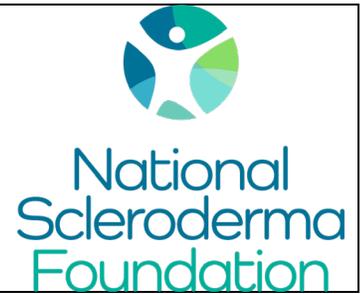


Advocacy

The United States Congress



The United States Congress

The US Congress makes laws for the entire nation.

It is composed of two chambers - the House of Representatives and the Senate.

The House of Representatives is the lower chamber of Congress.

Its main distinction from the Senate is that it has sole responsibility for originating appropriations bills - legislation that allocates government money.

Representatives can also be called congressmen or congresswomen, depending on their gender.

Representatives are selected every two years by their constituents - the people who live in a certain geographical area called a district.

Congressional districts are redrawn every ten years.

Each district has a state and a number and is named using these terms.

For example, if a district is number 10 in California, it is called the 'tenth district of California.'

Sometimes representatives include the name of their district in their title.

For example, Representative Brady of the eighth district of Texas may write his name 'Representative Brady (TX-8).'

There are 435 congressional districts and one representative is elected in each district so there are 435 representatives in the United States Congress.

One Representative is selected to serve as the Speaker of the House.

This person is chosen from the political party that has the most Members in the House. This is called the majority party.

The Speaker has the power to control the proceedings of the House.

The Senate is the upper chamber of Congress.

The Senate is very similar to the House of Representatives. However, the Senate has the special responsibility to approve presidential nominees for the Supreme Court, Cabinet positions, and other key federal officials.

Senators are elected every six years by the people of each state.

These people are their constituents whom they represent in the Senate.

There are 50 states, and 2 senators are elected in each state so there are 100 senators.

Each political party selects a leader for the Senate.

The senator from the majority party is called the Senate Majority Leader. This person has the power to schedule legislative priorities for the Senate.

The senator from the minority party is called the Senate Minority Leader.

Key Points

There are 435 Representatives and 100 Senators.

Every American has one Representative and two Senators.

Americans elect their Representative and Senators to represent their interests.

Committees

Both the Members of the House and Senate are divided up into smaller groups called committees.

Each committee is responsible for discussing a certain set of issues. Committees are usually named for the type of issue they discuss.

For example, the Senate committee that discusses health issues is called the Health, Education, Labor and Pensions Committee.

Most committees are divided into even smaller groups called subcommittees.

Each subcommittee is given a topic covered in the committee.

For example, the Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions Committee has a subcommittee called the Subcommittee on Aging which discusses health, education, labor, and pensions issues relating to older Americans.

Each committee and subcommittee has one Member of Congress from each political party who are responsible for scheduling discussion in the committee.

The Chair is the Member from the majority party.

The Ranking Member is the Member from the minority party.

Congressional Offices

Each Member of Congress has an office on Capitol Hill in Washington, D.C. and at least one in his/her home district or state.

Members of Congress count on the aid of several key people in their offices called staffers.

Each staffer has a distinct role in helping the Member of Congress.

Some staffers specialize in helping constituents with requests.

Others strategize about how to promote legislation.

Each office has a:

Chief of Staff who oversees all staffers and works closely with the Member of Congress to plan.

Legislative Director who organizes the Member of Congress' legislative priorities.

Press Secretary or Communications Director who handles press requests and represents the Member of Congress to the media.

Each office also has several Legislative Assistants who advise the Member of Congress on a set of issues.

Legislative Assistants are named for the specific topics they focus on.

For example, a Legislative Assistant who deals with health issues is called a 'Health LA.'

The letters 'LA' stand for Legislative Assistant.

Congress is inactive several times a year. This time is called recess.

During a recess Members of Congress often work from one of their district offices in their home states.

This is a good opportunity to meet with your Member of Congress.

Key Points

Members of Congress are divided into committees to discuss particular issues.

Committees are divided into subcommittees to deliberate on specific topics.

Members of Congress work out of offices on Capitol Hill and in their home districts.

Staffers work with Members of Congress to advise them on particular issue areas.