

BOX 1.3 Leadership Structure of Congress

The party leadership in the House and Senate is crucial to the smooth functioning of the legislative process. In the House, the formal leadership consists of the Speaker, the majority and minority leaders, whips from each party, assistants to the whips, and various party committees. The vice president of the United States serves as **president of the Senate**; in the vice president's absence, the **president pro tempore** or, more commonly, a temporary presiding officer of the majority party presides. The Senate also has majority and minority leaders, whips, assistant whips, and party committees.

The Speaker's fundamental power is to set the agenda of the House. Speakers achieve their influence largely through personal prestige, fundraising ability, mastery of the art of persuasion, legislative expertise, and the support of members. Among the Speaker's formal powers are presiding over the House, deciding points of order, referring bills and resolutions to committee, scheduling legislation for floor action, and appointing House members to select, joint, and House-Senate conference committees. Speakers infrequently participate in debate and usually vote only to break a tie. Their institutional prerogatives are buttressed by their role as leader of the majority party. For example, Speakers may chair their party's committee assignment panel and can expedite or delay floor action on legislation.

The majority and minority parties of the House and Senate elect, respectively, majority and minority leaders. The House majority leader ranks just below the Speaker in importance and has considerable influence over the scheduling of bills and day-to-day management of the floor. The minority leader heads his or her party in the House. Among other things, he or she develops policy alternatives to majority initiatives, serves as party spokesperson, and devises strategies to win back majority control of the House.

In the Senate, the majority leader is the most influential officer because neither the vice president nor the president pro tempore holds substantive powers over the chamber's proceedings. Everyday duties of the minority leader correspond to those of the majority leader, except that the minority leader has less authority over scheduling legislation. Agenda-setting is the prime prerogative of the majority leader. Both Senate leaders speak for their party and act as field generals on the floor party, promoting partisan cohesion and searching for ways to reclaim majority control of the chamber.

Each party in the House and Senate elects a whip and appoints a number of deputy, assistant, or regional whips to aid the floor leader in implementing the party's legislative program. The diversity of whips provides greater geographical, ideological, and seniority balance in the party leadership structure. At its core, the whips' job is to know where the votes are and to produce the votes on behalf of party objectives.