

**Chamber Leader Walkthrough**

As chamber leader, your primary role is to manage the legislature’s responsibilities with fairness and efficiency. You aren’t a dictator. You are selected by the membership and act under the assumption that your decisions have the support of (at least) a legislative majority. Of course, you also have your own constituency to represent, as well as personal policy objectives.

To be an effective leader, you need to understand the legislative process inside out or align with someone who does. Otherwise your leadership will be challenged at the most inopportune times. Challenges risk loss of control, and careful management is what legislative leadership is all about.

**Responsibilities**

The leader is primarily responsible for managing the day to day affairs of the legislature, from referring bills to committee to scheduling floor votes. The tools for accomplishing these and many other tasks are found on the Leader’s Desk under the ‘Floor’ link. [Your instructor must designate you to be the chamber leader before you have access to this desk]

In addition to these administrative responsibilities, the elected leader is in the best position to decide the priorities of the legislature – what is generally called ‘ agenda setting.’ It is important to recognize that there will be many more demands than can be accommodated. Committees also play a central role in setting chamber priorities, and you will want to have good working relationships with your committee chairs. But committees are still likely to report more bills than you’ll have time to address. Ultimately it will be up to you to make the hardest decisions about priorities.

Set priorities; develop a plan for getting there, but be adaptable because things are going to change. Perhaps your most powerful tool is information. Knowing what other legislators are concerned about so that you are able to correctly anticipate how they will respond to your priorities.

**The Leader's Desk**
Your desk includes a number of tools. The instructor also has access to these tools and can schedule any bill for floor debate and voting whereas your scheduling ability is limited by rules of procedure.

Your first formal action will probably be assign members to committees. This is a collective decision and your job is simply to implement the chamber’s recommendations. The same goes for assigning committee chairs, which should shortly follow the assignment of committee positions.

Once the committees are up and running, your next task is to give the committees something to do. It falls to you to refer bills that members have sponsored to the appropriate committees. You have 24 hours to do this. A bill is typically referred to just one committee based on a match between its primary subject and a committee’s issue responsibilities (jurisdiction). A bill can be referred to multiple committees, but such a bill cannot be considered by the legislature until all committees have reported it.

**Committee reporting, calendars and debate**

As the first stop in the legislative process, committees have a big impact on floor proceedings. Most bills die in committee. But more importantly for you, you depend on committees to produce legislation in a timely manner. Your legislative session is not very long. If you sit back and wait for committees to act, there’s a good chance that valuable time will be wasted. Equally important, the committees that do act may not be the ones that share your priorities.

A competent leader is pro-active. They communicate with committee chairs, sending clear signals about priorities. Committee chairs will often be receptive to these requests, because a bill that the leader likes has a better chance of getting to the floor. But of course, this is a two way street. A smart leader may also want to assist a responsive committee by advancing its priorities. “You scratch my back…”

When a committee reports a bill, you will receive a message indicating that it is on the leader’s desk. You next need to place it on the appropriate calendar as defined by the rules.

This is also the time to ‘open debate’ on the bill so that members can discuss it and offer amendments.

**Floor scheduling**

**IN THE HOUSE**, under ordinary rules of procedure, bills must be scheduled based on their order of placement on the calendar (you will only see one bill at a time on the vote scheduling page). The alternative is a special rule from the Rules committee that proposes a different procedure. Once the rule has been adopted and reported by the Rules committee, the Speaker must schedule a floor vote on the special rule. If the chamber formally approves the rule, then the bill itself will become available on the vote scheduling page.

Members can also offer amendments to bills that have been placed on the calendar and opened for debate. Under ordinary procedure, all germane amendments introduced in advance must be considered before the bill can be brought up for a final vote. A special rule (if it is approved) can do almost anything a majority supports such as limiting amendments and debate time.

**IN THE SENATE**, bills that have been placed on the calendar are brought to the floor using a 'motion to proceed' proposed by the majority leader. The Floor/Calendar page of a Senate LegSim session describes how this works. The filibuster is an important part of Senate proceedings and the majority leader needs to make sure that they understand the floor scheduling process and what to do if a filibuster occurs.

