THE ROLES OF CONGRESSIONAL STAFF

Each Member of Congress has staff to assist him/her during a term in office. To be most effective in communicating with Congress, it is helpful to know the titles and principle functions of key staff.

Chief of Staff (CoS): The Chief of Staff reports directly to the Member of Congress. He/she usually has overall responsibility for evaluating the political outcomes of various legislative proposals and constituent requests. The Chief of Staff is usually the person in charge of overall office operations, including the assignment of work and the supervision of key staff.

Legislative Director (LD), Senior Legislative Assistant (Sr LA), or Legislative Counsel (LC): The LD is usually the staff person who monitors the legislative schedule and makes recommendations regarding the pros and cons of particular issues. In some congressional offices there are several LAs and responsibilities are assigned to staff with particular expertise in specific areas. For example, depending on the responsibilities and interests of the Member, an office may include a different LA for health issues, environmental matters, taxes, etc.

Press Secretary (Press) or Communications Director (CD): The Press Secretary’s responsibility is to build and maintain open and effective lines of communication between the Member, his/her constituency, and the general public. The Press Secretary is expected to know the benefits, demands, and special requirements of both print and electronic media, and how to most effectively promote the Member’s views or position on specific issues.

Scheduler: The Scheduler is usually responsible for allocating a Member’s time among the many demands that arise from congressional responsibilities, staff requirements, and constituent requests. The Scheduler may also be responsible for making necessary travel arrangements, arranging speaking dates, visits to the district, etc.

Caseworker: The Caseworker is the staff member usually assigned to help with constituent requests by preparing replies for the Member’s signature. The Caseworker’s responsibilities may also include helping resolve problems constituents present in relation to federal agencies, e.g., Social Security and Medicare issues, veteran’s benefits, passports, etc. There are often several Caseworkers in a congressional office.

Other Staff Titles: Other titles used in a congressional office may include: Executive Assistant, Legislative Correspondent, Executive Secretary, Office Manager, and Receptionist.

THE ROLE OF COMMITTEES

What is the role of Senate and House Committees?

Committees within the House and Senate are a group of Members assigned to give special consideration to certain bills.

Committees are essential to the effective operation of legislative bodies. Committee membership enables members to develop specialized knowledge of the matters under their jurisdiction. Committees monitor on-going governmental operations, identify issues suitable for legislative review, gather and evaluate information, and recommend courses of action to the Senate and the House of Representatives.

House Committees:
The House’s 20 standing committees have different legislative jurisdictions. Each considers bills and issues and recommends measures for consideration by the House. Committees also have oversight responsibilities to monitor agencies, programs, and activities within their jurisdictions, and in some cases in areas that cut across committee jurisdictions.

Current standing committees of the House: Agriculture; Appropriations; Armed Services; Budget; Commerce; Education and the Workforce; Ethics; Financial Services; Foreign Affairs; Homeland Security; House Administration; Judiciary; Natural Resources; Oversight and Government Reform; Rules; Science, Space, and Technology; Small Business; Transportation and Infrastructure; Veterans’ Affairs; and Ways and Means.

The Committee of the Whole House is a committee of the House on which all representatives serve and which meets in the House Chamber for the consideration of measures from the Union calendar.

Before members are assigned to committees, each committee’s size and the proportion of Republicans to Democrats must be decided by the party leaders. The total number of committee slots allotted to each party is approximately the same as the ratio between majority party and minority party members in the full chamber.

**Senate Committees:**

The Senate has three types of Committees. **Standing Committees** are permanent committees established under the standing rules of the Senate and specialize in the consideration of particular subject areas. The Senate currently has 16 standing committees. **Joint Committees** include membership from both houses of Congress. Joint committees are usually established with narrow jurisdictions and normally lack authority to report legislation. Chairship usually alternates each Congress between members from the House and Senate. **Special or Select Committees** are established by the Senate for a limited time period to perform a particular study or investigation. These committees might be given or denied authority to report legislation to the Senate. Select and joint committees generally handle oversight or housekeeping responsibilities.

Each party assigns, by resolution, its own members to committees, and each committee distributes its members among subcommittees. The Senate places limits on the number and types of panels any one senator may serve on and chair.

**The Role of Subcommittees:**

Subcommittees are a subunit of a larger committee. Subcommittees specialize in specific areas and help to divide a committee’s workload. A subcommittee’s recommendations must be approved by the entire committee before being reported to the Senate.

For more information visit the Senate and House websites concerning the roles of Committees.