

# Language of Washington

Advocate – someone who speaks out about something they believe in on behalf of themselves and/or others.

Amendment – a proposed change to a bill to add and/or remove language. It must be agreed to by a vote before the bill is changed.

Bill – a proposed law in Congress. Many bills are introduced in Congress, but relatively few make it through the long process to become law.

H.R. – indicates a bill in the House of Representatives.

S. – indicates a bill in the Senate

The Capitol – the building where Congress meets. Learn more about the Capitol building from the Architect of the Capitol [here](#).

Caucus – An informal group of Representatives and/or Senators that exists to discuss issues of mutual concern and possibly to perform legislative research and policy planning for its members. There are regional, political or ideological, ethnic, and economic-based caucuses.

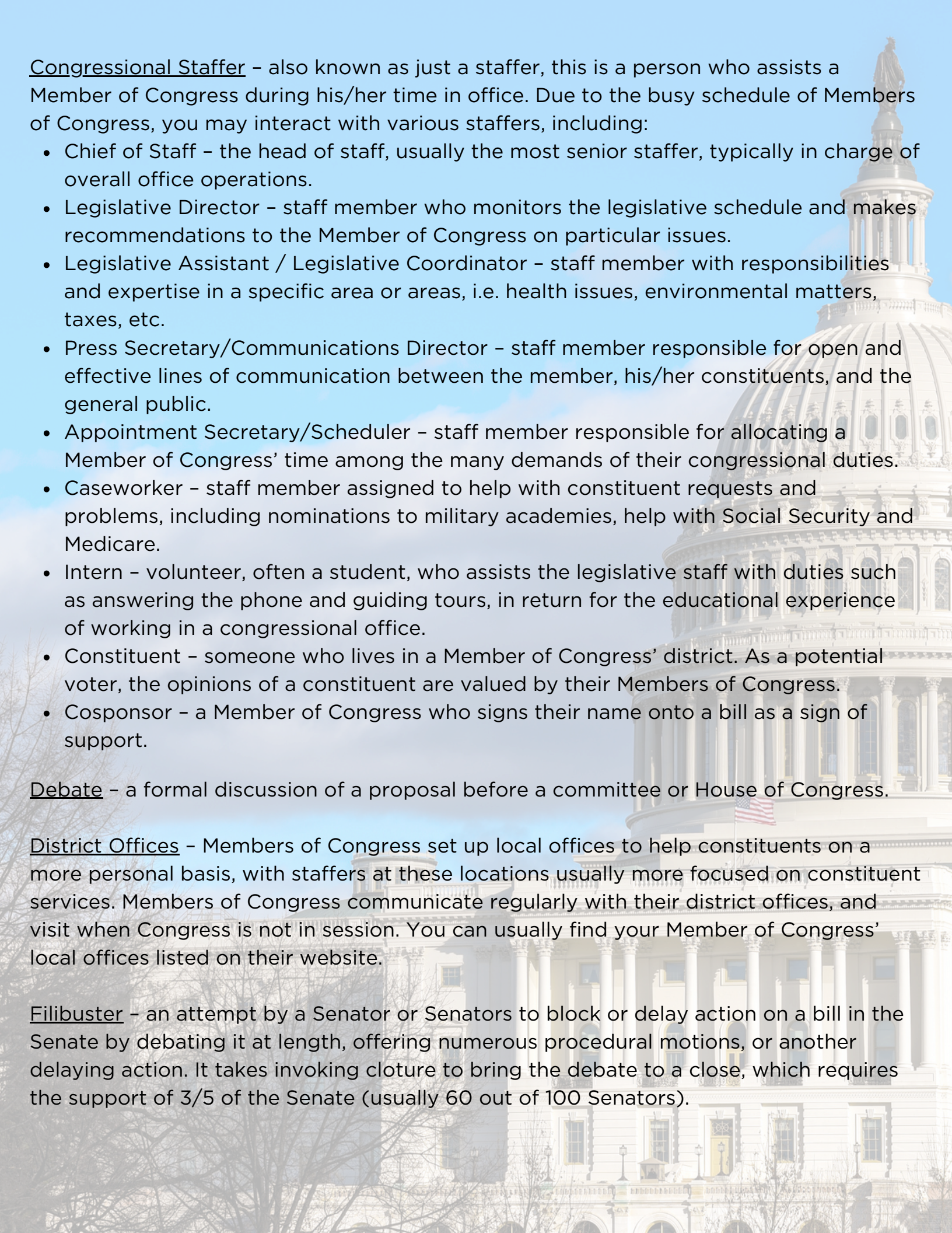
Committee – a group of Representatives or Senators assigned to consider a specific topic of issues, such as the Agriculture, Homeland Security, and Veterans' Affairs committees.

Companion Bill – term used to describe a bill in one House of Congress (Senate or House of Representatives) that is similar or identical to a bill in the other House of Congress. Though they will often have different numbers in each House of Congress, the text and purpose of the bills will be the same.

Conference Committee – A temporary group of Representatives and Senators formed to work out differences in similar legislation that has passed both chambers, with the goal of creating a uniform bill for both Houses of Congress to vote on and pass.

