

Guide to the House of Representatives

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Congress Asia

INTRODUCTION

Welcome to the United States House of Representatives! This guide will help you prepare for your role as a member of the United States House of Representatives for HMC Asia. Capitol Hill, where **Congress** meets, is one of the most exciting posts for a politician, but it comes with its fair share of rules and responsibilities. In order to serve your nation to the best of your ability, your **constituents** expect you to prepare for your role by familiarizing yourself with the legislative process and thoroughly researching the issues your **committee** will discuss.

We encourage you to begin preparing for HMCA right away! The more time you spend becoming acquainted with congressional procedure and considering the legislative issues that lay before you, the more fun you will have at the conference.

Congress—the legislature; the part of the government that makes laws. See the *Guide to the Constitution*.

Constituents—voters

Committee—the Senate splits up into smaller groups (called committee) to work more efficiently.

THE HOUSE AT HMCA

The House is a dynamic legislative body. As a representative, you will experience what it is like to write the laws for an entire nation. Accurately portraying the representative assigned to you will require some background research about your member, as well as his or her **party** and **ideology**.

For the purposes of HMCA, the House is divided into three committees: the Foreign Affairs Committee, the Committee on Education and Labor, and the Committee on Homeland Security. To begin the conference, each committee will consider its topics separately, debating and putting together draft **bills**. On the HMCA website, www.hmcasia.org, there are briefings on each of the topics that your committee will discuss. These briefings should be considered starting points for the issues; you are strongly encouraged to follow up with your own research. While each committee will only consider three topics, skim through the briefings for other House and Senate committees so that you are prepared to debate any bills that those committees might pass.

Party—see the [Guide to Partisanship](#).

Ideology—the values and beliefs that motivate a person.

Bills—before a law is passed by Congress and signed by the President, it is called a bill.



Preparing for the Conference

As a member of the House, your political commitments and legislative decisions are shaped by a number of factors. Each of your positions should reflect your personal feelings, the opinions of your constituents, what is best for your region, the view of your political party, and what is best for the nation as a whole. As soon as you are assigned a role, begin by researching your role's biography in order to familiarize yourself with your representative's background and your district profile. In addition to researching your role's positions, we strongly encourage you to research your assigned issues so you can consider the topic from multiple viewpoints. Delegates who have thoroughly read the briefings and done outside research on the issues are often the most successful at crafting thoughtful legislation.

At the Conference

During the conference, you will alternate between formal debate and caucus, each of which contributes to the congressional committee process. During formal debate, your committee chair will recognize or representatives to speak on the issue at hand. Speaking during formal debate is often the best way to communicate your idea to the whole group. During caucus, committee members may brainstorm ideas for legislation and work on the bill writing process in smaller groups.

Your chair will open committee by forming a general speakers' list to begin debate on the topic at hand. It is a useful strategy to request to speak as soon as possible. While you may think you have nothing to say, inevitably a fellow committee member will make a statement that you wish to object to or echo your support for. By placing yourself on the speakers list early, you can be confident that your ideas are brought front and center so the committee can consider your opinion while crafting legislation.

While drafting legislation, it is important to keep in mind the rules for bill-writing. First, legislation must be approved by the committee chair before it can be officially introduced. While each bill will be discussed in turn, chairs especially look for well-written legislation drafted through debate and compromise. The committee may pass more than one bill on the same topic, but it is always a good idea to make each bill as thorough as possible.

Party Caucus

Before full session, you and your fellow senators and representatives from each political party (Republican or Democrat) will meet in a party caucus, where you will rally behind your party's political platform and articulate the party stance on each issue. Your chairs will present the bills on the full session **docket** so that your party can attempt to construct a party strategy for addressing the proposed pieces of legislation.

Docket—the list of bills that will be debated in full session.



Full Session

Next, the Speaker of the House will call together the House Full Session so that the entire chamber can begin reviewing the legislation passed in committee. In full session, members of Congress have the opportunity to discuss the legislation that successfully passed in committee, in hopes that the bill will eventually be signed into law. During full session, each legislative chamber will discuss both legislation passed in its committees and bills passed in the other chamber's full session. If legislation passes in the House, the bill will then be sent to Senate for approval, and vice versa. Legislation passing both chambers is submitted to the president, who signs or **veto**s the bill.

Veto—when the President rejects a bill that has been approved by Congress. Congress can overturn the veto if two-thirds of both houses support the bill.