**Voting**
As leader, you must enter the text of any voting motion that you schedule. It is your responsibility to ensure that what is in the text box reflects what lawmakers think they are voting on. For example, normally the bill as proposed by the committee is what is debated on the floor (not the bill as introduced).

Similarly, if amendments have been adopted, then the bill as described in the final vote motion needs to reflect those adopted amendments. It is every legislator’s responsibility to know what they are voting on, but the reality is that they are going to expect you to be organized and informed.

One question that should be generally answered is how long are votes open? Students have other things to do, and that needs to be considered. 48 hours is probably a safe bet as long as everyone understands that they need to be checking that frequently.

**Procedural motions**

In Congress, certain motions have precedence. The ‘Pocket Guide’ under tutorials provides some examples as does the Rules of Procedure. When a member makes a procedural motion, the presiding officer rules on it. For example, if a House member objects that an amendment is not germane, the presiding officer would decide the question. Although this rarely happens in the U.S. House (it is more common in the Senate), a member of the body could then appeal the Speaker’s ruling to the chamber. If a majority disagrees, the Speaker ruling would be reversed.

Dealing with procedural motions during on-line voting can be tricky, especially since you have limited experience. As leader, you will need to decide how to deal with them fairly and efficiently. One suggestion is to appoint another member to be parliamentarian, so that they can assist you as relative experts. It is also often wise to clearly communicating the reasoning behind your decisions in order to avoid misinterpretation.

**In Class Debates**

Live (synchronous) debates are much better than debates that occur via discussion threads. In our experience, a debate on a controversial subject early on in the course stimulates activity throughout the simulation. To pull this off, you will need at least one committee to send you a good bill early in the process. By ‘good bill,’ we mean a bill that addresses an important issue (from the perspective of your colleagues) and that is likely to divide them, such as a bill addressing immigration reform. A debate over a bill eliminating student loans will probably be much less engaging!

For each bill that comes to the floor, the chamber leader assigna managers on each side. On the support side, the committee chair is usually your first choice. On the oppose side, it might be a minority member of the committee or another member who feels passionately about the issue.

The primary role of the managers is to frame the debate with opening statements, and then to allocate their limited time to other members who share their general position, but hopefully will make additional thoughtful contributions to the discussion. The floor managers control the time, equally divided (someone will need to keep track of the time – your parliamentarian?). As the Pocket Rules describe, a member who has the floor cannot be interrupted without permission and it is up to the presiding officer to enforce the rules.

You do not have to preside during this debate. Remember that you are a political leader and not just a clerk. The leader can temporarily delegate the chair to another member. This member is then responsible for keeping track of the time used by each side, responding to procedural questions that may arise, and when appropriate, supervising any voting that may occur. Be sure that you are prepared to enter the results of any votes that occur in the classroom. Things may be a little clunky the first time through but the class will quickly get the hang of it!

**The Collective Action Problem**

Finally, as the chamber leader, you bear more responsibility than most in ensuring that the simulation is a rewarding experience for everyone. There is always a small number of students in a class who are ready to make the most of the opportunity, but it works best when the other 80% of students engage as well.

A collective action problem occurs when individually rational behavior produces a collectively irrational outcome. In this case, individual students may be reluctant to engage. As a result, everyone has a much less rich and fun learning experience. As leader, you can play an important educational role by helping to address this problem.

Students are reluctant to engage for lots of reasons. An important one is that they feel unqualified and intimidated compared to the students with student government experience who jump in early in the process. Instead of just doing things, explain why you are doing them. Reach out to students and involve them in the process instead of assuming that they must not be interested. Encourage committee chairs to be inclusive during deliberation and to allocate responsibilities. Encourage floor managers to spread the wealth in terms of asking a wide range of students to prepare for a floor debate.

Students will participate more as they realize they have something to contribute, and everyone involve will benefit as a result.

Good luck!