

CRS Report for Congress

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Guide to Individuals Seated on the House Dais

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The House of Representatives meets in the Capitol in the House chamber. The center aisle of the chamber divides the political parties. In the front of the chamber is a three-tiered, elevated dais. Seated at a desk on top of the dais is the presiding officer. Members of the House sit in one of 448 unassigned seats arranged in a semicircle facing the presiding officer. Facing the dais, Republicans traditionally sit to the right of the center aisle, Democrats to the left. This fact sheet is one of a series on the legislative process. See [<http://www.crs.gov/products/guides/guidehome/shtml>] for more information on legislative process.

Top Tier

Speaker of the House. The only seat at the top tier of the dais is that of the presiding officer, the Speaker. When he is not presiding, he appoints a Speaker pro tempore to perform the duties of the chair in his absence. In the Committee of the Whole, however, the chairman (a majority-party member named by the Speaker) occupies this seat.

Parliamentarian. Usually observed standing to the left of the presiding officer (viewed from the rear of the chamber) is the House parliamentarian. The parliamentarian counsels the Speaker and Members of the House on rules and precedents and assists in the referral of legislation and other communications to the appropriate House committees.

Sergeant at Arms. Off the platform to the extreme left, the sergeant at arms, or a deputy, is seated at a separate table. Elected by the majority party, this officer is custodian of the mace, the symbol of parliamentary power and authority.

Speaker's Page. Seated beside the sergeant at arms is the Speaker's page, who assists the presiding officer during each day's session.

Clerk of the House. The House clerk is seated off the platform to the right of the presiding officer (as viewed from the rear of the chamber). Elected by the House, the clerk is the chamber's chief legislative official. The clerk's duties include certifying the passage of bills, delivering messages to the Senate, and affixing the seal of the House on all formal documents. The clerk also presides over a new session of Congress until a

Speaker is elected. Except for ceremonial occasions such as joint meetings and sessions, the clerk spends very little time seated in the House. The clerk's seat might be occupied by the timekeeper who is on the staff of the parliamentarian and keeps track of time used during House debate and other activities.

Documentarian Pages. Further to the right are two documentarian pages who operate the legislative lights and bells that signal votes, quorum calls, or adjournment. They also provide Members with copies of all documents (such as bills and reports) that are needed during a day's session of the House.

Middle Tier

The middle level of the dais is occupied by employees of the clerk of the House. The clerk's lectern is also on this level. It is from the lectern that the House chaplain offers prayers, the President delivers the State of the Union address, and bills and other business are read for consideration by the House.

Journal Clerk. To the far left of the clerk's lectern (viewed from the rear of the chamber) is the journal clerk, who compiles the House's daily minutes. These minutes are the official record required by the Constitution and published as the House *Journal*.

Tally Clerk. Between the journal clerk and the clerk's lectern is the tally clerk, who operates the electronic voting system, oversees the recording of votes on the House floor, receives reports of committees, and prepares the *Calendars of the United States House of Representatives and History of Legislation*.

Reading Clerks. To the right of the clerk's lectern (viewed from the rear of the chamber) are the reading clerks, who are responsible for reading aloud communications from the Senate, House bills, amendments, and other legislative matters.

Lower Tier

The lower tier is also occupied by employees of the clerk of the House.

Bill Clerk. On the far left of the lower level of the dais is the bill clerk, who is also on the clerk's staff. The bill clerk receives and processes bills and resolutions and receives lists of cosponsors, texts of amendments, and communications to the House.

Enrolling and Daily Digest Clerks. Seats are reserved on the lower level of the dais (left of center) for the enrolling clerk and Daily Digest clerk. The enrolling clerk prepares for the Senate the official (engrossed) copy of all House-passed measures and the official (enrolled) copy of all House-originated measures for transmittal to the White House for presidential action. The Daily Digest clerk prepares the information published in the Daily Digest section of the *Congressional Record*.

Official Reporters of Debate. In the center of the lower level of the dais are the clerks to the official reporters of debate. They are responsible for keeping track of floor activity and receiving text for the *Congressional Record*. Further to the right are seats for

reporters awaiting their turn to work on the House floor. The official reporters who are transcribing sit at a table in the “well” of the House in front of the lower level of the dais.

An illustration of the House chamber and dais can be found on the Internet at [<http://www.clerkweb.house.gov>]. At this site, the user should click on “historical highlights,” and then “virtual tours,” where there will be a color photograph of the rostrum/dais and a view of the chamber.