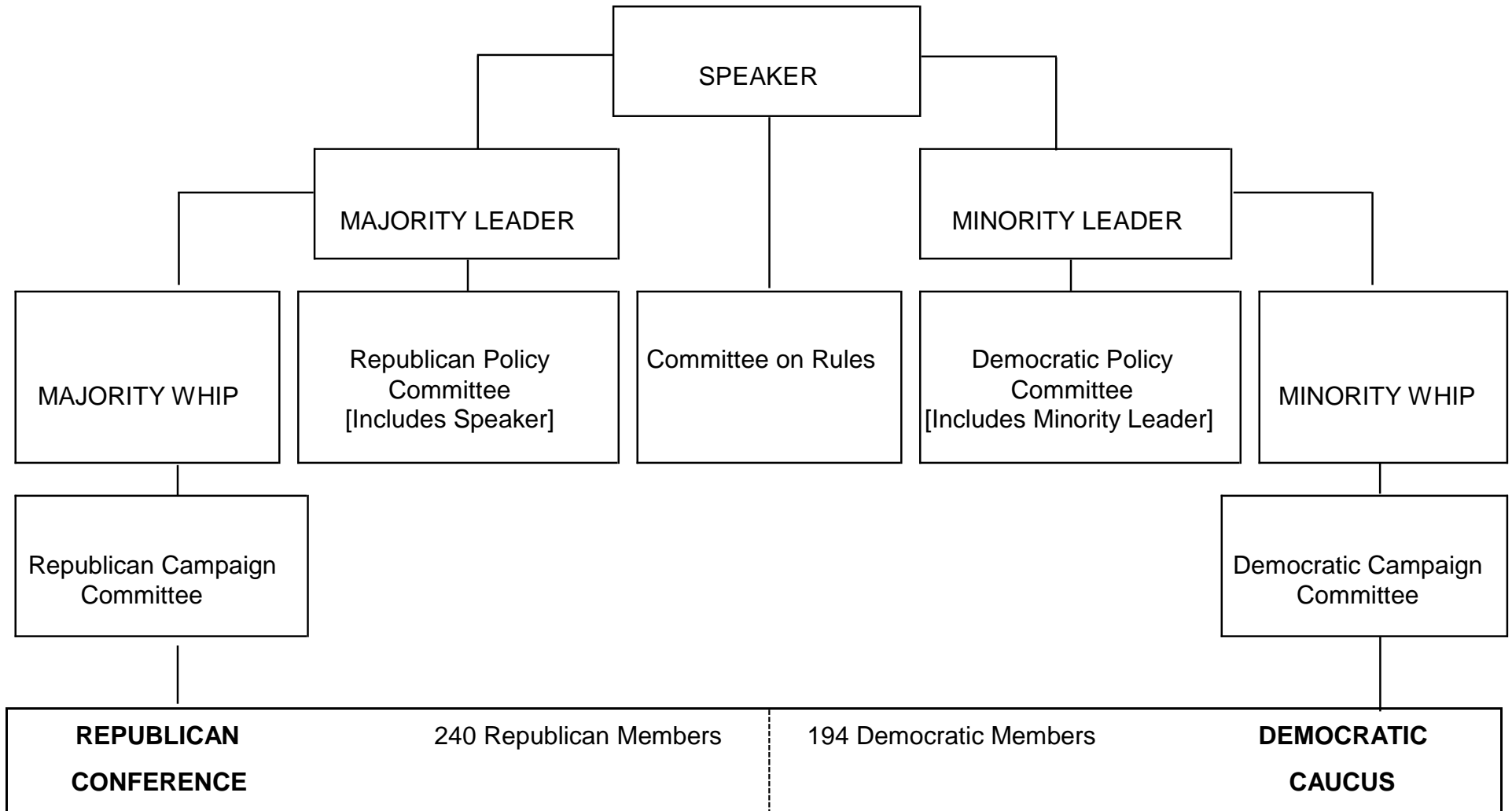
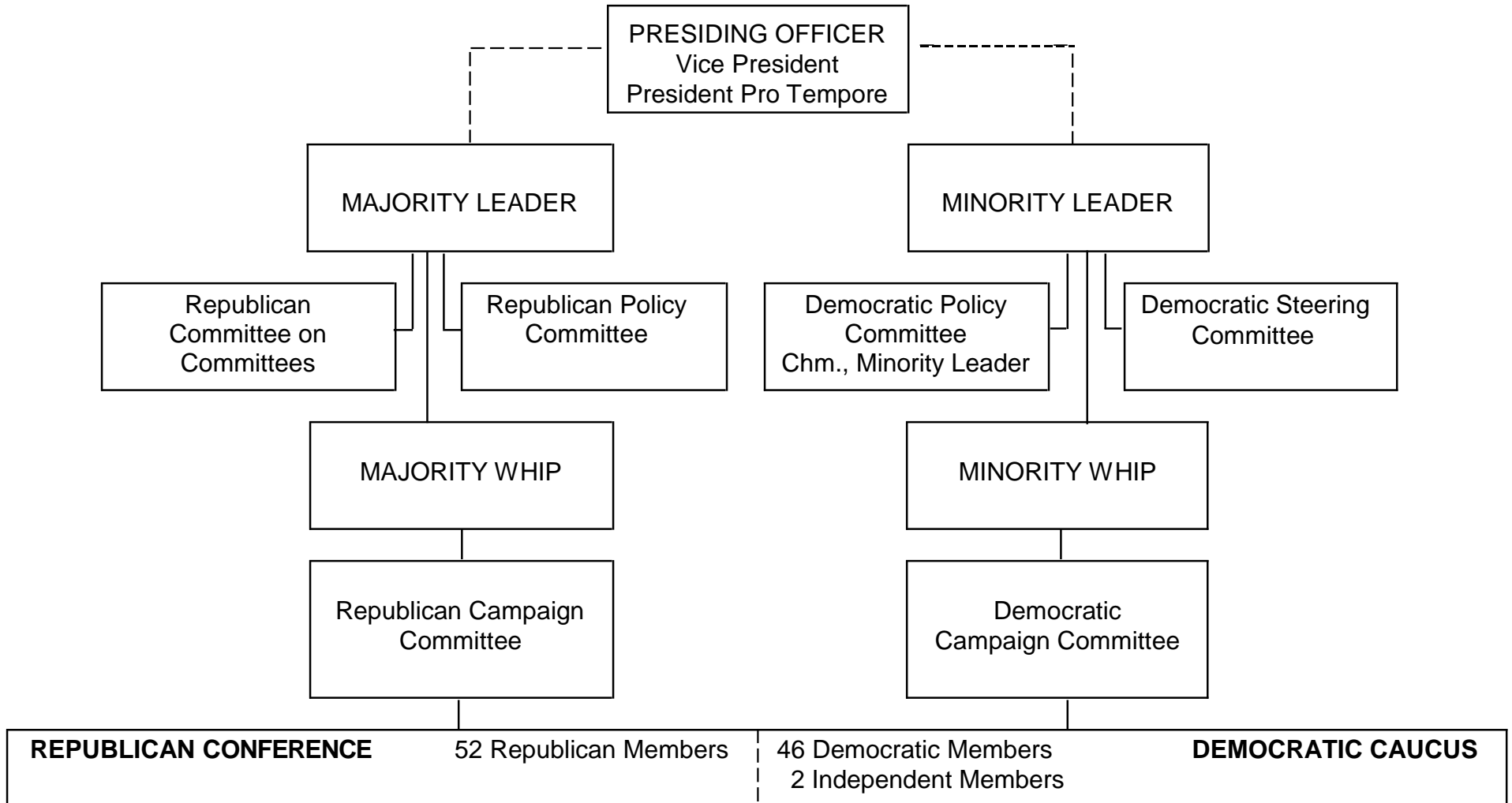


