

Frequently Asked Questions

What are the minimum qualifications to serve in Congress?

The Constitution establishes the minimum qualifications for Members of the House of Representatives and the Senate.

Members of the House must be at least 25 years old, a U.S. citizen for seven years and a legal resident of the state where the Congressional District is located.

Members of the Senate must be at least 30 years old, a U.S. citizen for nine years and legal resident of the state that elects him or her.

How do I contact my U.S. Senators?

Every state has two U.S. Senators who are elected to serve six-year terms. Mississippi's U.S. Senators are The Honorable Thad Cochran and The Honorable Roger Wicker.

Information about contacting other U.S. Senators can be found on the U.S. Senate's website.

Where can I find Information on legislation and voting records?

THOMAS is a handy site run by the Library of Congress that provides information on bills, voting records and other legislative acts of Congress. THOMAS can be found at <http://thomas.loc.gov>.

How many people does each Member of Congress represent?

Members of the House of Representatives each represent a Congressional District made up of about 650,000 people. These districts are normally redrawn every ten years following the National Census. Every state has two Senators who each represent the entire state.

The number of Representatives each state has is based on population, but each state has at least one. There are seven states that only have one Representative in the House: Delaware, Montana, North Dakota, Vermont, South Dakota, Alaska, and Wyoming. The District of Columbia has a non-voting Delegate in Congress who may participate in the proceedings of the House but is not permitted to vote.

How often are Members of Congress up for re-election?

Terms for Members of the House of Representatives are two years, so each of the 435 Members are up for election every two years (even-numbered years, including 2008).

Senators are elected for six-year terms. Unlike the House where every Member is up for re-election at the same time, only about 1/3 of all Senators are up for re-election every two years.

How many members of each political party are there in Congress?

In the 110th Congress, the House of Representatives has 233 Democrats and 202 Republicans.

The Senate has 49 Democrats, 49 Republicans, one Independent Democrat (Sen. Joe Lieberman of Connecticut), and one Independent (Sen. Bernie Sanders of Vermont). Sens. Lieberman and Sanders both organize with the Democrats, establishing a 51-49 Democratic Senate majority.

What are the leadership positions in Congress?

The Speaker of the House

The Speaker is the official leader of the House of Representatives. Though the Constitution does not specify who can or cannot hold the position, the Speaker is typically also an elected representative, and a member of the majority party. The Speaker's duties, regulated by House rules and customs, include administering the proceedings of the floor, recognizing Members to speak, and appointing Members to conference committees. Typically the Speaker delegates many of his day to day functions, including presiding over debate on the floor. The Speaker is also the chair of the majority's Steering Committee, which chooses the leadership of each House committee.

The current Speaker of the House is Nancy Pelosi (D-CA).

The House Majority and Minority Leaders

Each party elects a floor leader, who works to decide what legislation their party should support, and also is highly involved in choosing committee leadership. The Majority Leader is second in command to the Speaker, but the Minority Leader is the head of his/her party.

The current Majority Leader is Steny Hoyer (D-MD); the current Minority Leader is John Boehner (R-OH).

The House Majority and Minority Whips

Parties also elect Whips, who are deputies to the party Leaders and work to ensure that party members vote the way the party leadership intends.

The current Majority Whip is James E. Clyburn (D-SC); the current Minority Whip is Roy Blunt (R-MO).

The President of the Senate

The President of the Senate is the Vice President of the United States. Unlike the Speaker of the House, he is not an elected member of the Senate, and he cannot vote, except to break a tie.

The current President of the Senate and Vice President of the United States is Richard Cheney.

The President Pro Tempore of the Senate

In the absence of the President of the Senate (the Vice President), the President Pro Tempore is the official head of the Senate. He represents the Senate at formal events, and with the Speaker of the House, presides over the joint sessions of Congress. He is typically the most senior member of the majority party

The current President Pro Tempore of the Senate is Robert C. Byrd (D-WV).

The Senate Majority and Minority Leaders

The Senate Majority and Minority Leaders are similar to their counterparts in the House, but the Senate Majority Leader plays a larger role in determining the chamber's agenda and the leadership of committees than the Majority Leader in the House does.

The current Senate Majority leader is Harry Reid (D-NV); the current Senate Minority Leader is Mitch McConnell (R-KY).

The Senate Majority and Minority Whips

Like the House Majority and Minority Whips, the Whips in the Senate are deputies to their party Leaders and work to ensure party cohesiveness in votes.

The current Senate Majority Whip is Richard Durbin (D-IL); the current Senate Minority Whip is Sen. Jon Kyl (R-AZ).

What is the Congressional Research Service?

The Congressional Research Service (CRS) is a department of the Library of Congress that works exclusively as a nonpartisan analytical, research, and reference arm for Congress. Members and Congressional staff can ask CRS for information ranging from simple factual background to in-depth analyses of policy topics.

How can I find out what's happening in Congress right now?

To get a summary of what's happening on the floor of the House of Representatives, visit:<http://clerk.house.gov/floorsummary/floor.html>.

To find out what's on the schedule for the Senate, visit: http://www.senate.gov/pagelayout/legislative/d_three_sections_with_teasers/calendars.htm

The cable channels C-SPAN and C-SPAN 2 also carry live and recorded coverage of events in both houses. Live and archived video is also available on C-SPAN's website.