

PUBLIC AFFAIRS COUNCIL

WEBINAR

Insider Perspective:

Congressional Leadership Offices

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Unprecedented Turnover Lies Ahead

The midterms will reshape Congress at a historic pace. A record wave of retirements, redistricting battles, and open seats will bring massive turnover to both chambers. Turnover means less institutional memory, but also more opportunities to educate members.

55+

**House Members
Not Seeking Reelection**
2nd highest since 1928

35

**Senate Seats
On the Ballot**
Incl. 2 special elections

67

**Age of the Median Retiring
Representative**
*4 of the 10 oldest reps are
retiring, incl. Pelosi & Hoyer*

What We'll Cover Today

01

Power Structure

How leadership offices are organized and who actually matters

02

Legislative Business

How decisions get made about what comes to the Floor — and when

03

Currency

Ways to be useful to leadership.

04

Building and Maintaining Relationships

Best practices for earning trust with leadership staff and members

01 | How Leadership Offices Are Organized

Majority Leader

Sets the floor schedule. Meets with committee chairs.

Majority Whip

Counts votes, leads a full whip team. Manages member-to-member pressure.

Conference / Caucus

Manages messaging and member communications.

NRCC / DSCC

Campaign arm. Handles recruiting candidates. closely

Committee Chairs

Jurisdictional gatekeepers. Staff are the key subject matter experts.

Member Services / Floor Staff

These are the operators closest to members and generally the pool of future lobbyists.

House Republican Leadership (ELC)

Speaker of the House

Mike Johnson (R-LA)

Speaker since October 2023, relies heavily on relationship with White House.

Majority Leader

Steve Scalise (R-LA)

Longest-running leader in the current structure, dating back to 2014.

Majority Whip

Tom Emmer (R-MN)

Given the small majority, has had to become much more steeped in policy than past whips.

Chief Deputy Whip

Guy Reschenthaler (R-PA)

This is often a key operator who knows members and the institution; Patrick McHenry once held the post.

Conference Chairwoman

Lisa McClain (R-MI)

Also close to President Trump; the last three conference chairs have been women.

Conference Vice Chair

Blake Moore (R-UT)

Assists the Conference Chair in caucus operations.

Conference Secretary

Erin Houchin (R-IN)

Manages conference records and communications.

Policy Committee Chair

Kevin Hern (R-OK)*

Running for Senate, so this will be someone new soon.

NRCC Chairman

Richard Hudson (R-NC)

Second term as chair after a strong performance in 2024. Vice-Chair is Brian Jack of Georgia.

House Democratic Leadership

Democratic Leader

Hakeem Jeffries (D-NY)

Caucus Chairman

Pete Aguilar (D-CA)

Coordinates caucus strategy, messaging, and unity.

Assistant Democratic Leader

Joe Neguse (D-CO)

Assists the Democratic Leader on floor strategy.

Democratic Whip

Katherine Clark (D-MA)

Manages the party's legislative program and whips votes on key legislation.

Caucus Vice Chair

Ted Lieu (D-CA)

Assists the Caucus Chairman in organizing Democratic members and driving policy priorities.

DCCC Chair

Suzan DelBene (D-WA)

Campaign arm. Handles recruiting, though Jeffries has a big hand in this and redistricting.

Senate Leadership*



REPUBLICAN MAJORITY

1

John Thune

Majority Leader · South Dakota

53-seat majority. Process-first leader. Promotes consensus built on exhaustive discussions.

2

John Barrasso

Majority Whip · Wyoming

Vote counter. Manages member-to-member pressure.

3

Tom Cotton

Republican Conference Chair · Arkansas

Manages conference messaging and communications. Also the Intel chairman.

US
SEN



DEMOCRATIC MINORITY

1

Chuck Schumer

Minority Leader · New York

Experienced communicator. In the minority, his leverage comes from unanimous caucus holds, amendments, and procedural delays.

2

Dick Durbin (*Retiring)

Minority Whip · Illinois

Counts votes for the minority. Key relationship for bipartisan vote pairing.

3

Amy Klobuchar (*Running for Governor)

Democratic Caucus Chair · Minnesota

Leads caucus messaging and member comms.

Chiefs of Staff — Leadership Offices

HOUSE

Speaker of the House

Hayden Haynes

HOUSE

House Democratic Leader

Tasia Jackson

SENATE

Senate Majority Leader

Geoff Antell

SENATE

Senate Minority Leader

Mike Lynch

There are different kinds of leadership staff....

