

SURVIVING INSIDE CONGRESS

Sixth Edition



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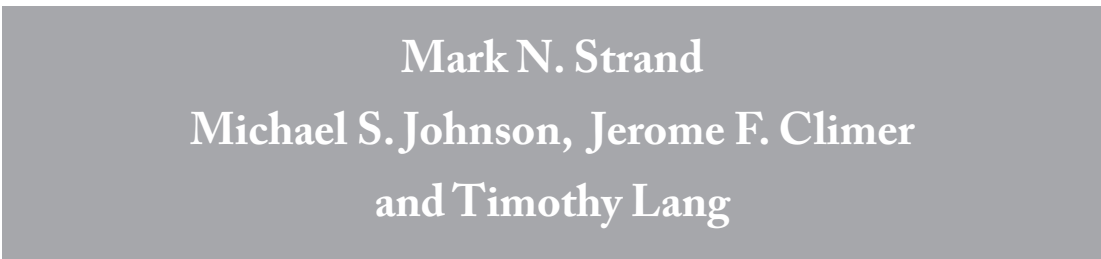





SURVIVING INSIDE CONGRESS

SIXTH EDITION

A guide for prospective, new and not-so-new
Congressional staff - and a tour for those who just want
to learn how it all really works



Mark N. Strand
Michael S. Johnson, Jerome F. Climer
and Timothy Lang

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This book is dedicated to the memory of congressional staffers Zachery Potts and Emma Thomson who died in 2022 in the service of the House of Representatives, while travelling with their employing Member, the late Congresswoman Jackie Walorski of Indiana. The dedication of staff to the Members of Congress and the constituents they serve is an all-too-often unsung strength of the Legislative Branch of government and a heartfelt treasure to those who work alongside them.

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Chapter 2: A Job or a Career?

There's no shame in using an appointment to a congressional staff as a stepping-stone. Nearly everyone who works for the Congress is a temp, most of all the elected officials who run the show but whose futures are as uncertain as the next election. If the boss is defeated, the entire staff is fired, though many stay on the Hill, working for another Member. What little job security there is usually derives from a staff member's dedication, talent and experience – not to mention the natural advantages of being an incumbent in any elected office.

Despite these harsh realities, congressional offices have little problem filling vacancies. They typically receive anywhere from several hundred to several thousand applications each year from people intent on serving the public by serving the institution and those elected to it. Although patronage no longer is the surest means to a job in government, elected officials still put a premium on ideological compatibility and familiarity within the district or state they represent – especially among those in their inner circle. Yet, education, professional skills and the ability to produce results are in greater demand than ever before, and there are many people with those skills eager to fill any slot that comes open.

People start their careers in different ways. They can start at the bottom as an intern or at the top as chief of staff. For most, however, the advice aspirants hear most often from veterans is: “Just get your foot in the door.”

This is good advice. The problem with Hill jobs is that they are rarely advertised. You have to be in the right place at the right time – you drop by an office to apply the day the front desk staffer walked out, for example – or you have to work your way into the informal grapevine that spreads the word when there's a vacancy.

For individuals in college or just graduated, the best avenue is an internship or entry-level staff assistant job. Prepare a resume that lists your education and experience. Include summer jobs and volunteer activities that demonstrate a willingness to work hard and make sacrifices for others. For heaven's sake, use spell-check and grammar review software – it is amazing how many people do not, and wonder why they never are called.

The Interview

It is essential to prepare for an interview, including research on the Member and the district. There are numerous books with biographies and information on the state or district, but the best place to start is usually the Member's own website.

Prospects should be able to explain why they would want to work for the Member they are interviewing with, what they like about the Member, and what they may have in common and what skills they bring to the office.

The person conducting the interview – most likely the legislative director or chief of staff – will not expect an encyclopedic knowledge but will be looking for certain skills. Preparation and research are two of the most important ways of communicating enthusiasm and diligence.

Your appearance and how you present yourself are important, as well. Dress in business attire – even if the House and Senate are in recess – and be on time. Don't look at your watch and turn off all of your electronic gadgets before you enter the office.

And finally, the interviewer will realize you're nervous and trying to make a good impression, so be yourself. If you are arrogant, abrasive or rude, it will be assumed that you would be a disruptive influence and not a good hire.

Hill offices are always looking for interns, especially in the non-summer months. A summer internship is a great experience – in the Senate, it even pays enough to cover your expenses in D.C. – but offices need interns most during the spring and fall. Most colleges have internship programs and often offer college credit for a semester in the nation's capital. Take advantage of them.

Hill veterans will quickly sort interns into three categories:

- Offspring of a friend of the Congressman, or FOCs.
- Nice kid, but not cut out for the Hill.
- Potential staff material.

Every moment an intern serves in a congressional office, he or she is auditioning for a permanent job – whether he or she understands that or not. Offices typically promote from within first.

Coming to work with a hangover one day can irreparably damage a reputation. Blowing off a request for help from a permanent staff member will also earn a permanent mark against you. Saying something offensive to a constituent for which a senior staff member has to apologize will probably get an intern sent home.

Staff, new or old, permanent or temporary, must always be on their best behavior, even after checking out for the day. Everyone, from the newest intern to the chief of staff, learns quickly that even their private actions can have consequences – if only because reporters and political opponents will exploit them to the detriment of the Congressman. In 2011, a group of young staffers rented a beach house in Annapolis and trashed the place while claiming to neighbors they were on congressional business. Even though the irresponsible staffers' boss had no idea what they were up to, the Congressman suffered the consequences.

On the other hand, working hard, lending a hand wherever it's needed and taking every opportunity to learn something new will get an intern noticed. A good attitude and great manners – especially around constituents – also go far.

When an entry-level opening does occur – usually at the staff assistant or legislative correspondent level – an intern who caught the eye of superiors is often on the short list of candidates. That's because

an internship provides far better evidence of an applicant's talents and abilities than a good resume, thirty-minute job interview and solid references.

If you can't relocate to Washington, D.C., look into the possibility of interning in a district or state office. Sometimes an internship at that level can be even more advantageous than one in D.C. When Members are in their home offices, their schedules may be less intense and provide opportunities to get to know the intern driving them from one town to another to meet with constituents.

Another popular method of attracting attention is to work on a campaign. Campaigns are incredibly intense but at the same time fun. The camaraderie between campaign workers is similar to the bond between soldiers. As Winston Churchill once observed with tongue firmly in cheek: "Politics is just like war, except in war you can only die once – in politics many times."

There are key differences between working on a campaign and working in a congressional office – some of which are discussed later in the book – but a smart, hard-charging staffer will usually be noticed, appreciated and rewarded.

Politics is one of the last great meritocracies. Academic credentials are nice – but they don't mean all that much in a Hill office. It doesn't matter where you came from, what your background is, or your gender, religion or race. If you help a Member succeed, he or she is going to find a way to keep you in the political family.

People who come to Washington without a job often are unable to land one right away. Don't be discouraged. Sometimes the timing is just wrong. The next best thing is to get into the orbit that revolves around the Hill. Political party organizations, think tanks, and lobbying and consulting groups, as well as the thousands of associations and non-profit groups headquartered in Washington, are always looking for research assistants. Many of these organizations work directly with the Hill and offer the opportunity to develop contacts, friendships and networks that form the Capitol Hill job grapevine.

Some will take a more direct route to the Hill, but these are people who, for the most part, will occupy senior level positions. A campaign

Hacks and Wonks

Hill veterans often make reference to “hacks” and “wonks.” Both terms are pejorative, but hack is considerably more pejorative than wonk.

Hacks are often despised for their perceived lack of convictions. They’re considered mercenaries, great campaigners who possess no belief system to guide their activities if their candidate is elected and they wind up with a job in government. They are the inside equivalent of outsider Jack Abramoff, the convicted former lobbyist who took down a number of Members and staff as a result of illegal activities.

Hacks are objects of scorn even when they’re on your side.

If you call someone a hack, it is an insult.

If you find yourself being unfairly characterized as a hack, chances are you’re projecting the wrong image.

Being called a wonk is far less devastating. A wonk is the political equivalent of a nerd. You might hear the term used to describe someone who is very bright but not politically astute. Occasionally though, the term might be vaguely complimentary. For instance, former House Speaker Paul Ryan, has been described as a wonk. A popular but now defunct *Washington Post* blog was named Wonkblog.

manager, for example, might be hired as chief of staff – but it’s not as common as you might assume – or a campaign spokesman might become press secretary, which is a far more natural fit. Someone with expertise in a topic near and dear to a Member’s heart might be hired into a policy position or onto a committee staff. Almost every situation is unique.

The greatest challenge facing those fortunate enough to be hired lies in fulfilling expectations. The public’s demand for efficient, cost-effective government often exceeds what mere humans can produce. That’s why it’s a good idea to bring more than altruism to a job on the Hill.

Typically, staff members share a desire to:

- Immerse oneself in public-policy issues and the art of governing;
- Make more money;
- Follow in the footsteps of a relative or mentor;
- Acquire celebrity, fame or notoriety in a policy area;
- Amass and exercise power
- Promote a partisan or philosophical agenda;
- Or simply serve the public.

Some new staff members consider themselves devotees of the art of politics: They are there to advance a party or ideology.

Others consider themselves issue specialists or policy experts and advocates: They are there to promote issue-related outcomes.

The most successful congressional staff members possess the best qualities of both – political and policy savvy with the intelligence to use it productively. Such staff members are essential to the successful operation of the Congress and make it possible for the elected to legislate.

Yet circumstances dictate that the vast majority of those working at any one time in a congressional office will take the experience and contacts they’ve accumulated to other jobs. They may find themselves employed in the executive branch, in academia, or the private sector.

Some staff leave public service, only to return through elective office. President Lyndon B. Johnson was a House staffer before serving in both Chambers and as President and Vice President. Former Senator and

Secretary of State Hillary Clinton started as an intern at the House Republican Conference, though later she was a Democratic staffer on the House Judiciary Committee. Former Speaker of the House Paul Ryan began his career as an intern in the Senate and later as a legislative assistant to the late Representative Jack Kemp, who, like his protégé, was also a Vice Presidential candidate. Former Speaker Nancy Pelosi and House Majority Leader Steny Hoyer both had internships for Maryland Senator Daniel Brewster—at the same time. Some were congressional staff in the home district: Republican Speaker Kevin McCarthy was a District Director for Representative Bill Thomas of California. All in all, according to the Congressional Research Service (CRS) 78 Members of the 117th Congress (15 in the Senate and 63 in the House) had been congressional staffers and 5 had been pages earlier in their careers.

Congressional staff anticipating they'd be there until retirement are often lured away by industry, other branches of government or the vast range of agencies that benefit from the skills and knowledge of those who've been intimately involved in the lawmaking process. Those who stay, though fewer in number than those who move on, may have arrived on Capitol Hill with plans of cutting their teeth there, then moving to the higher-paying, high-visibility jobs, but discover themselves better suited to working behind the scenes and end up remaining.

The staffers who do stay, for the most part, fit well in the unique role of congressional aide. They come to terms with the role of subordinate and the ego-bursting reality that they will seldom get credit or recognition for the ideas, concepts and innovations they bring to public policy. Their ideas see the light of day only when adopted, articulated and advanced by elected Members of the institution. They are agents of the constitutionally elected people they serve, and the good staff are comfortable and effective in that role. Their job satisfaction derives from the fact that their opinions are considered and sometimes their ideas are implemented, and the process is better for it.

These career professionals are the nucleus of Capitol Hill. They are the glue that holds the Congress together, the unseen, unheard, unsung heroes of the legislative branch. They know the ins and outs of the legislative process, as well as the history of almost every Federal policy, from environmental issues to tax laws.