WORKING WITH OTHER PARTS OF GOVERNMENT

Presidential Cabinet

House committees will periodically hear testimony from members of the Presidential Cabinet. Cabinet testimony is especially helpful because their statements can remind the committee of the President's view of the issue that is under discussion. Furthermore, their testimony will give you a good idea of whether or not the president plans to support or veto your bill. When drafting a bill in committee, be sure to talk to Cabinet members and try to gain their support; they will try to encourage you to write bills that accord with the President's position.

Press Corps

During the conference, the reporters will update all conference participants about important votes, court decisions, national crises, and political scandals that occur throughout the day. While observing committees, reporters will take notes on committee progress and may ask to interview you about current legislation ideas. If a reporter interviews you, make sure to present your actions in the best possible light. Remember that you have voters to please—a positive news story will help your re-election, but a negative one might be disastrous. Talk to the Press frequently, but be careful what you say.

National Governors' Association

The NGA is a group of governors that advocates for certain policies at the federal level. If the governor from your state is participating in the HMCA session of the NGA, you will want to coordinate policy with him or her. Make sure that your votes in Congress align with your state's interest, and consider holding a joint press conference with the governor from your state.



PARTISAN VIEWPOINTS

Unlike many parliamentary systems in other countries, the United States' political party structure is fairly loose. Since each representative is elected as an individual first, and as a member of a party only secondarily, maintaining a strong party line is often difficult. This looseness also makes bipartisan compromise possible, as many politicians do not want to appear too extreme to their constituents. Nevertheless, there are two major and distinct parties in the United States: the Republican Party and the Democratic Party. For more information on the two major parties, please see the Guide to Partisanship.

REGIONAL VIEWPOINTS

Unlike some parliamentary systems, lawmakers in the US House of Representatives represent specific constituents based on geographic considerations. Since many voters frequently decide candidates based on local issues, members of Congress typically feel an obligation to do what is in the best interest of their constituents first. Although legislators never intend to neglect broader party and national interests, they are very aware of how policy affects their local district, as their jobs depend on the voters who live there.

New England

This region is one of the oldest and most wealthy regions in the US. It consists of Connecticut, Maine, Massachusetts, New Hampshire, Rhode Island, and Vermont. Legislative priorities include protection of **civil liberties**, the environment, **social programs**, and labor. Democrats tend to prevail over Republicans more often than not in this region; for example, all of the New England states were carried by Democratic presidential candidate Senator John F. Kerry in the 2004 US presidential election. As a result, both Democrats and Republicans in New England tend to be more liberal than their counterparts in other parts of the country.

Mid-Atlantic

This region in the middle belt of the Atlantic seashore includes Delaware, Maryland, New York, New Jersey, and Pennsylvania. The Mid-Atlantic is the center of commerce and banking, as well as a highly industrialized part of the country. Politically, the region is fairly Democratic, but it usually elects moderates who are both **fiscally conservative** and **socially progressive**. The Atlantic states were carried by Senator Kerry in the 2004 presidential election. The region includes such major

Amendments—a formal change to a bill.

Civil liberties—political freedoms that the government should not violate.

Social programs—programs like health care, education, etc.

Fiscally conservative—generally oppose high taxes and increased government spending.

Socially progressive—support liberal stances on social issues like abortion and the separation of church and state.



cities as New York and Philadelphia, urban centers with dynamic economies but many problems associated with the **urban** poor. The “ethnic” constituencies and business interests of the Mid-Atlantic states tend to oppose curbs on legal immigration.

Urban—*in a city.*

South

The South, which still reveals influences from the Civil War in the 1860s, is a rapidly developing region with many contrasts. Historically one of the most solidly Democratic regions of the country, it has over the past decade firmed up as the stronghold of the more conservative Republican Party. Despite this recent trend, two recent Democratic US Presidents (Jimmy Carter and Bill Clinton) have been moderate Southern governors. The South is a region with a booming economy focused on cities such as Atlanta, Raleigh, Dallas, and Miami, but it is also home to some of America’s poorest **rural** areas. In terms of **demographics**, the South has a prominent African-American population, and Florida contains a substantial aged population of retirees, as well as a politically powerful population of Cuban-Americans who arrived in Miami after the rise of Fidel Castro. The South includes Arkansas, Alabama, Florida, Georgia, Kentucky, Louisiana, Mississippi, North and South Carolina, Tennessee, Texas, Virginia, and West Virginia, all of which were carried by Republican President George W. Bush in the 2004 election.