Congress – the legislative branch of American government, it is made up of two houses: the lower house is the House of Representatives; the upper house is the Senate. A congress can also refer to a term of Congress.





Congressional Staffer – also known as just a staffer, this is a person who assists a Member of Congress during his/her time in office. Due to the busy schedule of Members of Congress, you may interact with various staffers, including:

- Chief of Staff – the head of staff, usually the most senior staffer, typically in charge of overall office operations.
- Legislative Director – staff member who monitors the legislative schedule and makes recommendations to the Member of Congress on particular issues.
- Legislative Assistant / Legislative Coordinator – staff member with responsibilities and expertise in a specific area or areas, i.e. health issues, environmental matters, taxes, etc.
- Press Secretary/Communications Director – staff member responsible for open and effective lines of communication between the member, his/her constituents, and the general public.
- Appointment Secretary/Scheduler – staff member responsible for allocating a Member of Congress' time among the many demands of their congressional duties.
- Caseworker – staff member assigned to help with constituent requests and problems, including nominations to military academies, help with Social Security and Medicare.
- Intern – volunteer, often a student, who assists the legislative staff with duties such as answering the phone and guiding tours, in return for the educational experience of working in a congressional office.
- Constituent – someone who lives in a Member of Congress' district. As a potential voter, the opinions of a constituent are valued by their Members of Congress.
- Cosponsor – a Member of Congress who signs their name onto a bill as a sign of support.

Debate – a formal discussion of a proposal before a committee or House of Congress.

District Offices – Members of Congress set up local offices to help constituents on a more personal basis, with staffers at these locations usually more focused on constituent services. Members of Congress communicate regularly with their district offices, and visit when Congress is not in session. You can usually find your Member of Congress' local offices listed on their website.

Filibuster – an attempt by a Senator or Senators to block or delay action on a bill in the Senate by debating it at length, offering numerous procedural motions, or another delaying action. It takes invoking cloture to bring the debate to a close, which requires the support of 3/5 of the Senate (usually 60 out of 100 Senators).



Filibuster-proof - a bill that has the support of at least 60 Senators, and cannot be debated endlessly by any Senator who opposes it.

Hearing- a meeting of a committee of Congress, in which testimony and arguments about a bill are presented.

In Session - refers to when Congress is meeting. If you are near the Capitol building, the light on top of the dome indicates that Congress is in session.

Mark Up - to change the text of a bill. Committees will often hold markup sessions to change legislation before sending it to the whole House or Senate.

Member of Congress - can refer to either a Representative or Senator. Every American has three.

Recess - when Congress is not meeting ("in session"), but is on break. On typical business days, Congressional staffers are usually still working, even if Members of Congress are out of session. This serves as a time for Members of Congress to go back to their districts to spend time with constituents, district staff, and family. (Sadly, slides and jump ropes are rarely involved in a congressional recess.)

Referral - After a bill or resolution is introduced it is normally referred to the committee responsible for the subject of the proposal. Generally, a referral is made to the best fitting committee, but occasionally it may be referred to two committees that each relate to the subject of the proposal.

Reporting a Bill - when a committee submits its recommendations on a bill to the whole House or Senate.

Representative - an elected official in the House of Representatives who represents a given geographical district. A total of 435 Representatives are roughly distributed by population across the nation, with each state having at least one. Districts within a state are numbered, with members at large representing an entire state. The average district has about 600,000 people. Each American has one Representative, who they vote for every two years.



Resolution – a statement expressing opinions on policies or issues by Congress.

H.Res. – indicates a resolution in the House of Representatives.

S.Res. – indicates a resolution in the Senate.

Joint Resolution – indicates a resolution in both the House of Representatives and the Senate.

Senator – an elected official in the Senate who represents an entire state. Each state, and American, has two Senators. Each of the 100 Senators serves a six year term, with roughly 1/3 of the Senate being elected every two years.

Session of Congress – each term of Congress is divided into two one-year sessions, which are referred to as the “1st” and “2nd” sessions. We are currently in the 2nd session of the 112th Congress.

Sponsor – a Member of Congress who introduces a bill into either the House of Representatives or the Senate.

Subcommittee – a smaller group of Representatives or Senators in a committee that meet to hold hearings or consider legislation on a specific issue within the committee’s larger topic.

Term of Congress – a two year period, beginning on January 3 of each odd-numbered year, following a general election (January 3, 2011, January 3, 2013, etc.). We are currently in the 113th term of Congress, often referred to simply as the 113th Congress. Bills are good for the duration of the term in which they are introduced, but if they are not acted upon must be reintroduced and begin the legislative process anew in the next term of Congress.

Washington Office – every Member of Congress has a main office in Washington, DC. Representatives’ offices are on the south side of the Capitol building, in either Cannon, Longworth, Rayburn, or Ford House Office Buildings. Senators’ offices are on the north side of the Capitol building, in either Russell, Dirksen, or Hart Senate Office Buildings. Learn more about these buildings at [here](#).