Like all professions, theirs has distinctive cultural aspects, and archaic codes unique to the Hill. For example, among Congress' archaic codes is an antiquated system of bells, buzzers and lights that is used to summon Members of the Congress for a vote on the Chamber floor. In the old days, this was the only means to guarantee that every Member within earshot knew his or her presence was required.

Because voting is the one task a Member may not delegate, each Member must make his or her way to the floor when summoned – usually within 15 minutes. Members learn quickly how long it will take them to get to the Chamber from anywhere on the congressional campus and often cut their departure as close as humanly possible to give them time to finish whatever they were doing when summoned. There was a time when staff members were expected to be experts on the system of bells, lights and buzzers so they could remind the boss in case he or she lost track of time. Modern staffs rely on emails and texts, and by keeping one eye on C-Span, to stay aware of what's taking place on the Floor and keep their bosses updated by email or text message.

The system of bells, buzzers and lights, the Mace, the bowing protocols and other pomp and circumstance surrounding the House and Senate distinguish the institution and preserve its unique and revered place in our national body politic. Some of these may seem anachronistic to the uninitiated – they definitely can prove mind numbing to master and downright disturbing when they unexpectedly shatter your concentration – but they aren't likely to be abandoned just to make life easier for newcomers. Eventually, they'll contribute to the richness of your memories, whether your stay on a congressional staff proves to be a temporary oasis or the last job you ever have.

One dying tradition that could use resuscitation is the encouragement of staff friendships across the partisan aisle. And why not? For the most part staff from both sides have a remarkable amount in common: similar education levels and majors, similar salaries and working conditions, similar social circles – it's entirely possible that they find themselves on the same soccer sideline cheering their kids on towards the goal. They happen to have differing opinions on some issues – not unlike most family gatherings at the Thanksgiving dinner table. These relationships allow cooler heads to prevail during heated debates by creating informal

communication channels that allow staff to work on compromises without exposing their bosses to public attack. Today, far too few staff in the Congress have friends in the other party. This is one of the consequences of an environment that breeds partisan polarization and governmental gridlock, which will be discussed in more detail later in the book.

The good career professionals build relationships, but they also become expert mechanics in the craft of legislating. They obtain a working knowledge of parliamentary procedure and historical precedents. They develop expertise in particular areas of public policy and process making them indispensable to Members of Congress and other staff colleagues who do not have the luxury of sharpening those tools. The same holds true for communications directors and press secretaries who become important resources to the media and the public.

Whatever roles they might play in an office, star staffers should be skilled communicators able to connect easily with people both inside and outside Congress. A good staffer will know how to communicate with colleagues in either Chamber, whether they serve on personal, committee, or leadership staffs, each of which has a unique character and a language all its own. The best aides also perfect communications with counterparts in other branches and other levels of government, private sector organizations that have an impact on public policy and most importantly, the private citizens whose welfare is the reason for their service.

Their knowledge and skills enable the best staff to survive the daily challenges, as well as the winds of change that blow through the nation every decade or so, or, in the case of 2006, 2008, 2010 and 2014, 2018, 2020 – almost every two years (rarely in our history has Congressional turnover been so dramatic so often as it has the last twenty years).

New Members bring with them new staffs, but invariably they rely on the veterans to help them navigate through unfamiliar rules, procedures and protocols, to say nothing of the small fiefdoms and principalities that dot the landscape, from the massive enclaves of the Library of Congress to the offices of the Clerk, the Sergeant-at-Arms and the through the lines at the Longworth Cafeteria. Newcomers also find a universe that bears little resemblance to their expectations. They come to the nation's capital with dreams of conquering the panoply of complex issues facing America, from globalization's cultural and economic ramifications to educational

Genuine Politics?

In a speech delivered in 1993, famous anticommunist dissident and later President of the Czech Republic Václav Havel said: *“Those who claim that politics is chiefly the manipulation of power and public opinion, and that morality has no place in it are wrong. Political intrigue is not really politics, and, although you can get away with superficial politics for a time, it does not bring much hope for success... Genuine politics - politics worthy of the name - is simply a matter of serving those around us: serving the community, and serving those who come after us. Its deepest roots are moral because it is a responsibility, expressed through action, to and for the whole...”*

needs in a rapidly changing scientific and technological environment. They quickly learn that answering constituent mail can be their most urgent priority on any given day.

Less daunting than coming up with solutions to the world's problems is the need to review the lessons you learned in high school civics:

- The entire House of Representatives must be elected every two years, forming a completely new Congress that must elect (or re-elect) its party leaders, adopt its own rules and appoint its officers; Members of the Senate serve six-year terms, but the terms are staggered so that approximately one-third of the Senate is elected every election cycle – making the Senate the only ongoing legislative body in the world.
- Senators represent entire states; House Members represent districts within each state – districts that are a fraction the size of the states and whose inhabitants tend to be more cohesive in their attitudes (with the obvious exception of single-Member states – Alaska, Delaware, North Dakota, South Dakota, Vermont and Wyoming).
- Senators serve on more committees and have larger staffs to support their efforts. House Members typically don't even have committee specialists on their staffs until they achieve seniority – nor are they required to develop expertise in as broad a range of committee topics.
- Some believe that all House Members want to be Senators and all Senators want to be President. However, the election of 2008 was the first in nearly half a century to elect a Senator as President. Only one Member of the House has been elected directly to the Presidency and that was James Garfield in 1880. (Republican Leader Gerald Ford was, however, appointed to fill a vacancy for the Vice Presidency when Spiro Agnew was forced to resign the office in 1973; Ford soon became President when Richard Nixon resigned in August 1974.)

The Founders' Ideal Representative

In *Federalist* paper 52, the author described Members of the House as a kind of super-advocate on behalf of their constituents: "As it is essential to liberty that the government in general should have a common interest with the people, so it is particularly essential that the branch of it under consideration [the House] should have an immediate dependence on, and an intimate sympathy with, the people."

The Culture of the House and Senate

Often referred to as baptism by fire, staff will have a very steep learning curve when they first start out, but they are expected to have a

cursory knowledge of institutions of government and how they work. For example, they should know the answer to some very basic questions:

Does the Senate originate appropriations bills?

Does the House ratify treaties?

Do House Members vote to confirm nominees to the Federal court system?

Can a supermajority of the Senate and House amend the Constitution?

Can a simple majority vote of both houses override a veto?

Do House members serve for four years?

Do all Senators and House Members run for office at the same time?

Was the capital of the United States always Washington, D.C.?

(The answer to all of these questions is no, by the way.)

Most of your peers will assume you understand such basics and will not take time to explain them. This assumption is so firmly entrenched, in fact, that it has led to conversational shorthand to describe congressional actions. Were a House colleague to say, for example, that a bill has gone to Rules, he or she would mean the legislation has been approved at the committee level and submitted to the Rules Committee where the rules and scheduling for debate on the Floor are established. The “Floor”,

The Cost of Political Polarization

Unfortunately, as society becomes more politically polarized, extremists on both sides are casting aside the charade of rationality and appealing to raw emotions – as recent elections clearly demonstrated. In 2012, left-wing extremists disjointedly claimed Mitt Romney should be disqualified because in some way he was somehow responsible for someone’s cancer death, and right-wing extremists claimed President Obama should not be President because he wasn’t born in the United States. The day following the 2016 presidential election, Frank Newport, the editor-in-chief of the Gallup Polling, reported that the contest broke two of his organization’s records: Donald Trump and Hillary Clinton were the two most negatively evaluated candidates and Americans’ views of the negative tone of this campaign were the highest in Gallup’s history. Large numbers of Americans have not even accepted the results of the 2020 election between Donald Trump and Joe Biden, and the January 6 riots at the U.S. Capitol have left Americans describing their political opponents in ways not heard since the American Civil War. With negative campaign tactics, the bitterness that results transfers to governance following the election. This emotional and irrational thinking is dangerous for a republican form of government. Free society functions when people can engage each other in the battle of ideas respectfully in a forum that allows all points of view to be persuasively expressed to those elected to make decisions on behalf of the people. If people are just hurling unsubstantiated insults at each other, governing is not possible.

by the way is not the surface you walk on but the Chamber in which the Members meet for formal debate and vote.

The same “rules” expression will not be heard in the Senate, which does not rely on a committee to control the flow of work on the Senate floor or determine how long debate will be. In most cases, the rules of the Senate do not vary from one bill to the next, and the Senate majority leader handles scheduling.

Keep in mind that when it comes to official actions, including how Members of Congress vote or manage their offices, the Constitution does not make elected officials answer to anybody except their constituents (unless their Chamber sanctions them for misbehavior).

Become familiar with the culture of the legislative branch as a whole, as well as distinctions between the culture of the Senate and the culture of the House.

The House consists of 435 independent players representing all of the people in 435 congressional districts in the nation. In addition, the House has five non-voting delegates from the territories and one from the District of Columbia. It is a majoritarian institution – meaning it was deliberately designed to allow a unified majority to push its agenda through, even if it means steamrolling the minority.

The 100 U.S. Senators are equally independent. However, the Senate is deliberately designed to protect the rights of the minority party, even if it often frustrates the will of the majority party.

The stature of the offices these elected men and women hold affords them a semblance of respect among fellow citizens, their colleagues and staff. Maintaining appearances is essential and part of the culture. Congressional employees may be on a first-name basis with the boss in the office but are expected to address him or her formally in the presence of outsiders: Say “Congressman Smith” or “Congresswoman Applegate,” for example, when speaking to a constituent, other Members or the media. Always address other Members formally unless invited to do otherwise – and even then, follow the same rules that apply in your relationship with your boss.

Familiarize yourself with the roles of other staff in your congressional office, as well as personnel in other offices, committees and the leadership.

Employees of the legislative branch are much more interdependent than, for example, those in the Department of Agriculture, which has somewhere in the neighborhood of 100,000 employees with a range of specialties and a measure of autonomy working in offices scattered around the world. A congressional employee, on the other hand, might oversee her office's computer operations while the staffer sitting next to her might manage scheduling and another neighbor might be a central player in legislation or constituent services. Mutual respect is vital to peaceful and prosperous co-existence.

Successful staffers respect the history of the Congress. They become sensitive to its ebb and flow. They recognize it as a living part of the body politic, one with muscles and nerves that give it elasticity and ever-changing form. Successful staffers understand the goals and aspirations of the Member they serve and how those hopes affect the behavior of not only the Member but his or her staff and everyone else working on the Hill.

Learn to recognize formal and informal power structures and the relationships among the staffs of Members, between the staffs of Members and those of leadership. Leaders in both parties may do their best to persuade Members to march in lock step, for example, but they have limited

Who are the House Buildings Named For?

Nicholas Longworth from Ohio was a prominent Republican politician active during the first few decades of the 20th century. He served as House Majority Leader from 1923 to 1925 and subsequently as Speaker of House from 1925 to 1931. He was married - not always happily - to President Teddy Roosevelt's daughter Alice, who campaigned against him for reelection.

Republican Joseph "Uncle Joe" Cannon served as Speaker of the House from 1903 to 1911, and historians generally consider him to be the most authoritarian Speaker in United States history. At the time of Cannon's election, the Speaker of the House concurrently held the chair of the Rules Committee. He lost his power in a Republican revolt led by George Norris and Nicholas Longworth.

