



Identify your Senators & Representatives Assignment Description

In many cases, advocates of a cause meet with their national congressmen or state legislators to help promote change. Before one can meet with their elected officials, they should take a little time to learn about their interests to help frame the message in a way that will help get their full attention.

The United States Congress

The **United States Congress** is the bipartisan legislature of the federal government of the United States consisting of two houses: the Senate and the House of Representatives. The Congress meets in the Capitol in Washington, D.C. Both representatives and senators are chosen through direct election. Members are affiliated to the Republican Party or to the Democratic Party, and only rarely to a third-party or as independents. Congress has 535 voting members: 435 Representatives and 100 Senators. Members of the House of Representatives serve two-year terms representing the people of a district. Congressional districts are apportioned to states by population using the United States Census results, provided that each state has at least one congressional representative. Each state, regardless of population or size, has two senators. Currently there are 100 senators representing the 50 states. Each senator serves a six-year term, with terms staggered, so every two years approximately one-third of the Senate is up for election.¹

What Congressional District am I in?

- State Congressional Districts: Go to <https://www.govtrack.us/congress/members> and enter in your address to find out what congressional district you reside in, as well as who your state's federal senators and representatives are.
 - Keep in mind that each Congressional district within your state has one representative.

State Legislature

A **state legislature** in the United States is the legislative body of any of the 50 U.S. states. The formal name varies from state to state. In 25 states, the legislature is simply called the *Legislature*, or the *State Legislature*, while in 19 states, the legislature is called the *General Assembly*. In Massachusetts and New Hampshire, the legislature is called the *General Court*, while North Dakota and Oregon designate the legislature as the *Legislative Assembly*.

Every state except Nebraska has a bipartisan legislature, meaning that the legislature consists of two separate legislative chambers or houses. In each case the smaller chamber is called the Senate and is usually referred to as the upper house. This chamber typically, but not always, has the exclusive power to confirm appointments made by the governor and try articles of impeachment. (In a few states, a separate Executive Council, composed of members elected from large districts, performs the confirmation function.) Member of the smaller chamber represent more citizens and usually serve for



longer terms than members of the larger chamber, generally four years. In 41 states, the larger chamber is called the House of Representatives. Five states designate the larger chamber the Assembly and three states call it the House of Delegates. Members of the larger chamber usually serve for terms of two years. The larger chamber customarily has the exclusive power to initiate taxing legislation and articles of impeachment.

As a legislative branch of government, a legislature generally performs state duties for a state in the same way that the United States Congress performs national duties at the national level. Generally, the same system of checks and balances that exists at the Federal level also exists between the state legislature, the state executive officer (governor) and the state judiciary, through the degree to which this is so varies from one state to the next.

During a legislative session, the legislature considers matters introduced by its members or submitted by the governor. Businesses and other special interest organizations often lobby the legislature to obtain beneficial legislation, defeat unfavorably perceived measures, or influence other legislative action. A legislature also approves the state's operating and capital budgets, which may begin as a legislative proposal or a submission by the governor.²

How to Find Your State Legislators

1. Find out what your senate and house district number are.
 - a. To find out what senate district you are in, Google Search “Senate District Map [Your State]”
 - b. To find out what house district you are in, Google Search “House District Map [Your State]”
2. Find out who your district senator is.
 - a. To find out who your senator is, Google Search “[Your State] State Senate Roster”
 - b. Find the Senator who corresponds with your senate district (see 1a)
3. Find out who your district representative is.
 - a. To find out who your representative is, Google Search “[Your State] State Representative Roster”
 - b. Find the Representative who corresponds with your house district (see 1b)

What Committees are my Legislator on?

Legislators are assigned to committees based on their interests, their districts or states and (for the more competitive major committees) on how long they have served as a legislator (seniority). Legislators usually serve on one to three committees.

A legislator’s ability to influence legislation depends largely on whether she or he is a member of the committee that oversees related issues. Senators and Representatives on health policy committees have a significant impact on issues facing the fibromyalgia/chronic pain community. Your state has a



Representative or Senator serving on one of these committees we highly recommend that you learn more about them.

Discover What Committee your Legislators are on

1. After finding out who your district senator and district representative are, go to <http://www.votesmart.org>.
2. Type in either your Senator or Representative's names' in the search box.
3. Select a category from the tabs shown below the search box (bio, votes, positions, ratings, speeches, funding).
4. Select the "Bio" tab to find what Current Legislative Committees your legislator is serving on.

What Is the Legislator Passionate About?

Every legislator works on—and is passionate about—different issues. You can find out what your legislators are most interested by Google searching their name, or by utilizing <http://www.votesmart.org> and exploring the different tabs (bio, votes, positions, ratings, speeches, and funding).

Where Is My Legislator on the Seniority Scale?

All legislators are ranked on a scale of seniority, based on when they were elected to that office. Legislators with seniority as well as those who serve as a committee chair, ranking member or a member of the elected leadership will have the greatest ability to move policy proposals through the legislative process.

What Party Does My Legislator Belong to?

Legislators help all constituents, not just those who are members of their political party. However, it is important to know the legislator's party affiliation to determine whether they are part of the majority or minority party. Members of the majority party do have an advantage in efforts to get legislative proposals passed.

The next section of this document is a worksheet that will help you learn about and understand your legislators in more depth.

¹ Wikipedia (4 October 2014). *United States Congress*. Retrieved from http://www.en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_States_Congress

² Wikipedia (14 August 2014). *State legislature (United States)*. Retrieved from [http://www.en.wikipedia.org/wiki/State_legislature_\(United_States\)](http://www.en.wikipedia.org/wiki/State_legislature_(United_States))

6. Did you support this candidate?

- Yes No Did not know of candidate

7. If yes, did you actively support him/her (i.e., volunteer on his/her campaign, attend a fundraiser or set up a meeting)?

- Yes No

8. Do you know this legislator personally?

- Yes No Somewhat

9. Does your Senator serve on a health committee?

- Yes No

Do you have any concerns if you were to meet or speak with your state representative?

Please list your concerns, if you have any.