ORGANIZATION OF THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES, 115TH CONGRESS (2017-2018)



1 Vacancy (September 5, 2017)

ORGANIZATION OF THE SENATE, 115TH CONGRESS (2017-2018)

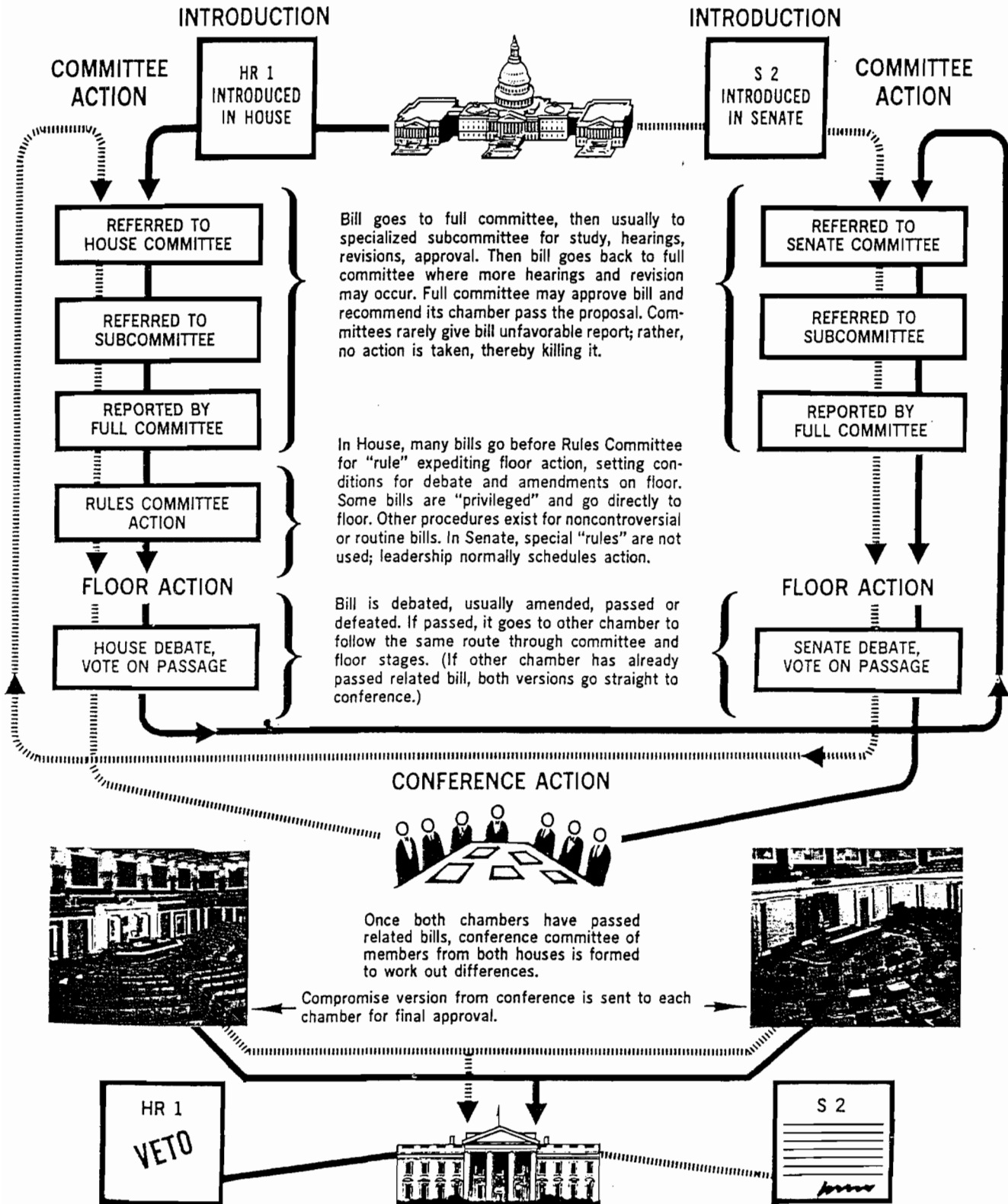


No Vacancies (September 5, 2017)

# HOW A BILL BECOMES LAW

This graphic shows the most typical way in which proposed legislation is enacted into law. There are more complicated, as well as simpler, routes, and most bills fall by the wayside and never become law. The process is illustrated with two hypothetical bills, House bill No. 1 (HR 1) and Senate bill No. 2 (S 2).

Each bill must be passed by both houses of Congress in identical form before it can become law. The path of HR 1 is traced by a solid line, that of S 2 by a broken line. However, in practice most legislation begins as similar proposals in both houses.



Compromise version approved by both houses is sent to President who can either sign it into law or veto it and return it to Congress. Congress may override veto by a two-thirds majority vote in both houses; bill then becomes law without President's signature.

## CONGRESSIONAL PROFILE

## House

## MEMBERSHIP

- **435** Members
- **5** Delegates
- **1** Resident Commissioner

## PARTY DIVISIONS

- **240** Republicans
- **194** Democrats
- **0** Independents
- **1** Vacancies

## Senate

## MEMBERSHIP

- **100** Senators  
(*Vice President votes in case of a tie*)

## PARTY DIVISIONS

- **46** Democrats
- **52** Republicans
- **2** Independents

## Congressional Profile Resources

## Membership Profile

The House Library compiles demographic data about the current membership of the House of Representatives and publishes downloadable lists of information including Members' previous occupations, educational levels, and military service.

## Member FAQs

Questions and answers explain the structure, operation, Leadership, and Officers of the House of Representatives, the requirements for membership, the nomination and election process, and the roles and responsibilities of Members.

## Member Data and Demographics

The House Press Gallery provides a demographic breakdown of the Members of the House of Representatives and facts on salaries, term limits, and departing Members.

## Search "the People's House"

The History, Art & Archives website presents profiles of the 11,000 Members of the House of Representatives. Content is searchable through biographical, bibliographical, and research collection information.

