

110th Congress – Leadership Positions

Speaker of the House (Speaker-Elect Nancy Pelosi, D-CA)

The Speaker is both the presiding officer of the House of Representatives and the leader of the majority party. She is also second to the Vice-President in the line of succession to the Presidency. The Speaker plans and implements the legislative agenda of the House, has administrative control over much of the operations of the House, and controls appointments to special committees and delegations. She also refers legislation to committees, may place deadlines on committee action, and chairs the committee which appoints majority party members to their committee assignments.

The Speaker is the chair of the party's steering committee, which chooses the chairmen of standing committees. The Speaker determines which committees consider bills, appoints most of the members of the Rules Committee, and appoints all members of conference committees. When the Presidency and Congress are controlled by different parties, the Speaker can become the *de facto* "leader of the opposition." Since the Speaker is a partisan officer with substantial power to control the business of the House, the position is often used for partisan advantage.

The Speaker of the House of Representatives is widely viewed as symbolizing the power and authority of the House. The Speaker's most prominent role is that of presiding officer of the House. In this capacity she is empowered by House rules to administer proceedings on the House floor, including the power to recognize Members on the floor to speak or make motions and the power to appoint Members to conference committees. The Speaker also oversees much of the non-legislative business of the House, such as general control over the Hall of the House and the House side of the Capitol and service as the chairman of the House Office Building Commission. Her role as "elect of the elect" in the House also places the Speaker in a highly visible position with the public.

Although she is elected as an officer of the House, the Speaker continues to be a Member as well. As such, she enjoys the same rights, responsibilities, and privileges of all Representatives. However, she traditionally refrains from debating or voting in most circumstances, and does not sit on any standing committee of the House.

Congresswoman Pelosi has said that in the first 100 hours of her speakership she will push for action implementing all 9/11 Commission recommendations on national security, raising the minimum wage to \$7.25, eliminating corporate subsidies for oil companies, allowing the government to negotiate Medicare drug prices, imposing new restrictions on lobbyists, cutting interest rates on college loans, and supporting embryonic stem-cell research.

House Majority Leader

The Majority Leader acts as deputy to the Speaker of the House. He or she schedules legislation for the floor, taking into account factors of political timing as well as policy importance. Majority Leader acts as a spokesman for the party position during floor debate, plans legislative and political strategy for the party, mediates political disputes

among majority party Members, and negotiates agreements with the minority, all under the direction of the Speaker.

Contenders for Majority Leader:

Minority Whip Steny Hoyer (D-MD)

John Murtha (D-PA)

Both Hoyer and Murtha currently sit on the House Appropriations Committee.

Whoever is elected as Majority Leader will have to step down from the committee.

House Majority Whip

The Majority Whip advises his or her party's leaders on how majority Members intend to vote regarding upcoming bills. He or she has a team of Members who act as assistants, gathering intelligence on Members' positions, and responding to leadership requests for head counts on specific bills. The Whip takes the lead in actively encouraging party discipline and unity, and in persuading rebellious Members to vote with the party. The Whip also notifies Members with alerts on floor schedules and timing of votes.

Contenders for Majority Whip:

Rahm Emanuel (D-IL), Democratic Congressional Campaign Committee Chairman

Jim Clyburn (D-SC), Democratic Caucus Chairman

Diana DeGette (D-CO) -- has stated she won't run if Emanuel does.

House Minority Leader

The Minority Leader serves as floor leader of the opposition party, and is the minority counterpart to the Majority Leader. The minority leader usually meets with the Majority Leader and the Speaker to discuss agreements on controversial issues.

Contenders for Minority Leader:

Majority Leader, John Boehner (R-OH)

Joe Barton (R-TX) -- Congressman Barton is currently the chairman of the House Energy and Commerce Committee (which held climate change hearings earlier this year). If he becomes Minority Leader, he will not act as Ranking Member of the committee.

Mike Pence (R-IN)

House Minority Whip

The Whip is the second ranking elected official in the Minority's Caucus. The Minority Whip is charged with mobilizing the party vote on important legislation, acting as a liaison between Members and the minority leadership, and coordinating strategy within the Caucus.

Contenders for Minority Whip:

House Majority Whip, Roy Blunt (R-MO)

Eric Cantor (R-VA)

Zack Wamp (R-TN)

Senate Majority Leader

The Senate Majority Leader is leader of the majority party in the Senate and is also responsible for scheduling the Senate's annual and daily legislative schedule, in consultation with the Senate Minority Leader. He/she has the authority to adjourn and recess the Senate's daily session. He/she also selects legislative priorities for each session and decides which legislation to bring up for floor consideration. The Senate Majority Leader negotiates agreements on the floor schedule, agenda, and parliamentary procedures with the Minority Leader and announces them to the Senate.

He/she also consults with the Speaker of the House to arrange joint sessions and events. He/she represents the Senate on ceremonial occasions, and hosts special events on behalf of the Senate. The Majority leader also welcomes official visitors and foreign guests to the Senate and provides them hospitality.

Harry Reid (D-NV) will ascend from Minority to Majority Leader.

Senate Majority and Minority Whips

The Senate Majority and Minority Whips are the second-ranking members of their parties in the Senate, acting as Chief Assistant to the Majority and Minority Leaders. The main function of the Majority and Minority Whips is to gather votes on major issues. Because he or she is the second ranking member of the Senate, if there is no floor leader present, the whip may become acting floor leader.

Majority Whip: Richard Durbin (D-IL)

Contenders for Minority Whip: Senator Trent Lott (R-MS) and Lamar Alexander (R-TN)

Senate Minority Leader

The Senate Minority Leader is elected by his party to be its spokesman on the Senate floor, and to the outside world. He maintains a working relationship with the Senate Majority Leader and negotiates legislative and procedural agreements with him on behalf of his party. He works with his party colleagues to define his party's policy priorities and seeks to insert them into the Senate's legislative agenda. He and his staff monitor the Senate's daily floor proceedings to ensure that his party's procedural rights are protected. When the minority party is the same party as the President, he acts as the President's chief liaison in the Senate. He stays in continuous contact with his party's ranking members on each Senate committee and seeks to coordinate their work to best serve the interests of the party's agenda overall.

Both the Majority and Minority leader seek to encourage unity among the Senators on their side of the aisle. Each party leader is also expected to reconcile personal and policy differences among their party's Senators.

Mitch McConnell (R-KY) will become Minority Leader.

Sources: The Center on Congress at Indiana University, the National Journal, the House of Representatives website, and Thomas.gov (the Library of Congress).