Sam Rayburn of Texas, also known as Mr. Democrat, served as the Speaker of the House for 17 years, the longest tenure in U.S. history. He was a close friend and mentor of President Lyndon B. Johnson. Rayburn's career as Speaker was interrupted twice: 1947-1948 and 1953-1954, when Republicans controlled the House. During those periods he so disliked the term *Minority Leader* that he asked to be referred to as the *Democratic Leader*, a practice that continues to this day. He was known for fairness and integrity and had close friends in both parties.

Three Perspectives on Representation

- “A portrait is excellent in proportion to its being a good likeness – the legislature ought to be a most exact transcript of the whole society.”
 - James Wilson (Signer of Declaration and Constitution and one of the original Supreme Court justices)
- “Your representative owes you, not his industry only, but his judgment; and he betrays instead of serving you if he sacrifices it to your opinion.”
 - Edmund Burke, Member of Parliament
- “Members of Congress need to be at least as clear on the reasons why they would risk losing as they are on the reasons why they wanted to come here in the first place.”
 - The late Representative Henry Hyde of Illinois

leverage to do so. That is why former Senate Majority Leader Trent Lott titled his book on congressional leadership *Herding Cats*.

Be aware most of all that the Congress is a well-lighted fishbowl that is monitored 24 hours a day by lobbyists, traditional media, independent bloggers, political adversaries and dozens of non-profit organizations whose existence is dependent upon their self-appointed role as overseers of the body politic. Those in government are often painted with broad strokes and harsh tones. Sometimes it seems that as far as these watchdogs are concerned, whatever public servants are doing is never enough and usually wrong.

The Balancing Act

Members of Congress serve their constituents in many ways, but the most difficult is making tough decisions for the good of the nation. Some of the more cynical political observers, such as political scientist and former Hill staffer David Mayhew in his classic book *Congress: The Electoral Connection*, believe that Member of Congress are solely motivated by the desire to be reelected. In reality, it is impossible to apply a common motivation to each Member of Congress.

In making decisions, legislative staff members must learn to balance political awareness, sensitivity to voter attitudes, ideological objectives, the legislative process and responsiveness to constituents.

All power is situational and temporary. Members of the House and Senate get to the Congress by a variety of routes and for a variety of reasons. The same holds true for their staff. The positions they hold are not necessarily based on skill, experience or knowledge. Their tenure is subject to the whim of the electorate or their boss. The Constitution sought to force Members to make decisions in the Congress by consensus and the system tends to grind to a halt when Members forget this. In recent years, the House and the Senate have been acting more like parliamentary bodies where a Member's vote can be predicted based on partisan affiliation, rather than regional differences, the economic interests of individual districts, and other traditional distinctions.

Because power there is transient, there are no formal rules for how a Member should decide whether to support or oppose a measure. It should come as no surprise then that when a Member is forced to take a position,

political scientists have made careers theorizing on what motivates different Members to make the choices they do. Academia has speculated that legislative decision-making is shaped by outside pressures, the imperative to compromise, simple logic, and what decision is most likely to get them reelected.

Among the reasons it's hard to decide whether a Member should vote his or her conscience or his or her constituency's sentiment is the leeway provided by the Founding Fathers when they took what they considered the best qualities of a republic and best qualities of a democracy and created our democratic republic.

- A democracy is directly governed by majority rule: In our case, the ballot box is used to elect individuals and adopt or reject initiatives or referendums.
- A republic is indirectly governed: In our case, the U.S. Constitution puts the burden on those elevated to positions of authority to make decisions based on their best judgment.

In the Federalist Papers, James Madison defined a republic as a representative democracy as opposed to a direct one. Reflecting both forms is not easy, particularly when a representative knows more about an issue than the constituents. Thus, there is a never-ending tension between following the people and leading them – and conflicting obligations, as well. Members of Congress are sometimes challenged to weigh their beliefs and their knowledge against public opinion.

There are circumstances in which a Member must make a choice between voting a conviction that one course of action is in the best interests of the country and his or her district or state, or voting for another course that seems to be the more popular among his or her constituents. In the former case, the Member is then obligated to return to the district or state and convince the constituency that his or her judgment should prevail over theirs.

A third situation can arise where the House Member or Senator feels obligated to vote on an issue in the best interests of the country, but maybe not in the best interests of the district or state. In that case, again the Member is obligated to return home and explain his or her vote or to

do that educational work before the vote is cast. These are the challenges that face a representative in a republic form of government.

There is often no right or wrong course, only choices to be made. However, Members must bear in mind that many elected officials and their staffs have been doomed when a strongly held belief or principle conflicted with the equally adamantly held opinions of voters back home. Just ask the Blue Dog Democrats who lost their seats in 2010 after they voted for President Barack Obama's healthcare reform bill.

Whether or not a Member is motivated solely by the desire to be reelected or perhaps gain power within the Congress by pleasing their party's leadership, or even just trying to enact good policy, political decision-making seems similar to what a business school graduate would refer to as the rational choice model of decision-making. According to this theory, a decision maker analyzes the situation, examines the possible alternatives, weighs the cost and decides on the best solution. While not exactly the same as a businessman, the seasoned legislator does indeed use a form of a rational decision-making model where outcomes are measured in the currency of politics: votes and political support, not dollars and cents. Everything else being equal, politicians will seek to propose the solution that maximizes political gains and minimizes political costs. (Political gains may include gaining power within the Congress or setting up a run for higher office as well as trying to get reelected).

Of course, government is not a business, and cannot be run like one. But that is not the point here. While politicians have specific reasons for the positions they take that may or may not produce the typical business outcome, they are rational people making decisions that maximize political benefits. Whatever their political motivation, however, there is an expectation by the media and the public that they explain their actions in rational terms that maximize the public benefit. Think of it as "rational justification."

The public, therefore, uses the rational choice model as the standard of accountability. The irony is that, even if they arrived at their own policy preferences through non-rational or emotional means, they will still want to justify their opinions in a rational way.

In short, whether or not a policy proposal actually is made consistent with the rational-choice model, politicians will need to justify their actions according to it.

The health care debate in the 111th Congress (2009-10) is a good illustration. Let's use the example of medical liability (the authors are not commenting on the merit of the proposal, but it's a good example because it divided the Congress along party lines). A purely rational decision-making process based on finding the best solution at the lowest cost might have included medical liability reform. Proponents argue that tort reform eliminates defensive medicine and needless diagnostic tests. Defenders of medical liability claim that cost savings brought about by tort reform would prevent innocent victims of medical malpractice from obtaining justice. Both sides were backed by strong political proponents. However, for the Democrats, who controlled the legislative process and drafted the bill, the political cost of including a rational economic decision opposed by one of their key coalition groups – the trial lawyers

Voting in the House in the 116th and 117th Congresses

One of the most “congressional” things a person will see on Capitol Hill is Representatives and Senators briskly making their way to their respective Chambers to vote when summoned. However, during the 116th and 117th Congresses, you would have seen far fewer House Members going to and fro like this. In May 2020, the House instituted proxy voting in response to the coronavirus pandemic. Under this system, a Member could ask a colleague to vote on their behalf, though the absent Member would need to provide instructions to their designee on each question put before the House. Prior to this, the House had never allowed proxy voting on the Floor and voting on behalf of another Member was considered a violation of ethics rules.

Much could be said about the effect of proxy voting on the House. Votes took much longer than usual since designated proxies had to announce the vote of each absent Member. More importantly, Representatives missed out on the opportunity to build relationships with their absent colleagues, whom they would normally see in committee rooms and on the Floor, which is an especially important area for Member-to-Member interaction. For instance, there were far fewer House Members in DC, especially on Thursdays and Fridays, since that meant they had extra time in their districts. Also, some Members came to Washington for only a fraction of the time that they normally would. In 2022 alone, when the worst of the pandemic was well behind us, dozens of Members voted by proxy literally hundreds of times out of 549 roll call votes. The loss of opportunities for Representatives to interact is regrettable since the House functions best and Members are most effective when they have strong relationships with each other.

The Senate never adopted proxy or remote voting for the Floor in response to the coronavirus pandemic.

At the beginning of the 118th Congress, the House discontinued proxy voting.

– would be too great and would split their governing coalition. Nonetheless, the policymakers in charge would need to make an argument to the public about why it is not cost effective to include tort reform. Ultimately the public judges that explanation at the ballot box.

To be fair, try to imagine the reaction to a member of the Republican Party suggesting his party support tax increases to reduce the deficit. Whether an actual economic rational choice can be made to justify it, proposing tax increases would involve political costs that most Republicans could not afford.

These Members arrive at their decisions rationally, but they are hardly going to issue a press release stating they were opposed to an important reform because it would reduce campaign contributions in the next election cycle. Instead, they will come up with an explanation that voters and the media will accept as being based solely upon the merits of the issue at hand. It seems confusing, but remember the maxim mentioned earlier: Members of Congress seek to maximize political gains while minimizing political costs.

President Lyndon B. Johnson, who had also been Senate Majority Leader, experienced that conflict when as President he tried to convince his fellow Southern Democrats to support the Civil Rights Act of 1964. Despite the fact that Johnson previously had resisted such change when he was in the Senate and despite their assurances that they would support the measure when it came to a vote, many of those Democrats voted nay. Had it not been for Johnson's long-time political adversary (but not enemy), Republican Leader Everett Dirksen of Illinois, he probably would not have been able to produce the votes he needed to win passage of the Civil Rights Act. Johnson rightly calculated that while many Southern Democrats thought the political costs too high for supporting the Voting Rights Act, the majority of Republican Senators did not, and therefore he could appeal to them to pass the landmark legislation. And they did.

More recently, when President George W. Bush determined it was necessary to the survival of the world financial system to pass the Troubled Asset Relief Program (TARP) legislation, he had to appeal to his political opponents in the Democratic Party to pass the emergency legislation because the political cost of supporting what constituents perceived as a "bailout" was too great for many Republicans.

The passage of the TARP legislation was extraordinary. More often you'll find that congressional work can be mundane, seemingly counterproductive and sometimes counter intuitive, with conclusions and outcomes often elusive. This sometimes produces a conflict of objectives between representing state or district interests and serving national or partisan political or policy interests. Dealing with that conflict in priorities also complicates the demands on your time. Egos, political ambitions and jealousies are magnified in this environment, usually at the expense of staff relationships and office efficiency.

And yet these quirks contribute to the human dynamic that is the U.S. Congress and make it an unparalleled gathering of Americans trying to ensure that self-government lives up to its ever-expanding potential. And it is this institution of Congress that has shaped the greatest government in history for the richest country and the most blessed people.

Chapter Two Summary

- The majority of congressional staff do not remain with the Congress for a life-long career.
- Those who do remain form the nucleus of Capitol Hill. They are the glue that holds the Congress together. They know the ins and outs of the legislative process, as well as the history of almost every Federal policy, from environmental issues to tax laws. Like all professions, theirs has distinctive cultural aspects and archaic codes unique to the Hill.
- According to the Congressional Research Service, 78 Members of the 117th Congress had been congressional staffers and 5 had been pages earlier in their careers.
- Job openings in the congressional world are rarely advertised; it pays to be at the right place at the right time and to know Members of the House, Senators or other staff. Internships and campaign work (voluntary or paid) are great avenues to entry.
- Politics is really one of the last meritocracies. Academic credentials are nice, but they don't mean all that much in a Hill office.
- Staff must become familiar with the culture of the legislative branch as a whole, as well as distinctions between the culture of the Senate and the culture of the House. Successful staffers respect the history of the Congress.
- Be aware most of all that the Congress is a well-lighted fishbowl that is monitored 24 hours a day by mainstream media, independent bloggers, lobbyists, political adversaries and dozens of non-profit organizations whose livelihoods depend upon their self-appointed role as overseers of the body politic.

