**The Speaker of the House**

*“The House of Representatives shall chuse their Speaker and other Officers; and shall have the sole Power of Impeachment.”*

# — Article I, Section 2, Clause 5

Since its inception, the position of the Speaker of the House has played a key role in politics. Though the role is vaguely defined by the Constitution, those who have held the office have shaped it into what it is today.

Under the Constitution, the Speaker ​presides over the House of Representatives and is elected by his or her peers. By tradition, the Speaker is chosen by the majority party.

Requirements for the office are the same as for any representative. Article I, Section II requires that a representative be 25 years of age, a U.S. citizen for seven years, and a resident of the state which he or she will be representing. (The representative need not technically be an inhabitant of the district he or she is representing, but almost all are.)

The Speaker of the House is, at heart, an administrative position, for the Speaker presides over the House, maintains order in the House, assigns legislation to the appropriate committees, and sets the House’s agenda (after conferring with party leaders, the President, and committee chairs) -- in other words, it’s the Speaker who makes sure that everything runs smoothly.

“Presiding over the House” means that the Speaker runs the meetings and debates. While the Speaker can participate in the debates and vote on matters discussed, he or she typically refrains. The exception being major legislation or constitutional amendments. The Speaker also presides over joint sessions, which is when both houses of the legislative branch are addressed by the President, and joint meetings, which is when both houses are addressed by foreign leaders or other guests.

When the Speaker is unavailable to perform the duties of the role, the Speaker has the power to appoint a Speaker ​*pro tempore*​, usually a senior member of the majority party, to act in his or her place as needed.

Although the speaker is the leader of the majority party in the House, there is actually a separate partisan role called the House Majority Leader (confusing!), whose job it is to manage the party’s legislative agenda on the floor.

When it comes to committees, the Speaker plays a significant role. He or she can influence the committees by appointing specific members. It is the Speaker who appoints nine of the thirteen members of the powerful Committee on Rules, which is the committee that generally determines which bills will make it to the floor for debate and how they will be debated.

In addition to the tasks above, the Speaker also oversees officers of the House, such as the Clerk, Chaplain, Chief Administrative Officer, and Sergeant-at-Arms, and can dismiss them should the need arise. It should be noted, though, that these officers are elected by the House every two years; they are not named by the Speaker directly.

# Additional Responsibilities

The responsibilities of the Speaker of the House are not exclusive to the House of Representatives. Because the Speaker is an elected representative, he or she still needs to represent those in his or her district.

All members of the legislative branch, including the Speaker, need to be part of the communities that they represent and offer what are called​ *constituent services*​. This means that they help the people whom they represent, also known as ​*constituents.* This is accomplished by holding town hall meetings, speaking to various groups (e.g.

visiting high schools, colleges, local organizations), helping local governments, nonprofits, small businesses, and research organizations find federal grants, and visiting sites to learn more about the needs of the communities.

Speakers can help their constituents navigate interactions with federal agencies such as the Internal Revenue Service and U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services. Congressional representatives can even help their constituents when it comes to filing complaints with against healthcare providers, landlords, businesses, and judges.

But they do not just help with problems, just like their fellow members of Congress, Speakers also offer student internships, help people with applications for benefits, and nominate students who wish to attend military academies.