## Party Divisions

The political divisions of the House of Representatives from 1789 to present are illustrated in this chart that features the breakdown of Delegates and Members representing all political parties as well as the number of Representatives allotted each Congress.

## Mapping Congress

An interactive U.S. map displays subsets of Members of the House of Representatives by state or territory, Congress ranges, and Leadership roles.

## LEADERSHIP INFORMATION

House leadership is elected every two years at the beginning of a new Congress. The Speaker of the House is elected by the entire membership of the House, and other majority party and minority party leaders are selected by members of each party's delegation. The Republican Conference is the formal organization of Republican Members in the House; the Democratic Caucus is the formal organization of Democratic Members.

## Republican Leadership

## Speaker of the House

**Rep. Paul D. Ryan**

Elected by the entire membership of the House of Representatives, the Speaker presides over the House as its administrative head and serves as the leader of the majority party in the chamber.

## Majority Leader

**Rep. Kevin McCarthy**

Elected by the Republican Conference, the Majority Leader helps plan the legislative agenda for the House and schedules legislative business.

## Majority Whip

**Rep. Steve Scalise**

Elected by the Republican Conference, the Whip maintains communication between party leadership and members, builds Member support for the leadership's priorities, and informs and mobilizes Members on voting on key legislation.

## Republican Conference Chair

**Rep. Cathy McMorris Rodgers**

Elected by the Republican Conference, the Chairman presides over conference meetings.

## Republican Policy Committee Chairman

**Rep. Luke Messer**

Elected by the Republican Conference, the Policy Committee Chairman helps formulate and promote Republican policy initiatives.

## Democratic Leadership

## Democratic Leader (Minority Leader)

**Rep. Nancy Pelosi**

Elected by the Democratic Caucus, the Minority Leader directs the party's legislative strategies and operations and serves as a spokesperson for the minority party.

## Democratic Whip (Minority Whip)

**Rep. Steny H. Hoyer**

Elected by the Democratic Caucus, the Minority Whip maintains communication between party leadership and members, builds Member support for the leadership's priorities, and informs and mobilizes Members on voting on key legislation.