Chapter 3: Who's Who

Every organization has a hierarchy, whether it is Microsoft or the PTA. Understanding such hierarchies can mean the difference between succeeding or merely surviving, particularly in Washington, D.C.

Just as no Member of Congress owes allegiance to any other, neither is there uniformity in staff titles and their meaning or function. While each office has great autonomy, Members must respond to a maze of obligations ranging from committee assignments and party loyalties to constituent demands. Each office has its own unique hierarchy.

A Member's interests typically reflect his or her personal background and the concerns of his or her constituents. A district from Kansas or Iowa, for instance, is likely to elect a Representative interested in farm policy. Those representing western states are likely to seek appointment to the Interior or Natural Resources Committees. A lawyer or a doctor prior to election may want to serve on the Judiciary Committee or a committee involved in health issues such as Ways and Means or Energy and Commerce.

When first elected, most Members don't get their first choice and not all get a committee that addresses their home district's or state's most pressing concerns. They're more likely to be appointed to second-choice committees, where they await opportunity to move up should someone retire or be unseated. There are rare times, however, such as a change of control in the Chamber, where numerous openings are created on major committees. Many members of the large 2022 House Republican freshmen class were appointed to seats on prize committees such as Ways and Means, Appropriations, and Energy and Commerce. Many Senate Democrat freshmen discovered the same good fortune with the change in the Senate Majority following the 2020 elections. Once in Washington, a new Member looks for experienced staffers who can get the office running, handle committee chores and deal with the Federal and state agencies on behalf of constituent needs. Staff tends to reflect the Member's background, interests and state or district, but the organizational structure may typically mimic that of his or her predecessor, if they are of the same party. Obviously, the new Member brings a new direction and needs, but it's usually beneficial to look to the predecessor's staff and approach to office needs and constituent services and learn from the practices that worked and those that didn't.

Unless the new Member is replacing someone from the opposition party, it's likely some of the predecessor's staff will even be retained, in the short term at least, providing the continuity and experience that will enable the newcomer to focus on more urgent matters. Sometimes, new Members will even retain non-partisan staff such as caseworkers, from their opponent's staff. At a minimum, however, the newcomer is likely to bring along a couple of trusted allies, usually people from back home and the campaign.

When the district's representation changes parties, it is not unusual to see a total turnover in staff and even a reshuffling of the location of district offices and committee preferences.

Congressional Staff Oath

Like the Members they serve, congressional staff are required to take an oath of office – in the House, employees merely sign the document, but Senate employees still recite it aloud:

"I do solemnly swear (or affirm) that I will support and defend the Constitution of the United States against all enemies, foreign and domestic; that I will bear true faith and allegiance to the same; that I take this obligation freely, without any mental reservation or purpose of evasion; and that I will well and faithfully discharge the duties of the office on which I am about to enter. So help me God."

Personal Staff

Despite the fact that Senate offices typically have more than twice the staff of their counterparts in the House, the organization charts of the two Chambers are very similar.

Not surprisingly, the Member occupies the pinnacle of the power structure, but who's next in line?

In the vast majority of offices, the chief of staff is the Member's strong right-arm, the most important hiring decision the Member makes – sometimes, the only one. An effective chief influences every aspect of the Member's political and professional life.

In the old days, the chief of staff position was referred to as an administrative assistant. Don't be misled. In non-congressional parlance, administrative assistant may be a euphemism for executive secretary, which is an important position, but an effective chief of staff carries considerably more responsibility.

In the absence of the Member, the chief is the boss. Even in the Member's presence, the chief makes decisions affecting how things get done. On one level, the chief functions very much like a Chief Operating Officer (COO), holding everyone else within his or her domain accountable to the Member's mission and goals, supervising every aspect of the congressional office. The chief oversees the legislative and communication operations and helps coordinate relations between the Member's personal office, on the one hand, and committees and leadership, on the other. The chief also coordinates the activities of the D.C. office with the Member's

district or state office. Sometimes the chief even coordinates interaction between the office and the Member's family.

In addition, the chief has a hand in policy initiatives and even re-election efforts. Although the chief is legally prohibited from participating in campaign activities during working hours, he or she is usually the liaison between the congressional office and the Member's campaign staff – particularly if the chief played a role in getting the Member elected in the first place.

Some chiefs are former campaign managers, but the nature of a government office and a campaign are quite different. Conventional wisdom suggests that individuals that have experience on the Hill or previously served on the Member's senior staff at another level of government may be better suited for the task. This is why there is a great deal of turnover among new chiefs of staff in the first year of a freshman legislator's term. For a campaign manager to be a successful chief of staff he or she needs to re-learn how to manage people and operate in an atmosphere that more closely resembles a small business than a political campaign.

Despite the responsibilities heaped on the chief, there are no legally mandated qualifications for the job: no experience or age requirements, no degree or certification requirement – nothing. As a result, it's not common but entirely possible for a Harvard Law School graduate to be working the phones in the front office under the supervision of a chief of staff whose academic achievements stopped at graduation from high school. Far more important than degrees are a chief's personal qualities, primarily political acumen, competence and loyalty.

Regardless of what sort of relationship exists between the Member and the chief at the time of the appointment, if they survive the first term together, they are likely to become life-long friends and confidants.

The Member will usually be less involved in the hiring of other staff, taking a collaborative role in the selection of senior positions but pretty much leaving others to the chief. The Member is likely to be involved in selecting a legislative director or communications director, for example, but far less involved, if at all, in hiring a staffer who drafts letters to constituents or a receptionist.

The focus of staff members who report to the chief fall into four basic categories:

Legislative

Communication

Outreach and Constituent Service

Support and Administrative Staff

The legislative team deals with what many think of as the main job of Congress: the making and amending of laws. These staff members manage the legislative process throughout all its stages: developing policy positions, researching legislative and political options, drafting bills and amendments, and shepherding them through the legislative thicket. They review incoming constituent mail on policy issues and conduct specialized research on key measures of interest to being advanced by the Member. They track local projects, meet with individuals, constituent groups and lobbyists who have an interest in issues of importance to the Member's constituents or the committees on which he or she serves.

Legislative staff must be knowledgeable in the processes and peculiarities of the Congress, its history and traditions, including myriad rules, procedures and precedents, and the jurisdiction of committees and leadership. They must possess near-encyclopedic knowledge of issues that are important to their boss and be able to respond swiftly to questions from the Member or constituents.

A "B+" may be a satisfactory grade in college, but a legislative staff member who gives the boss a memo on an issue that is only 90 percent accurate and balanced will soon feel the sting of rebuke. The legislative staff must earn and maintain a level of trust that ensures any information it provides will be accepted and acted upon.

The legislative team is usually a three-tiered hierarchy that consists of the legislative director (LD), legislative assistants (LAs) and several legislative correspondents (LCs).

The legislative director oversees the day-to-day activities of the legislative staff – 4 or 5 people in the House and more than 10 in the Senate – and is responsible for developing a strategy for pursuing the Member's legislative agenda. The LD also reviews all legislative staff work done

A Better Job Choice

Often times, a new Member of Congress will hire their campaign manager as their chief of staff. This is often not a good fit, as the management style of a political campaign differs dramatically from that of a congressional office. A better job choice for a campaign manager is district director. A good district director, like a good campaign manager, knows the district inside and out and talks regularly with local officials, "grass top" leaders, and state office holders. This enables this key individual to provide important political intelligence to the Member and allows them to more easily slip back into the role of campaign manager during the next reelection.

within the office to ensure it is consistent and reflects the Member's point of view. In addition, he or she works with the Member to map out support or opposition to efforts endorsed by the leadership or the executive branch. The LD also has the task of keeping the Member abreast of key provisions in legislation being debated on the floor or under consideration within committees and subcommittees.

Although some chiefs of staff have deputies (more common in the Senate than the House), the LD is second only to the chief in most offices.

Legislative assistants commonly have several committees or topics for which they are responsible. It is their job to audit the work going on in committees and advance the Member's interest on specific legislation. In the House, they also draft answers to constituent, agency or committee inquiries associated with their areas of specialty. An LA in the Senate doesn't usually draft correspondence but works closely with staff that does.

Legislative correspondent is the entry-level position in the legislative hierarchy, but LCs are often the best-informed team members when it comes to specific bills or amendments. Their survival depends on it. They are the ones who coordinate responses to all kinds of inquiries regarding questions on which a Member has already taken a position. Such responses usually start with a pre-approved text, but the LC should conduct further research to verify that its contents are still current, since it is not unlikely that a constituent will recognize errors in the letter, much to the Member's detriment. That's why the LC position is considered the best place to learn about a piece of legislation and its consequences.

There are ample opportunities for LCs to learn. There are sometimes more than 10,000 pieces of legislation introduced during each Congress – and each of them is the most important measure in the world to somebody. The ability to quickly research and reduce complex issues into easy-to-understand language is among the most valuable skills in any congressional office.

The demand for such skills adds to the challenges facing the legislative director, who must teach and mentor a new LC, one fresh out of law school, perhaps, to abandon overly complex, yet accurate and precise legal

writing in favor of a style that constituents find straightforward, factual and reassuring.

Constituent Mail

The biggest challenge for legislative staff is constituent mail. Every office gets a lot of it. Some House offices receive up to 100,000 communications per year from their constituents. Senate offices can receive many times that. As a new legislative correspondent in the House, answering constituent mail may very well take up 50 to 75 percent of your day.

Communications take many forms. There is the written letter – or what you will learn to call “snail mail.” This is the traditional handwritten or typed letter from an individual constituent on an issue of great importance to him or her. It has always been as good as gold in a congressional office because someone went to a great deal of effort to exercise one of his or her prerogatives as a citizen – almost akin to a sacrament in a civil religion.

Today, the hand-written or typed letter is just as valuable, though no longer the main form of constituent communication. Email is far easier to send, so it has supplanted the printed letter as the primary mode of communication. Second, the September 11, 2001, terrorist attacks and the subsequent anthrax attack on Capitol Hill a month later resulted in all letters and packages being sent to an outside facility for irradiation. This antiterrorism protection measure has dramatically slowed the mail process on Capitol Hill since it takes several days to process mail through this facility. By the time an office receives a letter to the time it can answer and turn it around, a month has usually passed before the constituent gets a response. And that’s the best-case scenario.

Finally, there are professional firms that are now counterfeiting personal letters from constituents. Several years ago, Jeff Birnbaum, writing in *The Washington Post*, described companies that special interest groups hire to compose letters for constituents to sign. As if to prove the market value of these letters, these operators received \$75 to \$125 for each letter they were able to convince a constituent to sign. This practice is not new, but the latest technology has taken it to a new level that will dilute the value of authentic letters since congressional offices won’t know which ones are from constituents and which ones are from hired writers.

Artificial intelligence may make distinguishing between constituents and computers even more difficult in the near future.

Another variation of this is the postcard campaign, where organizations generate postcards on behalf of their members. The cards are usually identical and unsigned. The silver lining is that when these postcards bombard you, an organization is essentially giving you its mailing list that can be harvested and used to communicate your own message to the constituent.

Another source of communication is constituent phone calls. Most offices will respond in writing to phone calls in the same way they respond to written correspondence. Phone calls are personal and require a constituent to take action and verbally state an opinion. A smart office will promptly write to the caller and store the name, phone, address and issue in a database.

Although “snail mail” had traditionally been constituents’ favored mode of communication, the highest volume of constituent communication is now email. The House of Representatives reports that more than 180 million emails are sent to House offices every year. Offices need to respond to emails from their district just as they would a letter.

