



CRS Report for Congress

Clerk of the House: Legislative and Administrative Duties

Lorraine H. Tong
Analyst in American National Government
Government and Finance Division

The Clerk is the chief legislative official of the House of Representatives. Elected by the House membership at the beginning of each Congress, the legislative duties of the Clerk were defined during the First Congress.

Over time, other responsibilities have been added by law, House rules, policies determined by the House Appropriations and Administration Committees, and by custom. House Rule II establishes the duties of the Clerk. For more information on congressional processes, see [<http://www.crs.gov/products/guides/guidehome.shtml>].

Duties and Responsibilities. At the commencement of each new Congress, the Clerk presides over the House pending election of a Speaker, calls the roll, certifies newly elected Members, preserves order and decorum, and decides all questions of order subject to appeal by a Member, Delegate, or Resident Commissioner. The Clerk is responsible for maintaining a *Journal*, and after each session of Congress, distributing it to Members, Delegates, and the Resident Commissioner; certifying the passage of all House bills and joint resolutions; and receiving messages from the President and the Senate. The Clerk also attests and affixes the House seal to all formal documents issued by the House, including writs, warrants, and subpoenas. The Clerk is the official custodian of a permanent set of House documents, including historical records of the House. In addition, the clerk administers the House page program and serves on the House Page Board.

The Clerk is charged with the management of vacant congressional offices due to resignations or death. When Members retire or leave Congress, the Clerk's staff provides comprehensive consultations on disposing of and archiving official papers and office files. House Rule VII charges the clerk with the preservation and availability of noncurrent records of House committees and records of House officers.

The following staff support the clerk in carrying out the Clerk's legislative duties:

- The *journal clerk* compiles the House's daily minutes (the official record of the House, published in the *Journal*).
- The *tally clerk* operates the electronic voting system, oversees the recording of floor votes, receives committee reports, and prepares the

Calendars of the United States House of Representatives and History of Legislation.

- The *reading clerks* read aloud House bills, amendments, and other documents submitted to the House.
- The *bill clerk* receives and processes bills and resolutions, lists of cosponsors, amendments and other communications to the House.
- The *enrolling clerk* prepares the official copy of all House — passed measures for the Senate, and the official copy of House originated and adopted measures for transmittal to the White House.
- The *Daily Digest clerk* prepares information for the *Daily Digest* of the *Congressional Record*. The *official reporters* transcribe House floor proceedings and House committee hearings; clerks to the reporters track floor activity and receive text for the *Congressional Record*.

In the 105th Congress, the clerk reorganized the Office of the Clerk and created the Legislative Resource Center (LRC) by consolidating the staff and activities of the historian, library, document room, office of records and registration, and the LEGIS office. Under House rules and public law, the Clerk also makes available public disclosure information such as federal election and campaign reports, financial disclosure statements, foreign travel expenditures and gift disclosure reports, franking information, and lobby registrations. This data, as well as the official legislative documents of the House, compiled by the Clerk, is accessible for public examination at the LRC.

Electronic Dissemination of House Information and Documents. At the direction of the House Appropriations Subcommittee on the Legislative Branch, the Clerk works closely with the secretary of the Senate and other legislative branch entities to develop and establish electronic information standards for efficient transmittal of information on legislation, voting records, and other data. The Clerk, with the approval of the Speaker and the Committee on House Administration, has formulated and implemented procedures for processing and posting information on House votes for integration into the Library of Congress's THOMAS computer system and the Legislative Information System (LIS). In June 1997, to facilitate the dissemination of House documents to both Congress and the general public, the Clerk established a website [<http://clerk.house.gov>], making available in electronic format documents compiled and printed by the Office of the Clerk.

Organization. The Office of the Clerk comprises the Clerk's main office and the following nine offices:

- Capitol Service Groups
- History and Preservation
- House Employment Counsel
- House Page Program
- Legislative Computer Systems
- Legislative Operations
- Legislative Resource Center
- Official Reporters
- Publication Services