## Assistant Democratic Leader (Assistant Minority Leader)

**Rep. James E. Clyburn**

Elected by the Democratic Caucus, the Assistant Democratic Leader works with congressional caucuses and is the leadership liaison to the Appropriations Committee.

## Democratic Caucus Chairman

**Rep. Joseph Crowley**

Elected by the Democratic Caucus, the Chairman presides over caucus meetings.

## Historical Leadership Information

[Speakers of the House](#) (1789 to present)

[Majority Leaders](#) (1899 to present)

[Minority Leaders](#) (1899 to present)

[Republican Whips](#) (1897 to present)

[Democratic Whips](#) (1899 to present)

[Republican Conference Chairmen](#) (1863 to present)

[Democratic Caucus Chairmen](#) (1849 to present)



## Senate Organization Chart for the 115th Congress



The Virtual Reference Desk provides resources about [Senate Leadership](#), [committees](#), and [officers](#).

### Constitutionally Mandated Officers



*Vice President*

Pence,  
Michael R.



*President Pro Tempore*

Hatch,  
Orrin G. (R-UT)

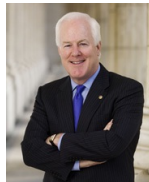
### Political Party Leaders

#### Republican Leadership



*Republican Leader*

McConnell,  
Mitch (R-KY)



*Assistant Republican Leader*

Cornyn,  
John (R-TX)



*Republican Conference Chairman*

Thune,  
John (R-SD)



*Vice Chairman of the Senate Republican Conference*

Blunt, Roy  
(R-MO)



*Republican Policy Committee Chairman*

Barrasso,  
John (R-WY)



*Republican Senatorial Committee Chairman*

Gardner,  
Cory (R-CO)

#### Democratic Leadership



*Democratic Leader Chairman of the Conference*

Schumer,  
Charles E.  
(D-NY)



*Whip*

Durbin,  
Richard J.  
(D-IL)



*Assistant Democratic Leader*

Murray,  
Patty (D-WA)



***Chairwomen  
of Policy &  
Communications  
Committee***

Stabenow,  
Debbie (D-  
MI)



***Vice Chair  
of  
Conference***

Warren,  
Elizabeth  
(D-MA)



***Vice Chair  
of  
Conference***

Warner,  
Mark R. (D-  
VA)



***Chair of  
Steering  
Committee***

Klobuchar,  
Amy (D-  
MN)



***Chairman  
of  
Outreach***

Sanders,  
Bernard (I-  
VT)



***Vice  
Chairman  
of Policy &  
Communications  
Committee***

Manchin,  
Joe, III (D-  
WV)



***Secretary  
of the  
Conference***

Baldwin,  
Tammy (D-  
WI)



***Chairman  
of  
Campaign  
Committee***

Van Hollen,  
Chris



## COMMITTEE INFORMATION

### Committee Directory

- [Committee on Agriculture](#)
- [Committee on Appropriations](#)
- [Committee on Armed Services](#)
- [Committee on the Budget](#)
- [Committee on Education and the Workforce](#)
- [Committee on Energy and Commerce](#)
- [Committee on Ethics](#)
- [Committee on Financial Services](#)
- [Committee on Foreign Affairs](#)
- [Committee on Homeland Security](#)
- [Committee on House Administration](#)
- [Committee on the Judiciary](#)
- [Committee on Natural Resources](#)
- [Committee on Oversight and Government Reform](#)
- [Committee on Rules](#)
- [Committee on Science, Space, and Technology](#)
- [Committee on Small Business](#)
- [Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure](#)
- [Committee on Veterans' Affairs](#)
- [Committee on Ways and Means](#)
- [Permanent Select Committee on Intelligence](#)
- [Joint Economic Committee](#)
- [Joint Committee on the Library](#)
- [Joint Committee on Printing](#)
- [Joint Committee on Taxation](#)

### Official Lists

**Official Alphabetical List of Members with Committee Assignments**  
[\[HTML\]](#) | [\[PDF\]](#)

**Official List of Standing Committees and Subcommittees**  
[\[PDF\]](#)

### Committee Activities

#### Committee Hearings

Complete information about House Committee hearings, including daily, weekly, and monthly schedules; meeting details; witness lists; and testimony and statements.

#### Committee Reports (1995–present)

Reports prepared by Committees concerning proposed legislation and findings on issues under investigation.

#### Committee Websites

Websites of the 26 Standing, Select, and Joint Committees of the House.





## Committees

### Committees

#### Standing

[Agriculture, Nutrition, and Forestry](#)  
[Appropriations](#)  
[Armed Services](#)  
[Banking, Housing, and Urban Affairs](#)  
[Budget](#)  
[Commerce, Science, and Transportation](#)  
[Energy and Natural Resources](#)  
[Environment and Public Works](#)  
[Finance](#)  
[Foreign Relations](#)  
[Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions](#)  
[Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs](#)  
[Judiciary](#)  
[Rules and Administration](#)  
[Small Business and Entrepreneurship](#)  
[Veterans' Affairs](#)

#### Special, Select, and Other

[Indian Affairs](#)  
[Select Committee on Ethics](#)  
[Select Committee on Intelligence](#)  
[Special Committee on Aging](#)

#### Joint

[Joint Committee on Printing](#)  
[Joint Committee on Taxation](#)  
[Joint Committee on the Library](#)  
[Joint Economic Committee](#)

### About The Committee System

Due to the high volume and complexity of its work, the Senate divides its tasks among 20 committees, 68 subcommittees, and 4 joint committees. Although the Senate committee system is similar to that of the House of Representatives, it has its own guidelines, within which each committee adopts its own rules. This creates considerable variation among the panels.

