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Senate Sergeant at Arms and Doorkeeper: A Primer

The Sergeant at Arms and Doorkeeper (Sergeant at Arms) is an elected officer of the Senate and is the chamber’s primary law enforcement and protocol official, responsible for the protection, security, decorum, and other administrative aspects of the Senate floor, Senate wing of the Capitol, Senate office buildings, and adjacent grounds. The office was initially established during the First Congress, when the Senate elected James Mathers as Senate Doorkeeper. The Senate Sergeant at Arms performs duties according to law, Senate rules, and custom.

Resolved, That the Doorkeeper of the Senate be, and he is hereby, invested with the authority of Sergeant-at-Arms, to hold said office during the pleasure of the Senate, whose duty it shall be to execute the commands of the senate, from time to time, and all such process as shall be directed to him by the President of the Senate.

-*Annals of Congress*, February 5, 1798, pp. 497-498.

Selection Process

The Senate elects the Sergeant at Arms, who serves until the Senate chooses a successor. The Senate typically considers a Senate Resolution (S.Res.) to elect a Sergeant at Arms. Typically, the Senate agrees to the resolution by unanimous consent (UC). For example, the current Sergeant at Arms, Karen Gibson, was elected in the 117th Congress (S.Res. 127) on March 22, 2021.

Acting Sergeant at Arms Appointment

Should the Sergeant at Arms die, resign, or become disabled, the Deputy Sergeant at Arms “shall act” as Sergeant at Arms “in carrying out the duties and responsibilities of that office in all matters until such time as a new Sergeant at Arms ... shall have been elected and qualified or such disability shall have been ended” (2 U.S.C. §6593).

117th Congress

On January 7, 2021, Sergeant at Arms Michael Stenger resigned following the events of January 6, 2021, at the U.S. Capitol during the joint session of Congress to certify and count the 2020 presidential election electoral votes. Pursuant to 2 U.S.C. §6593, Deputy Sergeant at Arms Jennifer Hemingway began serving as acting Sergeant at Arms. On March 22, 2021, the Senate elected Karen Gibson as the Sergeant at Arms (S.Res. 127).

Immediate Past Sergeants at Arms

Table 1 lists the 12 individuals who have served as Sergeant at Arms and Doorkeeper since 1991, and the date they were first elected.

Table 1. Senate Sergeant at Arms and Doorkeeper, 1991-2021

Congresses	Name	First Elected
102 nd (1991-92) to 103 rd (1993-94)	Martha Pope	1/3/1991
103 rd (1993-94)	Robert Laurent Benoit	4/15/1994
104 th (1995-96)	Howard Greene	1/4/1995
104 th (1995-96) to 105 th (1997-98)	Gregory Casey	9/6/1996
105 th (1997-98) to 107 th (2001-02)	James Ziglar	11/9/1998
107 th (2001-02) to 108 th (2003-04)	Alfonso Lenhardt	9/4/2001
108 th (2003-04) to 109 th (2005-06)	William Pickle	3/17/2003
110 th (2007-08) to 113 th (2013-14)	Terrance Gainer	1/4/2007
113 th (2013-14)	Andrew Willison	5/5/2014
114 th (2015-16) to 115 th (2017-18)	Frank Larkin	1/6/2015
115 th (2017-18) to 117 th (2021-22)	Michael Stenger ^a	4/16/2018
117 th (2021-22)	Karen Gibson	3/22/2021

Source: U.S. Congress, Senate Historical Office, at https://www.senate.gov/artandhistory/history/common/briefing/sergeant_at_arms.htm.

Notes:

- a. Michael Stenger resigned on January 7, 2021. Jennifer Hemingway, Deputy Sergeant at Arms, served as acting Sergeant of Arms from January 7, 2021, to March 22, 2021.

Duties and Responsibilities

The duties and responsibilities of the Sergeant at Arms have developed over time and can be located in law, rules, custom, and precedent.

