

Appearances by Sitting U.S. Supreme Court Justices at Congressional Committee and Subcommittee Hearings (1/1/1960 to 7/15/2026)

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This Insight provides historical information and analysis related to appearances by sitting U.S. Supreme Court Justices at congressional committee and subcommittee hearings during the period January 1, 1960, through July 15, 2026 (confirmation hearings are excluded from the analysis). Congressional hearings are used, generally, by committees and subcommittees “to obtain information and opinions on proposed legislation, conduct an investigation, or evaluate/oversee the activities of a government department.” Hearings “may also be purely exploratory in nature, providing testimony and data about topics of current interest.”

It has not been uncommon, at least since 1960, for sitting Supreme Court Justices to appear at congressional committee and subcommittee hearings. Justices made such appearances at least once every year from 1960 through 2011. Most recently, on July 14, 2026, Supreme Court Justices appeared at subcommittee hearings in both the House and Senate, when Justices [Elena Kagan](#) and [Amy Coney Barrett](#) testified about the Supreme Court’s budget request for FY2027.

Prior to these appearances, Supreme Court Justices last appeared at a [House hearing](#) in 2019, when Justices [Samuel Alito](#) and [Elena Kagan](#) testified before the House Appropriations Subcommittee on Financial Services and General Government (FSGG) about the Supreme Court’s budget request for FY2020. Sitting Justices last appeared at a [Senate hearing in 2011](#), when Justices [Stephen Breyer](#) and [Antonin Scalia](#) testified before the Senate Judiciary Committee regarding their views about the constitutional role of federal judges.

The data presented below were compiled from information collected by CRS using [ProQuest Congressional](#). When searching *ProQuest Congressional* to compile the information provided below, CRS searched for each Justice’s name in the “witness” field for congressional hearings, as well as for his or her name in the full text of hearing transcripts for the 1960 to 2026 period. The search of the full text transcripts revealed instances of hearings when Justices appeared before House and Senate committees, but which were not identified by *ProQuest Congressional* as instances of Justices appearing as committee witnesses. There may be additional instances of Justices appearing before congressional committees that were not identified using the methodology described above.

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How many appearances did Supreme Court Justices make at committee or subcommittee hearings from January 1, 1960, through July 15, 2026?

CRS identified 95 committee or subcommittee hearings held from January 1, 1960, through July 15, 2026, that included an appearance by at least one sitting Supreme Court Justice. Of the 95 hearings, 65 (68%) were held by a House committee or subcommittee and 30 (32%) were held by a Senate committee or subcommittee. CRS identified no instance of a sitting Justice appearing before a joint committee.

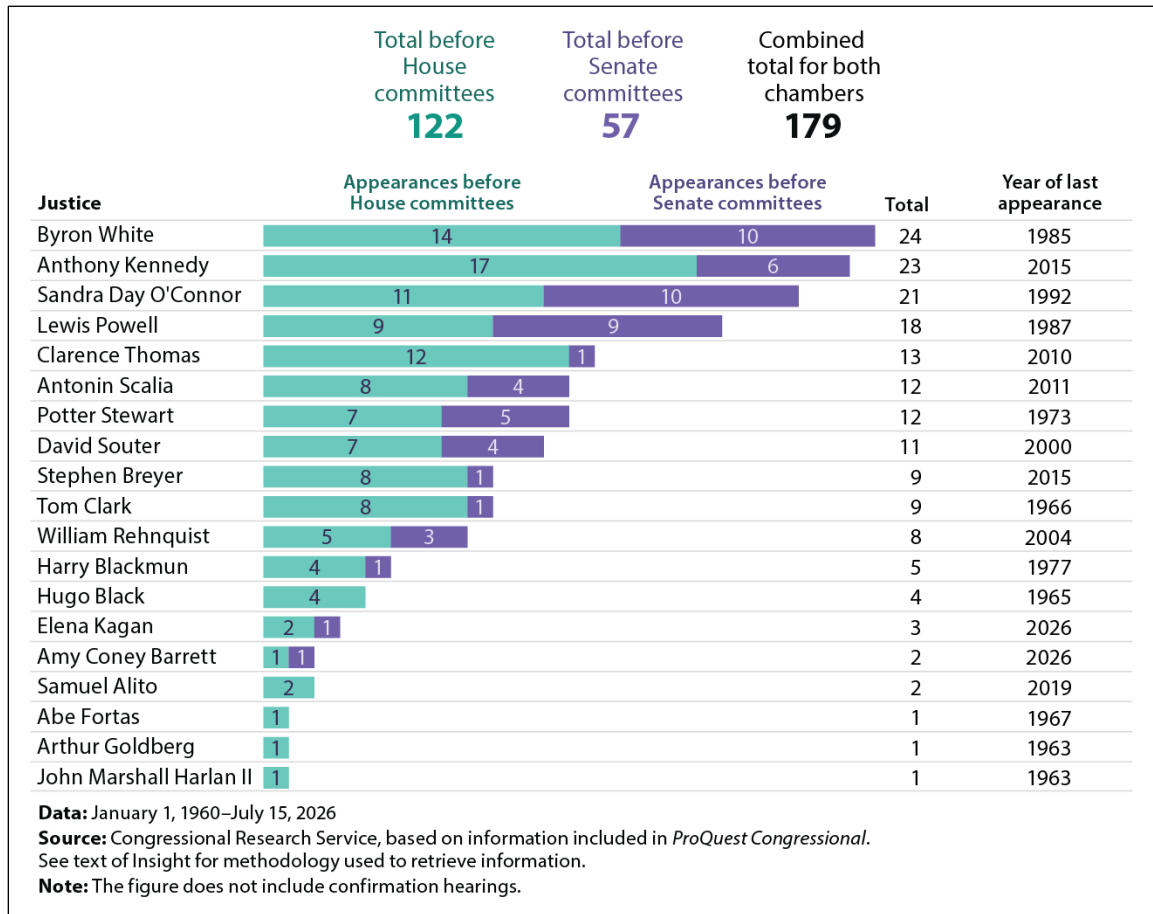
Collectively, the 95 committee and subcommittee hearings during this period featured a total of 179 appearances by sitting Supreme Court Justices (most hearings included appearances by at least two Justices). By chamber, this included 122 appearances in the House and 57 appearances in the Senate.