[More...](#)

### US Senate Caucuses

Informal congressional groups and organizations of Members with shared interests in specific issues or philosophies have been part of the American policymaking process since colonial times. Typically, these groups organize without official recognition by the chamber and are not funded through the appropriation process.

In the Senate there is one officially recognized caucus – the [Senate Caucus on International Narcotics Control](#) established by law in 1985.

### Nomination Hearings

Read Senate Judiciary Committee [hearing transcripts](#) for Supreme Court nominees.

### Supreme Court Nominations

[Supreme Court Nominations](#) is a list of nominees to the Court since 1789.

### Related Links

[Origins & Development of Senate Committees](#)  
[Frequently Asked Questions about Committees](#)  
[Find Executive Communications](#)

## Committees of the U.S. Congress

[Profile pages](#) for committees active in the current congress are listed here. The [Committee Consideration](#) tutorial explains committees within the context of the legislative process.

House	Senate
Standing Committees	
<a href="#">Agriculture</a>	<a href="#">Agriculture, Nutrition, and Forestry</a>
<a href="#">Appropriations</a>	<a href="#">Appropriations</a>
<a href="#">Armed Services</a>	<a href="#">Armed Services</a>
<a href="#">Budget</a>	<a href="#">Banking, Housing, and Urban Affairs</a>
<a href="#">Education and the Workforce</a>	<a href="#">Budget</a>
<a href="#">Energy and Commerce</a>	<a href="#">Commerce, Science, and Transportation</a>
<a href="#">Ethics</a>	<a href="#">Energy and Natural Resources</a>
<a href="#">Financial Services</a>	<a href="#">Environment and Public Works</a>
<a href="#">Foreign Affairs</a>	<a href="#">Finance</a>
<a href="#">Homeland Security</a>	<a href="#">Foreign Relations</a>
<a href="#">House Administration</a>	<a href="#">Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions</a>
<a href="#">Judiciary</a>	<a href="#">Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs</a>
<a href="#">Natural Resources</a>	<a href="#">Judiciary</a>
<a href="#">Oversight and Government Reform</a>	<a href="#">Rules and Administration</a>
<a href="#">Rules</a>	<a href="#">Small Business and Entrepreneurship</a>
<a href="#">Science, Space, and Technology</a>	<a href="#">Veterans' Affairs</a>
<a href="#">Small Business</a>	
<a href="#">Transportation and Infrastructure</a>	
<a href="#">Veterans' Affairs</a>	
<a href="#">Ways and Means</a>	
Special, Select, and Other Committees	
<a href="#">Permanent Select Committee on Intelligence</a>	<a href="#">Aging</a>
<a href="#">Select Committee on the Events Surrounding the 2012 Terrorist Attack in Benghazi</a>	<a href="#">Ethics</a>
	<a href="#">Indian Affairs</a>
	<a href="#">Intelligence</a>
Joint Committees	
<a href="#">Joint Economic</a>	
<a href="#">Joint Library</a>	
<a href="#">Joint Printing</a>	
<a href="#">Joint Taxation</a>	
Commissions and Caucuses	
<a href="#">Commission on Security and Cooperation in Europe</a> (U.S. Helsinki Commission)	<a href="#">Caucus on International Narcotics Control</a>
<a href="#">Tom Lantos Human Rights Commission</a>	



## Senate Committees

- [Chapter 1: Why Committees?](#)
- [Chapter 2: Types of Committees](#)
- [Chapter 3: Committee Membership](#)
- [Chapter 4: Operations](#)
- [Chapter 5: History - The Formative Years](#)
- [Chapter 6: Further Reading](#)



### Why Committees?

Committees are essential to the effective operation of legislative bodies. Committee membership enables members to develop specialized knowledge of the matters under their jurisdiction. As "little legislatures," committees monitor on-going governmental operations, identify issues suitable for legislative review, gather and evaluate information; and recommend courses of action to their parent body.

The Senate currently operates 24 of these fact-finding, consensus-building, policy-recommending panels. Although many are almost as old as the Senate itself, senators periodically update their jurisdictions and resources to meet the evolving demands of modern American life.

### Types of Committees

The Senate maintains [three types of committees](#). These include standing, select or special, and joint committees.

#### Standing Committees (16)

Standing committees are permanent bodies with specific responsibilities spelled out in the Senate's [official rules](#).

#### Special and Select Committees (4)

Select and special committees are created for clearly specified purposes and, although those that currently exist are now considered permanent, they did not necessarily enjoy that status at their inception. Special investigating committees, such as the 1973 Select Committee to Investigate Presidential Campaign Activities (the Watergate Committee), expire after they submit their final report to the Senate. There is no substantive difference between a select and a special committee. In earlier times, select and special committees lacked authority to report legislation to the full Senate, but some now have this power. While members of standing committees are formally designated by Senate resolution, members of select and special committees are officially appointed by the Senate's president or president pro tempore. (See the ["Appointment"](#) section below.)