From an efficiency and budgetary perspective, an office is better off responding to an email with an email, for a couple of reasons. First, the constituent has already shown his or her preferred means of communication. Second, sending an email instead of a letter saves much money, by avoiding the costs associated with snail mail, including paying for paper, envelopes, postage and for folding the documents.

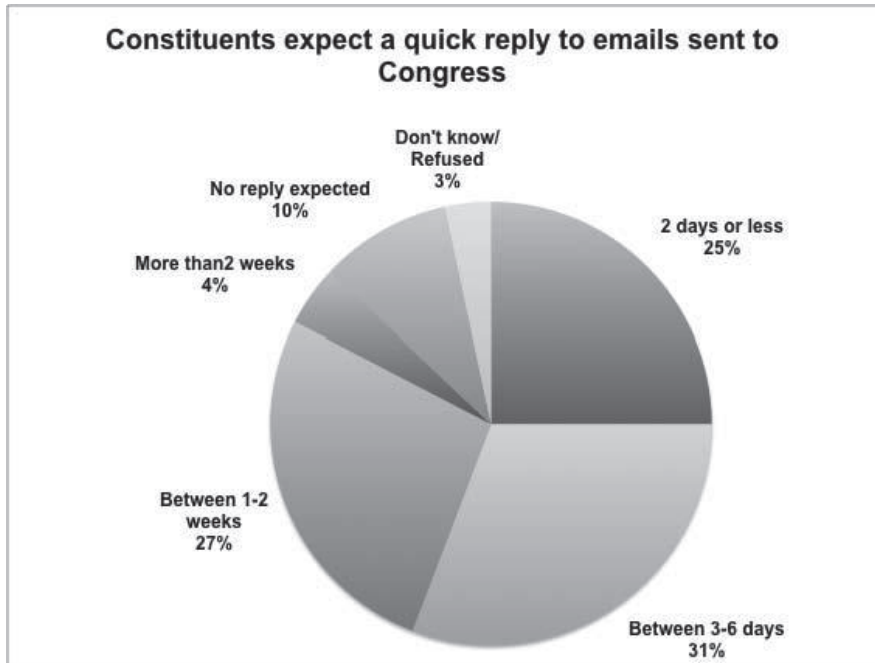
Although many constituents communicate with the office via email personally, companies are also generating large volumes of email on behalf of various organizations. Some companies sell web modules that allow an organization to automatically generate emails from their membership to congressional offices. While some of these efforts may be legitimate liaisons between advocates and their supporters, these emails are often generated by slick campaigns that only reveal a small portion of the information available on an issue.

For instance, in 2005, a major cancer organization contracted with one of these organizations. They whipped their membership into a frenzy

by telling them that Congress was trying to pass a law that would outlaw breast cancer screenings. Nothing could have been further from the truth of course. The underlying legislation was a small business health care bill that would have allowed any small association to form a group for health insurance purposes and operate under the same Federal law that governed the health care plans of labor unions and large corporations. By operating under Federal law these small associations might have evaded state mandates, but all of the union and corporate plans covered under Federal law had coverage for breast cancer screenings. These email-generating campaigns are often thinly disguised fundraising efforts designed to create lots of smoke even if there is only a small fire.

That doesn't mean an office can or should avoid answering these emails. The more inaccurate the information the constituent receives, the more important it is to generate a response that sets the record straight. And, as with the postcard campaigns discussed earlier, an office can

Constituents have high expectations when it comes to responses to their emails.



harvest the email addresses of constituents who've indicated they care about a certain issue.

Constituents expect rapid responses to their communications. A January 2009 Congressional Institute study found that a majority (55.8 percent) expected a reply to an email query within one week. In fact, 25 percent said they expect a reply within two days – a fairly common standard for customer service departments in big corporations. And this was the standard before companies like Amazon established huge customer service departments to rapidly help customers with problems.

How does an office answer this massive volume of mail? It does so with enormous amounts of time, effort and technology. In the House, while the legislative correspondent is responsible for processing incoming mail, every legislative staff person reviews mail. Likewise in the Senate, legislative correspondents generally draft all responses, but the more senior legislative staff will provide guidance and approval.

Generally, all messages are logged into a computer database. That database allows an office to identify the constituent's name and mailing and email addresses. The software also allows the user to attach an "issue code" which identifies issues that are important to a constituent. Finally, a record of previous letters and responses by that constituent is kept in the database.

The letter drafting process is different in each office, but generally speaking, offices try to answer as many letters as possible with a form response. This is an essentially identical letter written to people who have identical concerns. The Congressional Institute's 2009 study found most offices take one to two weeks to reply to a constituent query about public policy, with very specialized replies requiring up to one month. Some offices report that they can turn around 90 percent of their email in two to three days. But even at this high level of performance, some 10,000 letters – 200 per week – require original text to be drafted.

The degree to which the Member directly participates in this process varies. The best offices have the Member review all major new text. For instance, a legislative assistant may notice that a lot of letters and emails are coming in regarding an upcoming tax bill. The legislative assistant will likely want to brief the Member, explain the issue and seek his or

her guidance as to how to respond. The legislative assistant then drafts a response based on the Member's position. The legislative director and the chief of staff will review the letter. In most offices, the Member will make a final clearance, especially on a major issue. Once the letter is complete, the staff usually mails it to letter writers and callers and emails it to people who prefer email.

It should be noted that many Members insist on seeing and signing all correspondence. Without judging the relative merits of that noble-sounding ideal, it takes a lot of effort and valuable time for these offices to keep up with constituent expectations for a response, especially when the staff is accurately reflecting the Member's views. Suffice it to say, all Members want their correspondence with their constituents to not only accurately reflect their views but to capture their voice and communication style. The sooner a staff can earn the Member's confidence on accuracy, and accurately reflect their style, the sooner the Member can focus on those things only a Member can do.

The process sounds redundant, and it is. That is because the written word lasts forever. A junior staffer writing an inaccurate or offensive response could cost the Member dearly. There is a guiding principle about letters and emails: Never write anything you are not prepared to defend if your worst enemy gets a hold of it, because he will.

Additionally, all of these letters make up a library of "approved text" that can be used by other staff to write portions of other individual responses. These texts can also be used by district staff at meetings or by staff responding to constituent phone calls.

Most importantly, once the letter has gone out, a permanent computer record is made. This can be used to generate proactive email newsletters that keep constituents informed on issues you know are important to them. How do you know what they care about? They clearly told you so themselves when they wrote their letter.

The process is cumbersome and creative staff members in congressional offices are always looking for innovative ways to reduce steps and speed up the process. Only a seriously out-of-touch Member or chief of staff would tell you their mail system could not be improved.

Communications Staff

The communications director, who's sometimes called a press secretary, handles communications of a different sort but is involved in more than just public relations. Effective communication is essential to political and legislative success, so the position has evolved into one of the most significant in any congressional office. These days, the communications director is involved in every aspect of the office. He or she must be. No function in a congressional office can be performed well without consideration of the others.

In the information age with so many means of communicating information, an office must have a communications strategy and a comprehensive plan for accomplishing the office's goals. Without it, a communications director is likely to be found flailing about and doing little more than reacting to news made by others.

Digital strategies have become extremely important. According to a 2016 study called *A Connected Congress*, done by Echelon Insights for the Congressional Institute, Members of Congress have increasingly adopted social media in recent years. Twitter, for instance, reported that while only 44 percent of Senators and 35 percent of House Members were on Twitter at the start of the 112th Congress, by the time the 113th was sworn in, 100 percent of Senators and 90 percent of House Members had joined.

When Echelon Insights updated their study for the Congressional Institute, social media was "integrated into the fabric of Congress." Now, 94 percent of offices use Facebook, 92 percent use Twitter, and 67 percent use Instagram.

It is important for the communications director's reputation to be above reproach. Members must be able to trust that they will accurately express their thoughts, opinions and positions to the media. And the media must be able to trust that when a communications director speaks, it is with the Member's voice and that the information imparted is reliable. A seemingly innocuous misstep can prove fatal to a lawmaker's career. That's why most congressional offices prohibit staff other than those responsible for communications from talking to the media – even casually.

Communications directors also help manage the Members' public appearances; prepare materials for public distribution; draft newspaper columns and speak on radio shows; help coordinate state or district scheduling; and sometimes act as legislative assistants, overseeing activities surrounding measures such as those involving media regulation. There will be much more about communication later in the book.

Outreach and Constituent Services Staff

Outreach and constituent services may seem to describe many of the activities that have been ascribed to members of the legislative team, but legislative activities are centered in Washington, D.C., while outreach and constituent services are usually executed from within the district.

Outreach is primarily a communications function directed by the district or state director and carried out by key staff members, who attend countless meetings of Rotary and other service clubs, farm groups and veterans' organizations and visit senior centers, churches and schools on behalf of the Member. They also work closely with the communications director to ensure press coverage for local events that the Member will attend. For many constituents, outreach staff is tantamount to speaking with the Member since they are immediately accessible and presumably provide a direct conduit to the Member.

Outreach staff listens to questions, concerns and needs and, when appropriate, pass them along to the constituent service staff. Constituent service has become increasingly important as government has grown in size and complexity, making it difficult for the average citizen to find his or her way through the Federal bureaucracy.

Efforts on behalf of constituents are referred to as casework. Most involve immigration law, Social Security benefits, small business issues, the military and veterans' benefits, but there are literally hundreds of situations that might lead to the Member or his staff being called upon for assistance.

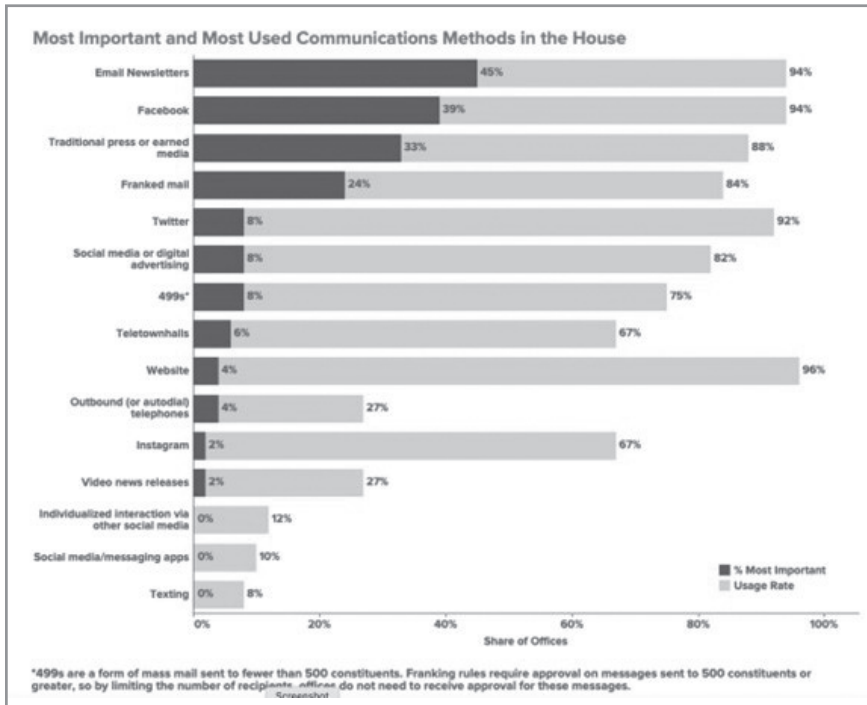
Although the majority of casework is handled at the district or state level, there are congressional offices that prefer to run constituent services out of Washington, D.C.

There is no right or wrong place to do it – as long as it gets results.