Rural—*areas with small populations and lacking large cities, particularly farming areas.*

Demographics—*the statistical data of a population, showing average age, ethnicity, etc.*

Midwest

Illinois, Indiana, Michigan, Minnesota, Missouri, Ohio, and Wisconsin make up the Midwest. This region, dotted with such prominent cities as Chicago, Detroit, Cleveland, and St. Louis, is America’s industrial heartland. The labor constituency is strong, but so is the **middle class**, making this a very competitive region in American politics. Opposition to **free trade** runs strong in the Midwest, where former manufacturing sectors are transforming their industrial economies towards services. The region’s successful Republican governors have experimented with cutting **welfare** and implementing reform in education and other social programs. The region split between presidential candidates in the 2004 election, with Illinois, Michigan, Minnesota and Wisconsin being carried by Senator Kerry, and Indiana, Missouri and Ohio going to President Bush.

Middle class—*portions of society that are neither very rich nor very poor.*

Free trade—*trade that occurs without taxes or restrictions.*

Welfare—*social programs designed to help the poor.*

Plains

The Plains region is divided into the states of Iowa, Kansas, Nebraska, North and South Dakota, and Oklahoma. The Plains are a land of farmers and ranchers. For the inhabitants of the farm belt the most important issues are agricultural subsidies and protecting traditional American values. A socially conservative region, few minority popula-



tions can be found in the Plains. All of the Plains states voted for President Bush in the 2004 election.

Pacific Northwest

The region includes Alaska, Idaho, Montana, Oregon, Washington, and Wyoming. This resource-rich region is also home to some of America's greatest natural wonders. The export-oriented economy makes this region a staunch supporter of free trade. With its vast timber forests and many **endangered species**, the Pacific Northwest has pushed for advances in environmental protection. Yet, now that the economic costs of environmental legislation have become apparent, some in the region are skeptical of environmental regulation. The Pacific Northwest split in the 2004 presidential election, with Alaska, Idaho, Montana, and Wyoming carried by President Bush, while the two coastal states Oregon and Washington were won by Senator Kerry.

Endangered species—*animals whose continued existence are threatened by human activity.*

Southwest

The Southwestern US includes Arizona, Colorado, Nevada, New Mexico, and Utah. The Southwest has a large population of Hispanic descent, and is very concerned about the future of immigration policy. It also contains most of the nation's Native American population. The Southwest enjoys a growing, dynamic economy based around such urban centers as Denver, Phoenix, and Salt Lake City; most of this economic growth comes from technology and government defense contracts. The region tends to be Republican and socially conservative, being home to more than 4 million members of the **Mormon Church**. All of these states were won by President Bush in the 2004 election.

Mormon Church—*a religious faith that is generally associated with conservative politics. Particularly influential in Utah.*

California/Hawaii

California is the most populous state in the Union. It can be divided into roughly three regions: sprawling, heavily populated, and ethnically diverse southern California (Los Angeles area), rapidly growing central California (San Francisco area), and sparsely populated but resource-rich northern California. California's economy is extremely diversified, including such industries as agriculture, high technology (Silicon Valley is near San Francisco), and entertainment (Hollywood is near Los Angeles). Politically, California is extremely diverse, encompassing some of the most liberal and most conservative politicians in the nation, yet most Californians are fiscally conservative and socially liberal. Recently, California has led the nation in cutting benefits to illegal immigrants and eliminating **affirmative action** programs.

Affirmative action—*policies whereby ethnic minorities receive preferential treatment, in recognition of past wrong treatment.*

Hawaii, the last state to join the US, is a volcanic archipelago located in the Pacific Ocean more than 2000 miles southwest of California. Environmental issues are central to Hawaiian politics, as are the rights of its native Hawaiian population in this socially liberal state.



Both Hawaii and California were won by **Senator Kerry** in the 2004 presidential election.

Senator Kerry—refers to John Kerry, the Democratic presidential candidate in 2004.

CONCLUSION

Your effectiveness in the House of Representatives depends largely on your willingness to spend time studying your committee's issues and to do your best at the conference to advocate for your interests. We encourage you to begin preparing for HMCA right away! The more time you spend becoming acquainted with congressional procedure and considering the legislative issues that lay before you, the more fun you will have at the conference. Check out your committee's webpage at www.hmcasia.org to find links to helpful articles. Email your chair with questions or for advice. Most importantly, get excited for HMC Asia!