#### Joint Committees (4)

In earlier years, both houses of Congress used joint committees more extensively than they do today for purposes of legislative and administrative coordination. (For their first century, the Senate and House of Representatives supplemented their individual rules with a system of joint rules, but these proved cumbersome and were abandoned in 1889.) At present, the Senate participates in the Joint Economic Committee, Joint Committee on Library of Congress, Joint Committee on Printing, and Joint Committee on Taxation. As their names indicate, they either perform housekeeping functions or conduct studies.

### Committee Membership

#### Appointment

The [committee assignment process](#) in the Senate is guided by Senate rules along with party rules and practices. Most new members arrive at the Senate with a "wish list" of committee assignments. They recognize that appointment to committees with a special impact on the interests of their states and regions can promote their own legislative effectiveness. For Senate party leaders, the

committee appointment process offers a means of promoting party discipline through the granting or withholding of desired assignments.

Until the mid-nineteenth century, the Senate made committee appointments either by vote of the full body or decision of its presiding officer. The first method proved inordinately time consuming; the second provoked controversy and dissatisfaction. Finally, in 1846, members agreed to a procedure under which both political parties within the Senate would submit for the full body's approval a slate of members to fill the various committee seats. This new plan fostered development of Senate party conferences (Democrats informally use the designation "caucus"). Independents and members of third parties have received committee assignments through one or the other of the major party conferences.

In the practice of recent years, party conferences convene before the start of each new Congress to elect leaders and determine committee assignments. Each party conference appoints a "committee on committees" to prepare a roster of members it wishes named to the party's specifically allotted committee seats. The percentage of a party's representation within the Senate determines the percentage of seats it will gain on each committee, although exact numbers are subject to negotiation between party floor leaders.

Party conference rules provide that each newly elected senator may choose a committee assignment before any other newly elected member is allowed to make a second committee choice. New senators make their selections according to a priority system that gives first choice to those who have previously served in the Senate, then to those with prior House service, and finally to those who served as their state's governor. All other new members have their order of choice determined by random drawing.

### **The Role of Seniority in Selection of Chairmen and Ranking Members**

Traditionally, the majority party member with the greatest seniority on a particular committee serves as its chairman. When the Republican party gained the majority in 1995, it altered its conference rules to allow Republicans on individual committees to vote by secret ballot for their committee's chairman, irrespective of that member's seniority. This adjustment was a logical consequence of the party's larger decision to place a six-year term limit on the service of its chairmen or, when in the minority, its ranking members.

### **Service**

Senate committees are divided, according to relative importance, into [three categories](#): Class A, Class B, and Class C. [Senate Rule XXIV](#) specifies that committee chairmen and members be appointed on the authority of a Senate Resolution, unless otherwise ordered. The rules also provide the following assignment limitations:

A, B, C's. Each senator may serve on no more than two Class A committees and one Class B panel. There are no limits to service on Class C panels.

**Class A subcommittees.** Within each of their assigned Class A committees, members who are not full committee chairmen may serve on three subcommittees, but they are eligible to chair—or serve as ranking minority member of—only one of those subcommittees. Appropriations subcommittee assignments are exempt from this limitation. Chairmen of full committees may chair only one Class A subcommittee among all their committee assignments.

**Class B subcommittees.** Senators may also serve on two subcommittees within their Class B committees. (There is no limit to service on Class C committees.) The chairman of a Class B full committee may not chair any Class B subcommittee, but may serve as a nonvoting member of any of that panel's subcommittees.

**"Super A" committees.** Republican Conference rules limit party members to service on only one of the so-called "Super A" committees—Appropriations, Armed Services, Finance, and Foreign Relations. Democrats observe the same practice for three committees—Appropriations, Armed Services, and Finance.

**Same-state rule.** Both party conferences provide that when a state happens to be represented by two senators of the same party, the two may not serve together on the same committee.

**Exceptions.** It is possible for a standing committee to temporarily increase its membership if an agreement is entered by the majority and minority leaders. As stated in [Rule 25.4c](#), "... the membership of one or more standing committees may be increased temporarily from time to time by such number or numbers as may be required to accord to the majority party a majority of the membership of all standing committees. When any such temporary increase is necessary to accord to the majority party a majority of the membership of all standing committees, members of the majority party in such number as may be required for that purpose may serve as members of three standing committees listed in paragraph 2. No such temporary increase in the membership of any standing committee under this subparagraph shall be continued in effect after the need therefor has ended. No standing committee may be increased in membership under this subparagraph by more than two members in excess of the number prescribed for that committee by paragraph 2 or 3(a)."

### **Operations**

The Senate provides for committee operations through its [Standing Rules XXIV-XXVIII](#).

## Legislative Role

The Senate refers approximately three thousand bills and resolutions to its committees during each two-year congressional session. Committees act on only a small number of these measures. Some of these bills and resolutions are introduced without expectation of immediate committee consideration, but simply to call attention to issues, or to test the likelihood of future support. Others receive no attention because they duplicate measures already being considered. Yet committees consider hundreds of bills in the course of their more than two thousand public hearings and business meetings each Congress. Unlike some other national legislatures, congressional committees customarily summon to their hearings a wide range of witnesses, including members of Congress, cabinet officers and other administration officials, representatives of business and labor organizations, and members of the general public. At the completion of the hearing process, committees "mark up" one or more related bills, often preparing a consolidated or "clean bill." In their authority to substantially revise proposed legislation, committees of the U.S. Congress enjoy powers not always shared by committees in the legislatures of other nations.

