



CRS Report for Congress

Guide to Individuals Seated on the Senate Dais

Mildred Amer
Specialist in American Government
Government and Finance Division

The Senate meets in the Capitol in the Senate chamber. Seated at the head of the chamber on the top of a two-tiered platform/dais is the presiding officer. Members are assigned to one of the 100 desks that are arranged in a semicircle facing the presiding officer. The center aisle in the Senate chamber divides the political parties. Facing the presiding officer, Republicans sit to the right of the center aisle, Democrats to the left. Senior Members usually sit the closest to the dais and along the center aisle, although some choose other desks. Seated around the presiding officer are various officers and employees of the Senate who have defined roles, some of which are prescribed in Senate rules and others of which are derived from precedent. This report is one of a series on the legislative process. For more information on the legislative process, please see [<http://www.crs.gov/products/guides/guidehome.shtml>]. An illustration of the Senate chamber can be found on the Internet at [<http://www.senate.gov/vtour/3high.htm>].

Top Tier

Presiding Officer. The Vice President of the United States is the President of the Senate and its presiding officer. He usually assumes this role only during ceremonial functions; when key administration issues are being debated; or if a pending vote is expected to be close (he can only vote to break a tie). In his absence, the President pro tempore, the senior Senator from the majority party, fills the role of presiding officer. However, other members of the majority party usually serve as the presiding officer on a rotating basis throughout a day's session. The presiding officer sits in the front of the chamber on the upper tier of the rostrum/dais. Below the presiding officer are other Senate officials.

Lower/Front Tier

Sergeant at Arms. The Sergeant at Arms or a deputy is seated to the left of the presiding officer (as viewed from the rear of the chamber). The Sergeant at Arms is the chief law enforcement and protocol officer in the Senate and is responsible for preserving order and decorum on the Senate floor and in the galleries. This officer is also the principal manager of many of the Senate's support services.

Secretary of the Senate. This chief administrative and budgetary officer of the Senate is seated to the right of the presiding officer (as viewed from the rear of the chamber). Except for ceremonial and other special occasions, the secretary spends very little time on the dais. The Secretary's office oversees a variety of services that support the legislative operation of the Senate, including record keeping and document management. In the absence of the Vice President and pending the election of the President pro tempore, the Secretary performs the duties of the chair.

Secretary to the Majority/Secretary to the Minority. Seated slightly behind and to the right of the presiding officer (as viewed from the rear of the chamber) is the Secretary to the Majority; behind to the left is the Secretary to the Minority. These two officials, elected by their parties, are responsible for providing support services to their respective leadership and Members. Their floor-related duties include supervision of their party cloakrooms and briefing Senators on pending votes and issues. Seated next to the two secretaries are the Assistant Secretary to the Majority and the Assistant Secretary to the Minority.

Seated directly in front of the presiding officer and on the lower/front tier of the dais are four legislative officials who are under the supervision of the Secretary of the Senate. They are the Journal Clerk, the Parliamentarian, the Legislative Clerk, and the Assistant Secretary of the Senate.

Journal Clerk. To the far left of the dais is the Journal Clerk, who records the daily minutes of the Senate and prepares them for publication in the Senate *Journal*, the official record of proceedings required by the Constitution. The Journal Clerk also prepares a history of bills and resolutions for inclusion in the Senate *Journal*.

Parliamentarian. Seated to the right of the Journal Clerk is the Senate Parliamentarian. He maintains and advises on the precedents and practices of the Senate for the presiding officer and other Senators, and assists in the referral of bills to Senate committees. He also is the Senate's official timekeeper.

Legislative Clerk. The Legislative Clerk, seated to the right of the Parliamentarian, is the Reading Clerk of the Senate. This clerk calls and records the roll for all votes and quorum calls, maintains official copies of measures pending before the Senate, receives all proposed and adopted amendments, and, at the direction of the presiding officer, reads aloud all bills and amendments, presidential messages, House messages, and other pending business.

Assistant Secretary. The Assistant Secretary of the Senate has a seat at the far right of the lower tier of the dais. The Assistant Secretary is the Secretary's chief assistant and supervises the day-to-day administration of the office.

Front of Dais

Official Reporters of Debate. Directly in front of the dais are two tables for the Official Reporters of Debate. They prepare the Senate business for publication in the *Congressional Record*.