Of the 24 Justices who have served on the Court since 1960, excluding those currently serving, 15 (63%) appeared at a congressional committee or subcommittee hearing on at least one occasion. Among these 15 Justices, 11 made five or more appearances during this period.

Of the nine current Justices, four (44%) have appeared at a committee or subcommittee hearing on at least one occasion. Specifically, Justice [Clarence Thomas](#) has appeared 13 times, last appearing in 2010; Justice Samuel Alito has appeared twice, last appearing in 2019; Justice Elena Kagan has appeared three times, last appearing in 2026; and Justice Amy Coney Barrett has appeared twice, last appearing in 2026.

Figure 1 shows the total number of appearances made by specific Justices at committee and subcommittee hearings from January 1, 1960, through July 15, 2026, as well as a breakdown of each Justice's appearances in each chamber. The figure also indicates the last year a Justice appeared before a congressional committee or subcommittee while still serving on the Court.

As shown by the figure, Justice [Byron White](#) made the greatest number of total appearances before congressional committees and subcommittees (24), followed by Justices [Anthony Kennedy](#) (23) and [Sandra Day O'Connor](#) (21). Justice Kennedy made the greatest number of appearances in the House, while Justices O'Connor and White made the greatest number of appearances in the Senate.

Figure 1. Number of Appearances by Sitting Supreme Court Justices at Congressional Committee and Subcommittee Hearings

In how many years during this period did Supreme Court Justices appear before congressional committees or subcommittees?

Overall, from January 1, 1960, through July 15, 2026, a sitting Supreme Court Justice appeared at a House or Senate committee or subcommittee hearing in 56 of the 67 years during this period (including 2026). Notably, a sitting Justice appeared at a hearing for 52 consecutive years, from 1960 through 2011. In contrast, CRS did not identify any such appearances by a sitting Justice in either chamber for 11 of the past 15 years (there were no appearances in 2012, 2014, or during the periods 2016–2018 and 2020–2025).

Additionally, there was a steep decline in appearances by sitting Justices at committee or subcommittee hearings in the Senate after 2000. Of the 30 Senate committee or subcommittee hearings for which a sitting Justice appeared, 26 (87%) occurred prior to 2000. The four post-2000 appearances by sitting Justices at a Senate committee or subcommittee hearing occurred in 2002, 2007, 2011, and 2026.

Prior to 2000, appearances by sitting Justices at committee and subcommittee hearings in the Senate were more common—specifically, such appearances occurred in 1964, 1967 to 1970 (four consecutive years), 1972 to 1974 (three consecutive years), 1978 to 1987 (10 consecutive years), 1989 to 1992 (four consecutive years), 1994, and 1996 to 1998 (three consecutive years).

Before which congressional committees and subcommittees did Supreme Court Justices appear?

Of the 179 appearances by sitting Justices from January 1, 1960, through July 15, 2026, 165 (92%) were before either the [House](#) or [Senate Appropriations Committee](#) (most commonly, before an appropriations subcommittee).

While most appearances by sitting Justices since 1960 have been in the context of the Court's annual appropriations request, the questions posed to the Justices during appropriations hearings have not been limited solely to the Court's request. For example, Justices have been asked questions related to why the Supreme Court itself has not adopted the [Code of Judicial Conduct](#), how the judiciary handles workplace misconduct issues, and the confirmation process for federal judges.

Appearances prior to 1960 may have been less tied to the Court's annual appropriations request. As [noted by Senator Leahy in 2011](#), an appearance by Justice Kennedy before the Senate Judiciary Committee in 2007 reflected "a tradition of Justices testifying before Congress on matters other than their appropriations requests, a tradition which included appearances by [Chief Justice Taft](#) and [Chief Justice Hughes](#) in the 1920s and '30s, as well as by [Justice Jackson](#) in 1941."

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