Ultimately, committees report to the full Senate approximately five hundred bills and resolutions—one-sixth of the legislation introduced each Congress. Occasionally, individual members seek to bypass committees by objecting to a measure's committee referral, thus keeping the legislation on the floor. Members may also circumvent potentially hostile committees by offering whole bills as amendments to other bills at the time of their floor consideration. In the Senate, unlike the House of Representatives, amendments generally do not have to be germane to the subject of the bill being amended. In the vast majority of cases, however, members work through the committee system.

## Investigative and Oversight Roles

Without significant investigative powers, Congress could not effectively pursue its legislative functions. Decades before he became president, Woodrow Wilson wrote that "the only really self-governing people is that people which discusses and interrogates its administration." He concluded that Congress' "informing function should be preferred even to its legislative function." With the passage of time, the role of Congress has broadened from merely informing itself to informing the nation. In the 1920s a reluctant witness challenged the right of a Senate committee to force a private citizen to testify. In the landmark case *McGrain v. Daugherty* (1927), the Supreme Court firmly established a comprehensive reading of congressional investigative power, noting that a "legislative body cannot legislate in the absence of information," and that "some means of compulsion are essential to obtain what is needed." Approximately one-quarter of all Senate committee hearings relate to oversight of executive agency operations. In most instances, standing committees serve as the Senate's principal investigative arm, but the Senate has also entrusted this responsibility to special and select committees.

## Staffing

Until the second half of the nineteenth century, Senate committees operated without either clerical or professional staff. In 1856, the Senate authorized clerical staff to assist committee chairmen and in 1884 provided clerical assistance to all other members who did not chair committees. Not until 1946 did the Senate significantly change committee operations by providing for hiring of professional staff. Previously, committees had to rely principally on executive branch agencies and outside interests for substantive policy information. Senate committee staffs grew rapidly over the next few decades, actually doubling during the 1970s. This increase occurred as a result of Senate Resolution 60, adopted in 1975. S. Res. 60 authorized each senator who was not a committee chairman to hire a legislative assistant for each the three Class A and B committees to which that senator was assigned. Today, approximately one thousand professional and clerical staff members support the work of the Senate's committees.

## Jurisdiction

[Senate Rule XXV](#) establishes standing committees, determines their membership and fixes their jurisdictions. Setting jurisdictional boundaries among committees has always proved troublesome. While some jurisdictions apply to oversight of specific executive agencies or precisely defined functions, others are not so obviously described. As a result, a half-dozen or more committees may claim jurisdiction in such broad policy areas as the national economy or environmental protection. While Senate Rule XXV also provides for select, special, and joint committees, it does not spell out their responsibilities. These are detailed in the Senate resolutions that established -- or updated -- the authority of these special panels.

## Rules

[Senate Standing Rule XXVI](#)(2) requires each committee to adopt and publish its own procedural rules. These rules must be consistent with the Senate's Standing Rules regulating committee procedures. The provision for individual committee rules took effect in 1970. According to its sponsor, the provision's purpose was to give "notice to all the world as to our procedures and [to notify] any witness who is subpoenaed or otherwise called as to his rights." For a useful compilation of these rules, along with the appropriate Senate Standing Rules, see the biennially published Senate document *Authority and Rules of Senate Committees*.

## Procedures

The indispensable role of committees in the legislative process places great power in the hands of their individual chairmen. Throughout the nineteenth century and into the first half of the twentieth, chairmen of major committees frequently used this power capriciously and arbitrarily to frustrate their opponents. In 1946, and again in the 1970s, the Senate moved to democratize

committee procedures. These reforms included, but were not limited to:

1. Establishment of regular weekly, biweekly, or monthly meeting dates;
2. Provision for special meetings with or without the chairman's approval;
3. Authorization for minority members to select and call witnesses;
4. Advance public announcement of hearings and advance filing of witness testimony;
5. Public access, including radio and television coverage, to meetings and hearings unless specifically closed by a committee majority as provided in Senate rules;
6. Public access to a record of committee proceedings and votes, and a formal public report of committee activities during the previous Congress; and
7. Timely reporting of a fully documented resolution authorizing committee expenditures.

Committees, except Appropriations and Budget, are not allowed to meet for more than two hours beyond the Senate's daily convening time, and not beyond two o'clock in the afternoon without the express permission of both party floor leaders, or their designees.

### **Subcommittees**

During its earlier years, responding to new needs or to accommodate individual members who sought the office space and staff that went to chairmen, the Senate haphazardly added new committees to the structure of existing panels. This produced a large number of committees, most of which seldom met or handled any legislation. Early in the twentieth century, there were nearly as many committees as senators. Occasional consolidations of the number and jurisdictions of Senate committees quickly gave way to renewed expansion. The Legislative Reorganization Act of 1946 changed this pattern. Since that time, the number of full committees has remained fairly constant, fluctuating between fifteen and twenty.

