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United Nations Issues: Congressional Representatives to the UN General Assembly

The annual session of the United Nations (UN) General Assembly is held at UN Headquarters in New York City. The President generally (but not always) appoints one Democrat and one Republican to serve as U.S. representatives to the session, alternating each year between the House and Senate. The 81st General Assembly session began on September 8, 2026. Two Members of Congress are serving as U.S. representatives during the session: Senator Dave McCormick and Senator Jeanne Shaheen.

Overview of the UN General Assembly

The UN General Assembly is composed of 193 UN member states, including the United States. It is the primary deliberative, policymaking, and representative organ of the United Nations. Each country, including the United States, has one vote. A two-thirds majority vote is required for decisions related to key issues such as peace and security, admission of new members, and the budget. A simple majority vote applies for all other matters.

The Assembly's annual regular session opens in September and runs for one year. The main part of the session, from September to December, includes most of the work of the Assembly's six committees. The annual meeting of heads of state and government, often referred to as the "general debate," is held at the beginning of the Assembly session. Selected Members of Congress generally serve as U.S. representatives during this period.

History of Congressional Representation

The concept of congressional representation to the UN General Assembly emerged from extensive participation by both Senators and Representatives in the 1945 San Francisco Conference on International Organization, which led to the adoption of the UN Charter. The practice began at the first Assembly session in 1946, when Members of the Senate and House held positions as representatives and alternate representatives, respectively. Since that time, with few exceptions, congressional representatives have served as part of U.S. delegations to the UN General Assembly, which are typically led and coordinated by the Department of State. Each year two Senators have alternated with two Representatives—with the Senate typically serving in years when the House holds elections. In most cases, both parties have been represented and, when possible, the Administration and Congress have aimed to select Members who have not previously served as delegates. (See **Table 1** for a list of congressional representatives from 2013 to 2026.)

Legislative Authority

After the adoption of the UN Charter, Congress enacted the United Nations Participation Act of 1945 (UNPA; 22 U.S.C. 287 et seq.), which provides legislative authority for U.S. engagement in the United Nations. UNPA does not require congressional participation in sessions of the General Assembly, but anticipates and permits participation of Members of Congress, among other U.S. representatives, in such sessions. Section 2 of the act sets out the authorities for U.S. representation the United Nations. Specifically, Section 2(a) specifies that the President, by and with the advice and consent of the Senate, shall designate not more than five U.S. representatives to attend a specified session or specified sessions of the General Assembly. UNPA does not specify whether Members are eligible to be appointed as U.S. representatives; however, Section 2(g) prohibits compensation for Members serving as U.S. representatives, signaling that Members might serve.

Role and Responsibilities

The role and duties of congressional representatives are not formalized; thus, the level and extent of congressional engagement during the Assembly session depends on the interests and priorities of individual Members. Delegates generally travel to New York at the beginning of the regular session. In the past, some Members have attended the general debate and the President's reception for visiting heads of state, while others have stayed for several additional days or returned for other parts of the Assembly session. Congressional representatives have also followed the activities of one of the General Assembly's six main committees, with at least one Member tracking the work of the fifth committee, which is responsible for administrative and budgetary matters related to the organization. Before or during the session, Members may also schedule appointments on policy issues of interest; these might include one-on-one visits with heads of state, foreign representatives, or UN officials.

Congressional representatives have often received support from congressional committee staff and State Department officials. For example, staff from the House Foreign Affairs Committee (HFAC) and Senate Foreign Relations Committee (SFRC) might write statements, provide background materials and briefings, or arrange meetings for Members. State Department officials have traditionally coordinated meetings and briefed Members on U.S. policy and key issues facing the Assembly. The Department also historically provided some Members with office space and services in the U.S. Mission to the United Nations in New York City.

Appointment Process

As outlined in UNPA, the President, with the advice and consent of the Senate, may designate congressional representatives. In practice, SFRC has developed a policy of not holding hearings for temporary or part-time positions, including General Assembly representatives.

