

Guide to Individuals Seated on the House Dais

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The House of Representatives and Senate Explained

Congressional Procedure

A Practical Guide to the Legislative Process in the U.S. Congress

Richard A. Arenberg

Foreword by Alan S. Frumin

 **TheCapitolNet**

The House of Representatives meets in the House chamber of the Capitol. In the front of the chamber is a three-tiered, elevated dais. Seated or standing at a sizable lectern (the height of which is adjustable) on the top level of the dais is the presiding officer. Members of the House sit in bench-style (unassigned) seats arranged in a semicircle facing the presiding officer. Facing the dais, Republicans traditionally sit to the right of the center aisle, Democrats to the left. The website of the Clerk of the House provides a photograph of the House dais at http://clerk.house.gov/about/chamber_guide.aspx.¹

Top Tier

Speaker of the House

The only seat at the top tier of the dais is that of the Speaker, who is the presiding officer when the House is meeting as the House. When not presiding, the Speaker appoints a Speaker pro tempore to perform the duties of the presiding officer. When the House is meeting in the Committee of the Whole House on the State of the Union (the Committee of the Whole), the chairman (a majority-party Member named by the Speaker) occupies this seat. During a joint session or meeting of the House and Senate, a second seat is added for the Vice President to occupy.

Parliamentarian

Usually observed standing to the left of and slightly below the presiding officer (viewed from the rear of the chamber) is the House Parliamentarian or an assistant Parliamentarian. In this role, the Parliamentarian counsels the Speaker or chairman of the Committee of the Whole on rules and precedents and attends the presiding officer in performing his or her duties.

Sergeant at Arms

Off the dais on the left, the Sergeant at Arms (or a deputy) is seated at a separate table. During legislative proceedings, an assistant Parliamentarian often sits at this table or stands near it. Elected by the House, the Sergeant at Arms is custodian of the mace, the symbol of parliamentary power and authority. When the House is meeting as the House, the mace is on a pedestal to the Speaker's left (viewed from the rear of the chamber). When the House is meeting as the Committee of the Whole, the Sergeant at Arms moves the mace to a lower pedestal.

Clerk of the House

The Clerk of the House is seated to the right of and slightly below the presiding officer (as viewed from the rear of the chamber). Elected by the House, the Clerk is the chamber's chief legislative official. The Clerk's duties include certifying the passage of bills, delivering messages to the Senate, and affixing the seal of the House on all formal documents. The Clerk also presides over a new session of Congress until a Speaker is elected. Except for ceremonial occasions such as joint meetings and sessions, the Clerk spends little time seated on the dais.

¹ A PDF brochure describing other characteristics of the House floor can be found at <http://clerk.house.gov/about/house-chamber-brochure.pdf>.

Timekeeper

The area near the Clerk's seat might be occupied by a timekeeper, who is on the staff of the Parliamentarian. The timekeeper keeps the time used during House debate and other proceedings and provides that information to the presiding officer.

Middle Tier

The middle level of the dais is occupied by employees of the Clerk of the House. The Clerk's lectern is also on this level. It is from this lectern that the House Chaplain or guest chaplain offers prayers, the President delivers the State of the Union address or other addresses to Congress, invited dignitaries address joint meetings of Congress, and a clerk reads bills and other business to the House.

Journal Clerk

To the far left of the Clerk's lectern (viewed from the rear of the chamber) is a journal clerk, who compiles the House's daily minutes. These minutes are the official record required by the Constitution and published as the *House Journal*.

Tally Clerk

Between the journal clerk and the Clerk's lectern is the tally clerk, who operates the electronic voting system, oversees the recording of votes on the House floor, receives reports of committees, and prepares the *Calendars of the United States House of Representatives and History of Legislation*. This tally clerk may be referred to as the "seated tally clerk." (See below for information on a second tally clerk, who stands during a vote.)

Reading Clerk

To the right of the Clerk's lectern is a reading clerk, who is responsible for reading aloud communications from the Senate and President, House bills, amendments, Members' vote changes, and other business. During busy legislative periods, there may be two reading clerks present.

Lower Tier

The lower tier is also occupied by employees of the Clerk of the House.

Bill Clerk

On the far left of the lower level of the dais (viewed from the rear of the chamber) is a bill clerk. This area is also where the "hopper" is located, a box into which Members place measures they wish to introduce. The bill clerk receives and processes bills and resolutions and receives lists of cosponsors, texts of amendments, and communications to the House. The bill clerk also keeps any active discharge petitions here for Members who wish to sign them.

Enrolling Clerk

A seat is reserved on the lower level of the dais (left of center) for an enrolling clerk, who prepares the official engrossed copy of all House-passed measures (for messaging to the Senate, when applicable) and the official enrolled copy of all House-originated measures (for transmittal to the White House for presidential action, when applicable). The enrolling clerk does not usually sit on the dais during the course of the day since the clerk is able to monitor televised floor proceedings.

Tally Clerk

During a vote, a tally clerk stands on the lower level of the dais directly in front of the seated tally clerk (see above) to take “well cards” (paper ballots) from Members casting votes or changing votes after the electronic voting stations are locked. This tally clerk may be referred to as the “standing tally clerk.” This clerk prepares the yea and nay tally sheets for the presiding officer at the end of each vote.

Daily Digest Clerk

Another seat is reserved on the lower level of the dais (left of center) for a Daily Digest clerk, who prepares the information published in the Daily Digest section of the *Congressional Record*. The Daily Digest clerk does not usually sit on the dais during the course of the day since the clerk is able to monitor televised floor proceedings.

Official Reporters

In the center of the lower level of the dais are the clerks to the official reporters. They are responsible for keeping track of floor activity and receiving text for the *Congressional Record*. Further to the right are seats for official reporters awaiting their turn to work on the House floor.

The official reporters who are transcribing sit at a table in the well of the House in front of the lower level of the dais. This table also holds a box containing the “well cards” (paper ballots) Members may use to cast or change votes. Two podiums, located on either side of this table, are used by Members to speak from the well of the House, thus facing their colleagues in the House chamber.²

Author Information

Valerie Heitshusen
Specialist on Congress and the Legislative Process

² Under some circumstances, Members speak not from the well but from one of four party tables that sit among the chamber’s permanent seats. The tables are used by the party leaders or by members of committees who are responsible for coordinating floor consideration of legislation.

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This report was originally written by Mildred Amer, former specialist on the Congress. The listed author has updated the report and can respond to inquiries from congressional clients on the subject.

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