Obviously, staff can generate considerable good will for their boss by serving as ombudsmen for constituents in dealings with Federal agencies, but they have to know precisely how far they can go. Some of the biggest scandals in recent congressional history have resulted when Members were asked to help convince agencies to bend the rules. Past examples include ABSCAM, the Keating Five, and a more recent case where a Senator inappropriately called a U.S. Attorney to inquire about the status of a legal investigation (offices should never intervene in legal matters).

To help avoid such pitfalls, most district offices employ a director of constituent services to set parameters, but in some cases these activities are overseen by a district or state director or even the chief of staff. As a further safeguard, all employees are now required to take ethics training within a few months of joining a congressional staff.

The district director in the House and the state director in the Senate perform the role of the chief of staff at the local level. Most supervise the activities of five or so people in a congressional district and as many as 20 in a Senator's state office. It is up to the district director to track political



developments at the grassroots level and to build relationships with elected officials. When a Member wants to know what constituents are thinking or how they will react to an issue, a bill or an action, it is usually the state or district director who is called. On a day-to-day basis, however, these local directors usually report to the chief of staff.

The district or state director job is the ideal landing spot for a Member's campaign manager. They remain based in the district, building contacts with key political and community stakeholders while constantly gathering political intelligence that is useful to the Member and legislative team in Washington, D.C. It is also less disruptive for the district director to take a leave of absence during a campaign to manage a reelection effort.

There has always been interdependence among staff at the local office as well as in D.C. The internet and other means of enhanced communications have made it possible for those who handle what are commonly referred to as the functional needs of the congressional office – the legislative and communication teams in D.C. and the outreach and constituent services teams at the local level – to work even more closely. Cross-functional teams have been credited with making these offices more efficient and more effective.

Websites represent one example. In most cases, these are usually designed by an outside vendor and maintained by the communications director. Legislative staff contributes by constantly updating issue and policy information and the local outreach and constituent services personnel share noteworthy activity occurring on the home front or on issues of broad concern. Legislative directors, meanwhile, have developed a close working relationship with legislative correspondents in an effort to track correspondence and response times and keep the Member informed of the volume of communication on hot issues, as well as the opinions such correspondence contains.

Support Staff

The support team facilitates the efforts of everyone else, makes it possible for other teams to do their jobs, and keeps the wheels oiled and turning. In a congressional office, the duties of support staff vary from filing to the tasks performed by the person affectionately known as the scheduler.

As with any other organization, each congressional office has a staff member dedicated to serving its technological needs. Just a few short years ago, all it took to become a computer systems administrator – or IT (information technology) manager, as they’re called in some offices – was to attend a class and perform data entry to support the correspondence program. This is no longer the case. Technology tools have become essential to the successful operation of every congressional office and require specialized knowledge.

For most House offices, the position of a systems manager was caught between the daily requirement of managing the mail and needing to buy and maintain equipment and software, all while keeping up with the latest innovations in constituent management applications. While the Senate still maintains technology specialists, House offices have increasingly relied on outside vendors. This is not optimal, but a consequence of increased workload and smaller budgets. Very often an office will have a sophisticated software system with enormous capabilities to support cross-team efforts, if only the staff had time to focus on the capabilities beyond what is necessary to do their immediate job.

Hand-held communications devices, such as the Apple iPhone and Samsung Galaxy have proliferated on the Hill, eliminating hand-delivered messages and making the old bells-buzzer-lights system of communication obsolete. Hand-held electronic devices are tethers attaching Hill staff to their offices, and it is not uncommon to see them using their iPhones for work at their kid’s soccer games, dinners, or the movies. Or foolishly on their nightstand when they go to bed.

The scheduler, who, in some offices, is referred to as the executive assistant, is usually the gatekeeper to the Member’s inner office and, not surprisingly, maintains the Member’s schedule. This itinerary not only identifies where the Member is going but where he or she has been. Keeping such a schedule is not an easy task, given the fact that plans often change several times a day as unforeseen events create detours and changes in the agenda.

The scheduler is typically responsible for the Member’s personal correspondence and phone calls, so the person who holds that position must be discreet and absolutely loyal to his or her boss. The scheduler usually knows more about the Member’s activities than anyone except

the Member and chief of staff. If the Member is thinking about a bid for higher office, chances are the scheduler knows about it. If the Member is having family problems, chances are the scheduler knows about it. If the Member is avoiding the party whip, the scheduler definitely knows about it.

Among the challenges the scheduler faces are figuring out what events the Member can and should attend. Members receive hundreds of invitations to events in Washington, D.C., and the home district or state. Almost all are worthwhile, but it's not humanly possible to be at every one. In ages past, such invitations were accepted or rejected more on the basis of expediency and personal taste than strategic planning. These days, however, activities, including sporting events, are weighed against the Member's goals, and in some instances, events are actually created to help fulfill strategic goals.

In 2014 a scandal broke indicating that veterans were being mistreated by the Veterans' Administration, with two-year waits for appointments and systemic and possibly criminal cover-ups of bureaucratic delays and incompetence. Congress rushed to adopt legislation reforming the system and to talk to their constituents about actions they were taking. Instead of waiting for invitations, the staff of one Member proactively called each veterans' organization in their district and asked if the Member could stop by and talk to a gathering of veterans. This sort of aggressive, well-thought-out strategic scheduling maximizes the effectiveness of the congressional office's most precious resource, the Member's time.

It has been suggested that the scheduler's duties are so crucial to achieving a Member's strategic goals that the position should be a functional category unto itself. To borrow an insight from the management guru, the late Steven Covey, the scheduler's mantra should be: "The most important thing is to make sure the most important thing remains the most important thing."

But in the House, at least, many of the scheduler's other duties fall into the support category and include maintaining supplies, contracting for package delivery and handling expense and payroll records. (Since 1995, Congress has been subject to most of the same labor laws as any other employer and must keep track of compensatory time, overtime,

distinctions between salaried and hourly employees and mandatory leave schedules.) Many Congressional offices now share an office manager that maintains the accounts and processes invoices. In the Senate, where staff sizes make support functions a full-time job, the duties handled in the House by the scheduler are usually divided between two employees.

The staff assistant is another member of the support team. It's a position most people would call a receptionist, but he or she is not a receptionist in the traditional sense. The staff assistant's job in a congressional office has many more facets. Besides being the point person on the telephones and the individual who greets guests as they enter the office, providing in the process that all-important positive first impression, the staff assistant frequently manages office interns, arranges and coordinates tours of numerous D.C. sites that require tickets (particularly the White House) and fields requests for flags to be flown over the Capitol.

This is a job that was dramatically changed by the pandemic. Under the direction of Speaker Nancy Pelosi, House offices were largely inaccessible to the public from March of 2020 to the summer of 2022. Normally, the hallways of the House office buildings are teeming with constituents and lobbyists seeking a meeting with their Member of Congress, making small crowd control an essential component of the staff assistant's job. Most of these staffers were in for quite a shock once the buildings reopened.

The staff assistant position is typically entry-level, taken by people hoping to work their way into a legislative, communication or administrative position. Most are successful. That's because they're usually over-qualified for the job. Don't be surprised if you learn that the first person you meet when you walk into a congressional office holds an advanced degree from a highly rated college or university. For obvious reasons, staff assistant is a high-turnover position. Those who hold that job typically move up in a year or they move on.

Chapter Three Summary

- Each office has great autonomy and its own unique hierarchy. Staff tends to reflect the Member's background, interests and district.
- Senate offices typically have more than twice the staff of their counterparts in the House, but the organization charts are very similar.
- In the vast majority of offices, the chief of staff is the Member's strong right-arm and the most important hiring decision the Member makes.
- The focus of staff members who report to the chief fall into four basic categories: legislative, communication, outreach and constituent services, support and administrative Staff.
- Legislative staff must be knowledgeable in the rules, procedures, processes and peculiarities of the Congress, its history and traditions. The legislative team is usually a three-tiered hierarchy that consists of the legislative director, legislative assistants and legislative correspondents.
- The biggest challenge for legislative staff is constituent mail. Congress receives nearly a million constituent communications every day. To answer this massive volume of mail requires enormous amounts of time, effort and technology.
- The communications director is involved in every aspect of the office. Effective communication is essential to political and legislative success. Without a strategy and plan, a communications director is likely to be found flailing about and doing little more than reacting to news made by others.
- Outreach is primarily a communications function carried out by key staff members who attend countless meetings on behalf of the Member.

- Constituent service has become increasingly important as government has grown in size and complexity, making it difficult for the average citizen to find their way through the Federal bureaucracy.
- The district director in the House and the state director in the Senate perform the role of the chief of staff at the local level.
- Technology tools have become essential to the successful operation of every congressional office and require specialized knowledge.
- The scheduler is usually the gatekeeper to the Member's inner office and maintains the Member's schedule.
- The staff assistant answers phones, greets guests as they enter the office and frequently manages interns, arranges tours and fields requests for flags to be flown over the Capitol.

Chapter 4: Power Stations

One of the aspirations shared by many congressional staffers is to be around long enough and regarded highly enough to be named to the staff of a powerful House or Senate committee. Those who succeed are considered policy experts. They are among the best-paid congressional employees because they handle the difficult, sometimes tedious, nuts-and-bolts work of shaping legislation that moves through the Congress. If the House and Senate have bureaucracies, they most likely are composed of long-serving staff members on long-standing committees under long-serving chairmen.

There are about 1300 committee staffers in the House and 1100 in the Senate, according to the Congressional Research Service. These individuals do not have civil-service-style employment protection. If they remain employed after a change in the chairmanship or party control of the committee, it reflects their professionalism and expertise.

(In order to avoid a deluge of angry emails, we'll pause here to explain congressional nomenclature. It's impossible to discuss committees without mentioning their leadership. Many observers would contend that referring to women who chair committees as *chairmen* is sexist. It should be noted that some of the women who lead committees prefer to be called – not *chairwoman* or *chairperson* or *chair*, but *chairman* and, on formal occasions, *Madame Chairman*, although this has been gradually changing over time as women increasingly gain power within the institution. So as a concession to congressional tradition, we'll refer to those who chair as *chairs* ...knowing we can't please everyone.)

Each committee divides staff positions based on which party is in power. In the House, the ratio in recent years has been as high as 2-to-1 in favor of the majority party. The Senate Republicans and Democrats negotiate staff ratios, so when one party has a narrow overall majority, the disparity between the number of majority and minority staff members is typically far less than it would be in the House. The minority party generally puts together a legislative staff of its own that mirrors the majority's, but typically is somewhat smaller.

Committee ratios, especially in the Senate, are often major points of contention between the parties following an election. At the beginning of a Congress, the House sets its rules, which stipulate committee sizes, ratios and jurisdiction. The Senate, on the other hand, considers itself an

ongoing body, whose rules, written in 1789, are perpetual and carry over from one Congress to another. As a result, new committee ratios must be established by a resolution that can be filibustered by the outgoing majority. Things got complicated in 2001, when the Senate was evenly divided between the two parties, with Republican Vice President Dick Cheney acting in his role as President of the Senate casting tie-breaking votes. Democratic Senators did not give up their committee chairmanships for 17 days into the new session when a power-sharing agreement was finally reached. The Democrats naturally desired a more equal distribution of the committee seats, even though the Republicans would have the majority, thanks to the Vice President's vote.

During the 117th Congress, the Senate was again evenly divided between the parties, but this time Democratic Vice President Kamala Harris, acting in her role as President of the Senate, gave the Democrats the majority control.

