

LEADERSHIP IN THE SENATE

Article I, Section 3, Clause 4

The Vice President of the United States shall be President of the Senate, but shall have no Vote, unless they be equally divided.

Article I, Section 3, Clause 5

The Senate shall choose their other Officers, and also a President pro tempore, in the Absence of the Vice President, or when he shall exercise the Office of President of the United States.

President of the Senate: Vice President of the United States

Under the Constitution, the vice president serves as the president of the Senate and presides over the Senate's daily proceedings. Vice presidents cannot vote in the Senate, except to break a tie, nor may they formally address the Senate, except with the senators' permission.

During the twentieth and twenty-first centuries the vice president's role has evolved into more of an executive branch position, and is usually seen as an integral part of a president's administration. He presides over the Senate only on ceremonial occasions or when a tie-breaking vote may be needed.

President Pro Tempore of the Senate

When the vice president is absent, the president pro tempore, who is a constitutionally recognized officer of the Senate, presides over the chamber. The president pro tempore (or, "president for a time") is elected by the Senate and is, by custom, the senator of the majority party with the longest record of continuous service.

Senate Majority Leader and Senate Minority Leader

Elected at the beginning of each Congress by members of their respective party conferences to represent them on the Senate floor, the majority and minority leaders serve as spokesmen for their parties' positions on the issues. The majority leader has also come to speak for the Senate as an institution. He or she is seen as the most powerful person in the Senate. Working with the committee chairs and ranking members, the majority leader schedules business on the floor by calling bills from the calendar and keeps members of his party advised about the daily legislative program. In consultation with the minority leader, the majority leader fashions unanimous consent agreements by which the Senate limits the amount of time for debate and divides that time between the parties. When time limits cannot be agreed on, the majority leader might file for cloture to shut off debate. Occupying the front desks on the center aisle, the two leaders coordinate party strategy and try to keep their parties united on roll-call votes.

The leaders spend much of their time on or near the Senate floor, to open the day's proceedings, keep legislation moving, and protect the rights and interests of party members. When several senators are seeking recognition at the same time, the presiding officer in the Senate will call on the majority leader first, then on the minority leader, and then on the managers of the bill being debated, in that order. This right of first recognition enables the majority leader to offer amendments, substitutes, and motions to reconsider before any other senator. Former Majority Leader Robert C. Byrd called first recognition "the most potent weapon in the Majority Leader's arsenal."

The posts of majority and minority leader are not included in the Constitution, as are the president of the Senate (the vice president of the United States) and the president pro tempore. The party leaders meet frequently with the president and with the leaders of the House of Representatives.

Senate Majority Whip and Senate Minority Whip (Assistant Floor Leaders)

Both parties in the Senate elect whips. The term "whip" comes from a fox-hunting expression -- "whipper-in" -- referring to the member of the hunting team responsible for keeping the dogs from straying from the team during a chase. Established early in the 20th century, the development of party whips coincided with the evolution of party leaders in the Senate. These assistant leaders are mainly responsible for counting heads and rounding up party members for votes and quorum calls.