- Staff that have been with the member since before they were in leadership.
- Staff that were in leadership and worked their way up.
- Staff that were in the same office and joined as part of institutional continuity.
- Staff from a think tank or organization adjacent to the party.

Reaching staff in general is an ongoing public affairs challenge.

The Power Centers Around Congressional Leadership



02 | How the Calendar Gets Made

The calendar is a living, ongoing negotiation.

1

Must-pass (can-pass) vehicles

Appropriations, NDAA, debt ceiling — these anchor everything else.

2

Policy packages

Legislation tends to move in tandem, which is easier for all involved.

3

Messaging vehicles

Legislation is often geared toward the issue, not the outcome.

4

One-off suspensions

Post offices and the like.

X-Factors

- ✓ **Do you know your vote count?** Leadership schedules wins, not (total) gambles.
- ✓ **Is the committee chair on board?** Floor time almost never materializes without committee buy-in first.
- ✓ **Does it solve a messaging problem?** If your bill or issue gives leadership something to say, that's currency.
- ✓ **Have you mapped the opposition and its intensity?** Know which factions or members will object — and have a plan before you walk in.

02 | The Floor Isn't the Only Game in Town

Play the long game, think strategically and incrementally. There are 'wins' to be had any number of places.

Committee Hearings

A hearing puts your issue on the record, creates a news hook, and signals the chairman is engaged — even without a vote.

Markups

Getting your language into a committee-passed bill is often the first real step to enactment — and a proof of concept for floor consideration later.

Messaging Bills

Votes on bills that won't pass can still move the needle — they define the party's position, generate press, and put the other side on record.

Amendments & Riders

Appropriations bills, the NDAA, and must-pass vehicles are where policy gets made quietly.

Letters & Collateral Pressure

Sign-on letters, dear colleague letters, and coalition statements build the visible coalition that tells leadership there's momentum.

Investigations & Oversight

Oversight hearings, IG referrals, and GAO requests don't require a majority. They keep pressure on an issue and force agency responses.

03 | Currency with Leadership Offices



Reliable intelligence

They want to know what's happening in your industry, your coalition, and among members — no surprises.



Validation

Can you produce a constituent voice? A third-party endorser? Outside credibility.



Messaging cover

Op-eds, press surrogates, constituent validators — help build the case for (or against) something.



Accurate timelines

Look prescient and proactive, not reactive.



Problem-solving, not problem-dumping

Come with a proposed solution. Don't just describe your issue — tell them how they solve it with minimum political risk.



Discretion

If you can't be trusted with sensitive conversations, that will get around.

04 | Best Practices — Building Working Relationships with Leadership Staff

1

Ditch the cynicism

There is always business getting done, much of it bipartisan. Keep a positive approach.

2

Respect the time

This applies in many ways—from having a clear message and priorities to not spraying and praying and reaching out to multiple people in the same office with the same ask.

3

Be additive

Can you produce a constituent voice? A third-party endorser? Outside credibility? Leadership offices need validators — give them what they can use externally.

4

Relationships over transactions

Yes, if leadership only hears from you when you need something, they will remember that. It's true these are busy and won't always have time for you. Still, get to know them and their motivations.

5

Show up during the hard moments

When leadership is in a tough spot — bad press, a difficult vote, a crisis — and you're helpful without an ask, that gets remembered. Keep them in mind.

6

Never burn a bridge over a loss

You will lose more than you 'win.' How you handle the loss — graciously, with perspective — determines whether you stay in the game.

Takeaways To Consider

1

Know the leadership

Identify staff in relevant leadership offices, look for common threads and connections.

2

Study the schedule

Look for patterns, study hearings, see who's asking what questions.

3

Audit your resources.

What intelligence, validators, or messaging support can you offer to leadership?

4

Build a relationship calendar

Schedule touchpoints when nothing's urgent. Coffee, a quick update call, a relevant article. Stay present.

5

Read the room

Know where your issue sits relative to reconciliation, appropriations, and the political calendar. Timing your ask correctly is half the battle.

One More Thing

1

Know the institution

Study floor procedure, committee dynamics, and the legislative calendar — not just who holds which title.

2

There are no accidents or coincidences

Congress is the land of long memories. Things often carry over from one bill to the next, one debate to the next, one Congress to the next.

3

It's still the one.

Never doubt it is the greatest legislative body in the world.

ON THIS DATE · MARCH 19, 1979

The House Goes on Television



Source: history.house.gov