From 1947 to 1977, pressure for expansion was redirected from full committees to subcommittees. With a growing number of postwar era policy issues pressing for attention under a tightly consolidated committee structure, subcommittees naturally proliferated. Until reforms of the 1970s curtailed the practice, some committees--such as Judiciary--maintained as many as fifteen subcommittees, with the full committee's chairman presiding over several of them. Although the Senate currently places no formal limit on the number of subcommittees per legislative committee, the numbers range from none to seven. (The Appropriations Committee has thirteen.) As noted above (under Membership) as a result of recent reforms, a full committee chairman may now serve as a nonvoting member of each of that panel's subcommittees. But each full committee chairman may preside over only one Class A subcommittee among all the full committees to which he or she is assigned. This reform has opened the opportunity to chair a subcommittee -- or to serve as its ranking minority party member -- to a much larger number of senators, including very junior members.

### **History - The Formative Years**

#### **Select Committee System (1789-1816)**

The Senate created a standing committee system in 1816, more than a quarter century after its first meeting in 1789. The United States Constitution did not mention or provide for committees in Congress. Prior to 1816, the Senate relied on temporary select committees, the first of which was appointed on April 7, 1789, to draw up Senate rules of procedure. That committee filed its report within a week and, by April 18, the Senate had resolved that twenty rules "be observed." In those days, the Senate spent much of its time acting as a "Committee of the Whole," a parliamentary device for facilitating the legislative process.

This improvisational system made the select committees completely responsive to the Senate as a whole. The Senate determined their jurisdiction and membership, and they invariably complied with the will of the majority that had created them in the first place. Furthermore, if the Senate was not satisfied with the progress of a particular select committee, it could at any time create another committee to handle the same matter. The system also was useful for its flexibility, as the Senate could, if it preferred, dispose of legislation and nominations without any committee referral.

For the most part, these early Senate committees consisted of three members for routine business and five members for more important issues. During the first session of the First Congress, the largest committee, containing eleven members, was created to decide the salaries of the president and vice president. Also in the first session, the entire membership of the Senate was divided into two large committees, with half the senators on the committee to prepare legislation establishing the federal judiciary and the other half on the committee to define the punishment of crimes against the United States. These committees obviously contained more members than was usual, and in the case of organizing the federal judiciary, a smaller subcommittee actually drafted the bill.

With the great number of temporary committees appointed each session, the position of committee chairman was not as influential as it would become later with the establishment of standing committees. Chairmen were often the senators who introduced the



legislation, since they had the most interest in the bill's passage. But generally the chairman was the senator who received the most votes in the balloting for committee members.

The chief disadvantage of the temporary committee system was that it encouraged an unequal workload for senators. During the first session of the First Congress, for instance, one very able senator served on twenty-two committees; a year later, in the second session, he was elected to thirty-six committees, while the average member served on only about eleven committees. Several senators served on only one or two, or none at all.

The increasing business of the committees, particularly in the handling of nominations, the pressing needs of national defense during the War of 1812, and the growing institutional needs of a body that was now over a quarter-century old, all pushed the Senate toward the creation of standing committees. In 1815, at the end of the War of 1812, the stage was set for the Senate to consider establishing its own system of standing committees. Meeting in temporary quarters—because the Capitol Building itself was under repair for damage that British troops had inflicted during the war—members of the Senate were most likely concerned about the permanency, continuity, and stability of governmental processes. Perhaps struggling with the issues of the war made members realize the need for greater expertise and a more specialized review of legislation. In addition, given the frequent movement of House members to the Senate, we may assume that former representatives brought with them a preference for the standing committee assignments that had become common in that body.

During the first session of the Fourteenth Congress, meeting in December 1815, the Senate appointed a series of select committees to report on various portions of the president's annual message to the nation. Instead of allowing these temporary committees to disband after they had completed their immediate work, the Senate utilized the same committees for other business during the session.

### **Standing Committee System (Since 1816)**

During the second session of the Fourteenth Congress, meeting in December 1816, the Senate agreed to create eleven permanent standing committees: Foreign Relations, Finance, Commerce and Manufactures, Military Affairs, Militia, Naval Affairs, Public Lands, Claims, Judiciary, Post Offices and Post Roads, and Pensions. Five members were appointed to each committee, with the exception of Commerce and Judiciary, each of which began with four members.

The appointment of standing committees permitted the Senate to assign long-term studies and investigations to those panels, in addition to regular legislative duties. For instance, the Commerce Committee's first assignments consisted largely of compiling statistical reports and conducting investigations required by the Senate on harbor improvements, foreign trade, canal construction, and shipping regulations. Standing committees also spent much of their time handling presidential nominations and petitions from citizens.

The significance of the change from temporary to permanent committees was perhaps little realized at the time. But this was a decisive moment in the institution's history. The sheer mass and complexity of the Senate's growing responsibilities demanded the division of labor and specialization that a permanent committee system offered. The changed structure of internal authority quickly became evident, for instead of the Senate telling its committees what to put into legislation, as it did in the years prior to establishment of the standing committee system, the committees assumed the prerogative of determining which substantive provisions the Senate should consider, and they became policy-making bodies instead of merely technical aids to the chamber. Whereas the Senate formerly set the agenda, the committees came to be, in effect the Senate's agenda-maker.

### **Further Reading**

Congressional Research Service. "[Senate Committees: Categories and Rules for Committee Assignments.](#)" 26 October 2006.

Congressional Research Service. "[Committee Assignment Process in the U.S. Senate: Democratic and Republican Party Procedures.](#)" 3 November 2006.

### **Senate Historical Office**

Information provided by the [Senate Historical Office](#).

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