Instead, both HFAC and SFRC have provided the President with their choices, who are nominated by the President and confirmed by vote of the full Senate, with some exceptions. For example, nominees for the 72nd (2017) and 73rd (2018) Assembly sessions were confirmed by the Senate by voice vote. From 2013 to 2016, however, it appears that while SFRC reported out nominees, the full Senate did not vote on the nominations and they were returned to the President pursuant to Senate Rule XXXI, paragraph 6. For the 74th (2019) and 75th (2020) sessions, President Trump did not transmit nominations to SFRC, and thus no committee or full Senate consideration took place. In each of those years, two Members of Congress served as representatives to the Assembly (except in 2020 due to COVID-19). During the Biden Administration, nominees were transmitted to the Senate from 2021 through 2024; Senators Leahy and Risch were confirmed in 2022, while the nominations in other years were returned to the President.

President Trump did not transmit nominations for the Assembly's 80th session in 2025. On September 22, 2025, Representative Sara Jacobs stated, "The Trump Administration has refused to send a bipartisan congressional delegation to the UN this year – blocking my official participation but not my Republican counterpart's." On September 23, Representative Young Kim stated that she was representing the United States at the 80th session. As noted previously, Senator Dave McCormick and Senator Jeanne Shaheen are serving as U.S. representatives to the 81st General Assembly session. The Trump Administration has not transmitted their nominations to the Senate.

Committee Selection

Although both HFAC and SFRC have at different times documented procedures for selecting congressional representatives, in practice the process appears to be informal and has varied over time depending on the priorities and preferences of committee leadership.

House of Representatives. HFAC does not appear to have a formal process for selecting congressional representatives to the General Assembly. In past practice, it has assigned one Member from each political party on the basis of seniority, starting with those who have not served as representatives; however, HFAC members have increasingly selected participants based on the Member's level of interest in UN-related issues and availability to attend the session.

Senate. SFRC also does not appear to have a formal process for selecting congressional representatives to the Assembly. In practice, the chairperson and ranking member select the representatives, who are usually chosen from among SFRC members. Similar to the House, congressional representatives from the Senate appear to be selected based on their interest in UN issues and availability.

Role of the Executive Branch

In accordance with the President's authority to appoint U.S. representatives to the UN General Assembly, the executive branch is responsible for sending a letter of invitation to the individual Member appointing him or her to the U.S. delegation. At the same time, it might customarily forward the names of the selected Members to the Senate for confirmation. The first public notice is usually a press statement from individual Members, a White House announcement, or a notice of intention to nominate as part of the Assembly delegation, subject to Senate confirmation.

The State Department has historically provided funding for U.S. representatives to the General Assembly, including per diem, transportation, and lodging expenses. These activities are typically financed through the Diplomatic Programs account, which funds the Office of International Conferences in the International Organization Affairs Bureau (IO/C). IO/C is responsible for accrediting, instructing, and managing U.S. delegates to multilateral conferences, including the General Assembly.

Table 1. Congressional Representatives to UN General Assembly Sessions: 2013 to 2026

General Assembly Session and Start Date	Representatives or Senators
81st September 8, 2026	Sen. Dave McCormick Sen. Jeanne Shaheen
80th September 9, 2025	Rep. Young Kim
79th September 10, 2024	Sen. Ben Cardin Sen. Dan Sullivan
78th September 5, 2023	Rep. Barbara Lee Rep. French Hill
77th September 13, 2022	Sen. Patrick Leahy Sen. James Risch
76th September 14, 2021	Rep. Barbara Lee Rep. French Hill
75th September 14, 2020	None due to COVID-19 pandemic.
74th September 17, 2019	Rep. Barbara Lee Rep. Cathy McMorris Rodgers
73rd September 18, 2018	Sen. Ron Johnson Sen. Jeff Merkley
72nd September 12, 2017	Rep. Barbara Lee Rep. Christopher Smith
71st September 13, 2016	Sen. Chris Coons Sen. Ron Johnson
70th September 16. 2015	Rep. Barbara Lee Rep. Christopher Smith
69th September 16, 2014	Sen. Ben Cardin Sen. Ron Johnson
68th September 17, 2013	Rep. Barbara Lee Rep. Mark Meadows

Sources: CRS, White House, Congress.gov, and press statements.

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