Most House committees favor the majority, but there are some notable exceptions, including the House Committee on Intelligence and the House Ethics Committee. These committees split staffs equally. During the 116th and 117th Congresses, the House Select Committee on the Modernization of Congress also had an equal number of Democrats and Republicans and shared staff on a bipartisan basis.

The size of the staff allotted to each committee depends on its jurisdiction and clout. The House Small Business Committee, for instance, has about 30 staff members, while the powerful and prestigious Appropriations Committee, which drafts spending legislation, has around 90.

Regardless of how much clout a committee might have, the chair holds the bulk of the power.

Since 1995, each committee chair has been responsible for staffing and payroll decisions, office space allocation and the agenda. The ranking minority member has been, however, generally accorded the authority to oversee that portion of the payroll that affects his or her staff and to make personnel decisions without having to clear them with the chairman.

Committees establish their own rules at the beginning of every Congress – the majority proposes the rules and expects its Members to support them. The proposed rules are usually approved, with everyone in the majority voting *yes*.

Most committees have subcommittees, which in turn have their own staffs, thus increasing the size of the staff available to do the committee's work. There are about 100 subcommittees in the House and about 70 in the Senate. These numbers can change from Congress to Congress. The chairman of the full committee decides who will be hired to fill these positions but does so with varying degrees of consultation with subcommittee chairmen.

The hierarchy of committee staffs closely resembles the hierarchy of Members' personal staffs. But job titles are seldom the same. Among the exceptions are the communications director and the computer systems manager.

The chief of staff is typically called the staff director and usually comes to the job with a good deal of history with the chair, familiarity with the chair's preferences, and knowledge of his or her agenda. The staff director may come from a variety of backgrounds, but he or she is first and foremost loyal to the chair. The staff director's responsibilities – beyond making sure the chair's agenda is carried out – include hiring and budget decisions, representing the committee at leadership meetings and coordinating the committee's activities with the chair's personal staff. The staff director must work with the chair's personal staff because one of the surest ways for a chair to get into political hot water back home is to allow the committee's agenda to get out of sync with the expectations of the constituents who elected him or her.

Underneath the staff director is the chief counsel. The chief counsel plays a role similar to the legislative director's but is more likely to be called the committee's policy director or deputy staff director. In addition to experience, the chief counsel is expected to bring to the job a thorough knowledge of the rules, history and traditions of the committee; a legal background; and policy expertise in the issues under its jurisdiction. It usually is the chief counsel who assigns the committee's senior legislative staff to organize hearings, generate lists of potential witnesses, develop lines of questioning and brief their party's committee members. He or she is usually the one you see whispering in the chair's ear in videos shot during such hearings.

It's not unusual for tension to exist between the staff director and the chief counsel. The staff director is interested in advancing the chair's

agenda, putting the chair's mark on the committee, and making sure the political ramifications benefit the boss. Chief counsels, on the other hand, sometimes see themselves as guardians of tradition. They are the ones most likely to say, "This is the way we have always done things..."

Most committees have an abundance of legislative staff positions. Committee members rely on those who fill these positions for instant recall of minute details relating to complex policy issues and to help manage the legislative process on the Floor of the House or Senate. Committee legislative staffers serve as resources for Members' personal staff as well, responding to questions concerning past and pending policies or legislation.

Providing information to non-committee members helps foster positive relations by encouraging support for legislation being drafted by the committee and more importantly, defining jurisdictional authority. A clear definition of authority over issue areas helps minimize turf wars between committees, conflicts that could otherwise become nasty, intra-party struggles requiring the leadership of the House or Senate to referee.

Some committees' legislative staffs are large enough to handle investigations. In these cases, the staff does not just rely on information provided by an agency but funds field research independent of the executive or judicial branch, into the operations of programs under its jurisdiction. Investigative staff members spend months and sometimes years overseeing Federal programs. Often recruited from the Federal agencies they'll help oversee, they are typically young lawyers with a background in legal research and accounting.

In addition, each committee hires specialists in its area of jurisdiction. The Ways and Means Committee, which is responsible for tax legislation and bills affecting Social Security, Medicare and other entitlement programs, lists "senior economist" among its staff titles. Other committees, such as the Armed Services Committee, have just as much specialization and expertise but refer to all senior legislative staff as "professional staff members" – a practice that often confuses outsiders trying to figure out who to talk to about a specific issue before that committee.

Don't be misled by staff-title roulette or the sometimes seemingly whimsical names that are given to committee staff positions. Often, the less pretentious the title, the more power the staff person actually has.

The people who fill these posts are generally knowledgeable and experienced in what they do – though figuring out who’s in charge may require the help of an experienced hand.

Legislative staff that serve simultaneously on a Member’s personal staff and a committee’s staff are known as associate staff members. The House Budget Committee, for instance, allows each of its members to appoint one personal staff member to serve on the Committee’s legislative staff, from which subcommittee staff directors typically are chosen.

The clerk of each committee is the chief archivist, the keeper of committee records and the person responsible for the logistics of committee hearings. The clerk is usually a senior employee with several years of experience and usually has an assistant if he or she is assigned to one of Congress’s large standing committees. The clerk also maintains the calendar of committee activities and is responsible for everything from providing water and pencils for committee meetings to ensuring that audio and video systems are available when needed.

Recordkeeping and archiving are more critical on a standing committee than in a Member office. That’s because a standing committee has a life of its own – chances are it existed before today’s Members were born and will continue to operate long after they’ve ended their careers. The clerk maintains continuity from one generation to the next.

A committee may also have a printing clerk whose primary responsibility is the publication of committee minutes and reports. Everything that is said in committee is transcribed and forwarded to committee staff for clarification (if there’s uncertainty over precisely what words were uttered) and then edited for grammar before being archived. All of this is necessary, not only because the House rules require transcripts of hearings to be published, but also because courts rely on these transcripts when considering a legal principle known as legislative intent. Committee testimony also can be used in criminal and civil court cases, including those involving perjury for lying to a committee while under oath.

Once the transcript of a committee hearing has been corrected, proofed and formally released, the committee will make it available on its website for use as a resource and reference, not only for the Congress, but also for anyone else in the world interested in the topic.

Printing tasks used to be handled by the Government Publishing Office, but the era of desktop publishing has brought with it the ability to make printed and online copies available to more people more quickly and cheaply.

Finally, most committees employ an office manager who is responsible for expenses, supplies and payroll processing. In addition to serving much the same needs as an office manager in a Member office, a committee's office manager must be knowledgeable in the rules governing committees.

Leadership Staff

In the House and Senate, in the minority and majority, Members are elected or appointed to leadership positions. The Democratic Caucus and Republican Conference in each Chamber selects these leaders to act as their agents. Most of those leaders are permitted to hire additional staff, over and above staff that are allotted to them for their personal office and committees on which they serve, to assist them in meeting their additional duties as leaders.

In some cases, the leadership staff allotments allow for the hiring of only one or two persons, but in the case of the top leaders, the additional appropriations for both staff and office operations are substantial.

The top leadership offices, those of the Speaker, and the majority and minority leaders in the House and Senate, perform five basic functions: (1) oversight of the management of their respective Chamber; (2) management of the House or Senate floor procedures and their respective legislative agendas; (3) media relations; (4) political operations, and (5) the development and coordination of policy positions.

Beneath the top leaders are the majority and minority whips, who are the second ranking officers in their respective caucus or conference. The whips get their name from their counterparts in the British Parliament. The whips help manage the scheduling and flow of legislation on the floors and are responsible for corralling the votes necessary to implement their leadership agenda. The whips appoint a chief deputy and other deputy whips.

Under the whips are caucus or conference chairmen and deputy chairmen, who are primarily responsible for external communications

and messaging responsibilities, as well as communications and liaison duties with their entire membership including regular meetings of the membership to discuss strategy, internal rules, the legislative agenda and other matters relevant to the entire membership.

Leadership also includes a chairman of policy responsible for the development of policy positions and research and analysis of issues coming before the legislative body.

Leadership staff, by and large, are among the most qualified and experienced staff in Congress. They provide a wide range of services to their leaders and more generally to the Members of Congress and their staffs. Leadership staff who oversee the flow of legislation on the Floor, for example, can be particularly helpful to congressional staff providing legislative, communications or scheduling assistance to their Members.

Usually, the media professionals in leadership offices are the best source of information and guidance regarding national press relations, and the policy experts oftentimes are as informed, and sometimes more informed, about where their opponents will be positioned on a given issue.

While it is true that most staff, in terms of their interests, expertise, disposition, ideological outlook and personalities, are a reflection of the leaders who hired them, they are more often than not inclined to be of service and helpful to other congressional staff as well.

Leadership staff, if they have an expansive view of their roles, will also be sensitive to and helpful with their leader's responsibilities to his or her constituents back home. The leader, after all, is first and foremost a representative of a constituency. Throughout history, when a Member has assumed a leadership position, it is not uncommon for him to suffer in the eyes of his constituents, so attention to their interests and needs becomes all that much more important. The most striking example is that of House Speaker Thomas Foley, who was defeated for re-election to the House in 1994, because his constituents became convinced he was paying too much attention to Washington, D.C., and too little attention to the people of Spokane, Washington. It happened again, more recently, in 2014 when Republican House Majority Leader Eric Cantor lost his primary election in suburban Richmond, Virginia. In 2019, Alexandria

Ocasio-Cortez of New York City defeated House Democratic Caucus Chairman Joe Crowley, long thought to be the successor-in-waiting to Speaker Nancy Pelosi and went on to become the youngest woman ever elected to the House.

- Besides Speaker, elected leadership offices in the House include:
- Majority and Minority Leaders
- Majority and Minority Whips
- Chairman and Vice Chairman of the Democratic Caucus
- Chairman, Vice Chairman and Secretary of the Republican Conference
- Co-chairman of the House Democratic Steering and Policy Committee (the party leader is the actual Chair)
- Chairman of the House Republican Policy Committee
- Chairman of the Democratic Congressional Campaign Committee (political arm)
- Chairman of the National Republican Congressional Committee (political arm)
- During the 112th Congress, the Democrats created a new position of Assistant Leader.

The primary elected leadership offices in the Senate are:

- President of the Senate (the Vice President, per the U.S. Constitution)
- The President pro tempore
- Majority and Minority Leaders
- Majority and Minority Whips
- Chairman, Vice Chairman and Secretary of the Democratic Caucus
- Chairman, Vice Chairman and Secretary of the Republican Conference
- Chairman of the of the Democratic Policy Committee
- Chairman of the Republican Policy Committee

Caucus or Conference

In each Chamber, the organization for Democratic Members refers to itself as a Caucus, and the organization for Republicans is called a Conference. It's a historical preference that started back in the 19th century and continues to this day.

