee press secretary with material for committee announcements of events and activities and committee Web site.
- In consultation with the press secretary, assemble media kits, and arrange interviews or press conferences with the chair and other members.
- On the hearing day and in consultation with the committee press secretary, distribute press releases, witness statements, and the witness list.

## **Final Preparations**

- Prepare members' briefing books that include description of the subject, scope, and purpose of hearing; copies and comparisons of measures under consideration; pertinent statutes and regulations; court decisions; published 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 can be augmented as needed.
- Assemble materials on the dais, including a gavel and block (for the chair), briefing books, House and committee rules (for the 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 members' opening statements.