Additionally, the Senate Committee on Rules and Administration and the Senate Committee on Appropriations define other duties of the Sergeant at Arms. The Senate Rules and Administration Committee provides oversight to the Sergeant at Arms.



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Generally, the duties and responsibilities of Sergeant at Arms and Doorkeeper can be divided into three broad categories: law enforcement and security, protocol, and administration. Each category reflects the basic responsibility to ensure safe and effective operation of the Senate.

Law Enforcement and Security

As the Senate's chief law enforcement officer, the Sergeant at Arms is responsible for security and law enforcement in the Senate wing of the Capitol and the Senate Office Buildings (2 U.S.C. § 6617; *Rules for the Regulation of the Senate Wing of the U.S. Capitol and Senate Office Buildings*, Rule I). Further, during a "live" quorum call, the Sergeant at Arms also has the authority to compel the attendance of absent Senators (*Standing Rules of the Senate*, Rule VI).

The Sergeant at Arms works in concert with the House Sergeant at Arms and the Architect of the Capitol. In addition to their other duties, these three officials comprise the Capitol Police Board, with the U.S. Capitol Police Chief serving as an ex-officio member (2 U.S.C. § 1901 note). The Senate Sergeant at Arms also serves with the Secretary of the Senate, the Clerk of the House, the House Sergeant at Arms, and the Architect of the Capitol on the Congressional Accessibility Services Board (2 U.S.C. § 2172). This board oversees the Office of Congressional Accessibility Services, which provides and coordinates accessibility services for individuals with disabilities in the U.S. Capitol complex.

Together with the Secretary of the Senate, the Sergeant at Arms develops and maintains a continuity-of-operations plan that enables the Senate to conduct business and access data at offsite locations, and oversees the office of security and emergency preparedness, which serves as the Senate's emergency planning and response team.

Protocol

The Sergeant at Arms serves as the Senate's chief of protocol. In this role, the Sergeant at Arms performs ceremonial functions that generally have developed through custom and precedent. For example, the Sergeant at Arms

- greets and escorts the U.S. President, heads of state, and other official Senate guests while attending functions in the Capitol;
- leads Senators from the Senate side of the Capitol to the House chamber for joint sessions of Congress, to their places on the inaugural platform, and to any other place the Senate travels as a body; and
- assists in arrangements for inaugurations and the planning of funerals of Senators who die while in office.

By custom, the Sergeant at Arms is custodian of the Senate gavel.

The Sergeant at Arms is also responsible for protocol following the death of a Senator. These responsibilities include, among other responsibilities, the enforcement of a provision in the *Standing Orders of the Senate*, which prohibits flowers in the Senate except on the day reserved for eulogies to a deceased Senator (*Standing Orders of the Senate*, § 64).

Administrative

As an executive officer of the Senate, the Sergeant at Arms is responsible for specified administrative services both to the Senate as a whole and to Senators individually. These include functions such as the operation of the Senate appointment desk; Senate parking services; and acquiring home state office space for Senators (2 U.S.C. § 6317).

Organization

As described in the Senate Appropriations Committee majority print, the Sergeant at Arms has four principal organizational units. They are as follows:

Office of Security and Emergency Preparedness. This office "prepares the Senate to respond to a full spectrum of emergencies that may disrupt normal business operations." The office includes life safety programs, intelligence, security, and continuity of operations policies and programs.

Capitol Operations. This office "is responsible for many of the services provided within the Capitol building that support the day-to-day operation of the Senate," including chamber operations, official business visitor processing, credentialing news media, and operating the Senate Recording Studio.

Operations Division. This office furnishes and maintains the Senate side of the Capitol Building and "provides an array of services to the Senate community to include identification, transportation, parking, and photographic services; printing, publishing, graphic design, and framing services; and USPS mail screening, and mailing and package delivery services."

Office of the Chief Information Officer (OCIO). This office "builds, operates, and supports the Senate's information infrastructure," including information security, telecommunications, helpdesks, data networks, web services and hosting, system development, and office equipment.

Jacob R. Straus, Specialist on the Congress

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