- Chairman of the Democratic Senatorial Campaign Committee (political arm)
- Chairman of the National Republican Senatorial Committee (political arm)

U.S. House of Representatives Leadership	
118th Congress	
56 th Speaker of the House Mike Johnson (R-LA) Born 1972, House since 2017	
Majority Leader Steve Scalise (R-LA) Born 1965, House since 2008	Democratic Leader Hakeem Jeffries (D-NY) Born 1970, House since 2013
Majority Whip Tom Emmer (R-MN) Born 1961, House since 2015	Democratic Whip Katherine Clark (D-MA) Born 1963, House since 2013
Republican Conference Chair Elise Stefanik (R-NY) Born 1984, House since 2015	Democratic Caucus Chair Pete Aguilar (D-CA) Born 1979, House since 2015
Republican Conference Vice Chair Blake Moore (R-UT) Born 1980, House since 2021	Democratic Caucus Vice Chair Ted Lieu (D-CA) Born 1969, House since 2015
Republican Conference Secretary Lisa McClain (R-MI) Born 1966, House since 2021	Assistant Democratic Leader Jim Clyburn (D-SC) Born 1940, House since 1993
Republican Policy Committee Chair Gary Palmer (R-AL) Born 1954, House since 2015	Steering and Policy Co-Chairs Barbara Lee (D-CA); Born 1946, House since 1998 Dan Kildee (D-MI); Born 1958, House since 2013 Debbie Wasserman Schultz (D-FL); Born 1966, House since 2005 <i>Leader serves as chair</i>
National Republican Congressional Committee (NRCC) Chair Richard Hudson (R-NC) Born 1971, House since 2013	Democratic Congressional Campaign Committee (DCCC) Chair Suzan DelBene (D-WA) Born 1962, House since 2012

U.S. Senate Leadership	
118th Congress	
President of the Senate Vice President Kamala Harris Born 1964, Vice President since 2021	
President Pro Tempore of the Senate Patty Murray (D-WA) Born 1950, Senate since 1993	
Majority Leader and Caucus Chair Chuck Schumer (D-NY) Born 1950, Senate since 1999	Republican Leader Mitch McConnell (R-KY) Born 1942, Senate since 1985
Majority Whip Dick Durbin (D-IL) Born 1944, Senate since 1997	Republican Whip John Thune (R-SD) Born 1961, Senate since 2005
Democratic Policy and Communication Committee Chair Debbie Stabenow (D-MI) Born 1950, Senate since 2001	Republican Conference Chair John Barrasso (R-WY) Born 1952, Senate since 2007
Steering Committee Chair Amy Klobuchar (D-MN) Born 1960, Senate since 2007	Policy Committee Chair Joni Ernst (R-IA) Born 1970, Senate since 2015
Democratic Caucus Vice Chairs Mark Warner (D-VA); Born 1954, Senate since 2009 Elizabeth Warren (D-MA); Born 1949, Senate since 2013	Republican Conference Vice Chair Shelley Moore Capito Born 1953, Senate since 2015
Democratic Senatorial Campaign Committee Chair Gary Peters (D-MI) Born 1958, Senate since 2015	National Republican Senatorial Committee Chair Steve Daines (R-MT) Born 1962, Senate since 2015

Keep in mind that when party control changes in the House, the incoming majority gains a new leadership office, the speakership while the outgoing majority must contract. The same is not true in the Senate, where the Vice President of the United States is the President of the body, regardless of which party is in the majority. The majority party does, however, elect the President pro tempore, who by tradition is the

longest-serving majority Senator. (Senator Patty Murray of Washington state was elected the President pro tempore in January 2023. She is the first woman to hold that position. If there is a change in the majority and the outgoing President pro tempore remains in the Senate, the Senate customarily designates them the President pro tempore emeritus. Senator Chuck Grassley of Iowa currently holds this honorary title.) The President pro tempore, by the way, and not the Senate Majority Leader, is third in the line of presidential succession, following the Vice President and the Speaker. The parties also exchange the “majority” and “minority” designations for their leadership offices. Being in the minority means fewer leadership offices, smaller budgets and a draconian reduction in staff. Likewise, when control of a Chamber shifts from one party to another it also sets off a major round of office shuffling and furniture moving. This is because the best offices in the Capitol go to the majority party. In Congress, the spoils definitely belong to the victors.

Most members of the leadership are provided with budgets to cover the cost of staff dedicated to their leadership responsibilities. In those offices that don’t have dedicated staff, the Member will usually assign an individual from his or her personal staff to help carry out leadership staff responsibilities. The political arms of the caucuses and conferences are not provided appropriated Federal funds for the operation of their offices, nor are they provided staff or office space. They are, however, considered part of the elected leadership in both the House and the Senate.

Leadership staffs must perform a delicate balancing act. Since both Chambers give leadership a great deal of power in decisions pertaining to the development and flow of legislation and policy issues, proponents and opponents of key issues, both inside and outside the Congress, want to have the ear of the leaders. And there are never enough ears to go around.

That dynamic puts increasing demands on leadership staff, many of whom are known to have the ear of the leadership and are in a prime position to influence the political and policy decision-making process. Some of the most capable senior leadership staff working for the top leaders are looked upon as non-elected members of their respective bodies. Some staff are able to keep that exalted position in the right perspective; others are not. Some are able to handle the adulation and power and keep their arrogance in check; others are not. Those who fail usually don’t last long in their positions.

As will be noted throughout this book, professional staff on the Hill shoulder an extraordinary responsibility to keep what power they have in perspective; to keep their own personal opinions and political proclivities subordinate to those of their employers; and to treat their position as that of public servant, not of political powerbroker. Effective leadership staff are, indeed, servant-leaders.

Leadership staff, in the broader sense, also includes those individuals who are designated by the Constitution, statute, or the rules of the respective bodies to manage the Chambers' day-to-day activities and serve all the Members, not merely one party. Their duties vary widely, and they affect the legislative process to different degrees.

These staffers are elected by the whole membership of each Chamber. The officers of the House, such as the Clerk, the Sergeant-at-Arms, the Chaplain, and the Chief Administrative Officer (CAO) are nominated by the Speaker and elected by the entire House.

The Secretary of the Senate, the Sergeant-at-Arms, and the Chaplain are appointed by the majority leader and approved by the full Senate.

Two of the most important non-partisan officers in Congress are the Clerk of the House and the Secretary of the Senate. These offices have been in existence since the Congress first met in 1789. They provide essential administrative support to the bodies they serve, particularly in maintaining records.

Like the Clerk, the Chief Administrative Officer of the House provides general support to all its Members and staff. House Speaker Newt Gingrich created the Chief Administrative Officer and his staff after the 1994 Republican takeover in an attempt to professionalize the support functions of the House and remove the politicization and potential corruption involved in the delivery of essential services.

Although not involved with the legislative process, the Sergeants at Arms of the House and Senate are vital to Congress' wellbeing. As the names suggest, they help coordinate and oversee matters related to the security of the House and Senate and their Members in Washington and on official travel. Their original duty, now a small part of their role, was to maintain order within their respective Chambers.



Senate Chaplain Barry Black (left) and House Chaplain Margaret Grun Kibben both served as the U.S. Navy Chief of Chaplains prior to being elected as officers of their respective Chambers. (Photos courtesy of the offices of the House and Senate Chaplains)

In God We Trust

Each Chamber of Congress has usually had an official chaplain since 1789. House and Senate rules provide that each legislative day open with a prayer. The Chaplains either offer the prayer themselves or arrange for a guest chaplain (typically a member of the clergy from a state or district). Additionally, the Chaplains provide pastoral care for Members and their families, officiate at Member weddings and funerals, and oversee other faith-based activities that occur on Capitol Hill.

Currently, the Chaplains are officers of the House and Senate, meaning they are elected by the Members and not merely selected by the House Speaker or Senate Majority Leader. As with other Senate officers, the Senate does not necessarily elect the Chaplain at the beginning of each Congress. The House, however, elects all its officers, including the Chaplain, at the beginning of each Congress, even if there is no turnover. Customarily, the House elects all its officers as a group, except for the Chaplain, who is voted on separately. The House is a strongly majoritarian institution, so the officers generally reflect the partisan divisions. However, as a testament to the non-partisan role of the Chaplain, the minority party requests that the House vote on the Chaplain separately, and the minority does not offer its own candidate for Chaplain, as it does for positions like the Clerk or Sergeant-at-Arms.

The current House Chaplain is the Rev. Dr. Margaret Grun Kibben, who was first elected in January 2021. The current Senate Chaplain is the Rev. Dr. Barry C. Black, who was first elected in June 2003. Both achieved the rank of rear admiral in the U.S. Navy, both having served as Chief of Chaplains. Chaplain Kibben is the first woman elected as House Chaplain, and Chaplain Black is the first African American Senate Chaplain.

In addition to these primary non-partisan officers elected by the whole body, there is a host of others who serve the Congress.

Perhaps the most important appointed officials are the Parliamentarians of the House and Senate. Rules and precedents governing debate

on the Floor prove to be downright vexing to learn, so both the House and Senate have officers, known as Parliamentarians, to master procedures and interpret and explain them to the Members. The Parliamentarians and their staffs' primary responsibility is to advise the presiding officers how to rule in debate, but they also provide counsel for Members on how they can use their body's rules to achieve their legislative goals. We will speak more about the Parliamentarians in chapter 6, which discusses the legislative process.

When Congress is in session, you can easily find the Parliamentarians, or their assistants, on the floors of the Chambers they serve. In fact, you can find plenty of support staff near the congressional Chambers. Near the Parliamentarians are clerks and official proceedings staff who manage, monitor and record what goes on while the bodies are in session. Not far from the great halls are the Republican and Democratic cloakrooms, areas for the Members to gather before, during, and after debates and votes. Each cloakroom has a manager.

Congressional Support Agencies

There is another group of Hill employees that seldom are recognized as members of the legislative branch in part because Members have comparatively little direct control over them. These are members of the staffs of support agencies such as the Government Accountability Office (GAO); the Library of Congress (LOC); Congressional Research Service (CRS); and U.S. Capitol Police (USCP), which provides security for Members and the Capitol complex.

All told, the more than 20,000 members of the agency staffs constitute the majority of employees working for the Congress. Time was when their ranks were filled with patronage, but no more. These days they're hired and promoted on the basis of merit and answer to professional managers. Their training, performance reviews, and pay scales are administered much like any other governmental office, without regard to partisan politics.

Chapter Four Summary

- Each committee divides staff positions based on which party is in power. The size of the staff allotted to each committee depends on the committee's jurisdiction and clout.
- The hierarchy of committee staffs closely resembles the hierarchy of Members' personal staffs. But job titles are seldom the same. Among the exceptions are the communications director and the systems manager.
- The staff director's responsibilities, beyond making sure the chairman's agenda is carried out, include hiring and budget decisions, representing the committee at leadership meetings and coordinating the committee's activities with the chairman's personal staff.
- The chief counsel is expected to bring thorough knowledge of the rules, history and traditions of the committee; a legal background; and policy expertise relating to the issues before it.
- The minority party generally puts together a legislative staff of its own that mirrors the majority's.
- Committee members rely on legislative staff for instant recall of minute details relating to complex policy issues and to help manage the legislative process on the floor of the House or Senate.
- Some committee legislative staffs are large enough to conduct investigations.
- Don't be misled by staff-title roulette – a practice that often confuses outsiders trying to figure out whom to talk to about a specific issue before that committee.
- The clerk of each committee is the chief archivist, the keeper of committee records and the person responsible for the logistics of committee hearings.
- A leadership staffer's primary responsibility is to ensure that leadership meets its obligations to other Members, but like committee staff, they also must be sensitive to the demands of home constituencies, particularly when those demands conflict with leadership obligations.

- Most members of the leadership are provided with budgets to cover the cost of staff dedicated to leadership responsibilities, including floor managers and other experts in House or Senate procedures, communication staff to handle the needs not only of journalists but also of congressional colleagues, and staff dedicated to the organizational responsibilities of the respective caucuses.
- Officers of the House, such as the Clerk, the Chief Administrative Officer as well as the offices of the Sergeant-at-Arms of the House and Senate are financed through the Legislative Branch Appropriations bill.
- House Speaker Newt Gingrich created the Chief Administrative Officer in an attempt to professionalize support functions in the House and eliminate the politicization.
- There are 20,000 nonpartisan Hill employees of the legislative branch at the Government Accountability Office (GAO), the Library of Congress (LOC), Congressional Research Service (CRS) and U.S. Capitol Police (USCP).