SURVIVING INSIDE CONGRESS

Third Edition

A guide for prospective, new and not-so-new Congressional staff – and a guided tour for those who just want to learn how it all works

Mark Strand
Michael S. Johnson
and Jerome F. Climer

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Who's Who

Every organization has a hierarchy, whether it is Microsoft or the PTA. Understanding such hierarchies can mean the difference between succeeding or merely surviving, particularly in Washington, DC.

Just as no Member of Congress owes allegiance to any other, neither is there uniformity in staff titles and their meaning or function. While each office has great autonomy, Members must respond to a maze of obligations ranging from committee assignments and party loyalties to constituent demands. Each office has its own unique hierarchy.

A Member's interests typically reflect his or her personal background and the concerns of his or her constituents. A district from Kansas or Iowa, for instance, is likely to elect a Representative interested in farm policy. Those representing western states are likely to seek appointment to the Interior or Natural Resources Committees. A lawyer or a doctor prior to election may want to serve on the Judiciary Committee or a committee involved in health issues such as Ways and Means or Energy and Commerce.

When first elected, most Members don't get their first choice and not all get a committee that addresses their home district's or state's most pressing concerns. They're more likely to be appointed to second-choice committees, where they await opportunity to move up should someone retire or be unseated. There are rare times, however, such as a change of control in the Chamber, where numerous openings are created on major committees. Many members of the large 2011 Republican freshmen class were appointed to seats on prize committees like Ways and Means, Appropriations and Energy and Commerce.

Once in Washington, a new Member looks for experienced staffers who can get the office running, handle committee chores and deal with the Federal and state agencies on behalf of constituent needs. Staff tends to reflect the Member's background, interests and state or district, but the organizational structure may typically mimic that of his or her predecessor, if they are of the same party. Obviously, the new Member brings a new direction and needs, but it's usually beneficial to look to the predecessor's staff and approach to office needs and constituent services and learn from the practices that worked and those that didn't.

Unless the new Member is replacing someone from the opposition party, it's likely some of the predecessor's staff will even be retained, in the short term at least, providing the continuity and experience that will enable the newcomer to focus on more urgent matters. At a minimum, however, the newcomer is likely to bring along a couple of trusted allies, usually people from back home and the campaign.

When the district's representation changes parties, it is not unusual to see a total turnover in staff and even a reshuffling of the location of district offices and committee preferences.

Personal Staff

Congressional Staff Oath

Like the Members they serve, congressional staff are required to take an oath of office—in the House, employees merely sign the document, but Senate employees still recite it aloud:

"I do solemnly swear (or affirm) that I will support and defend the Constitution of the United States against all enemies, foreign and domestic; that I will bear true faith and allegiance to the same; that I take this obligation freely, without any mental reservation or purpose of evasion; and that I will well and faithfully discharge the duties of the office on which I am about to enter. So help me God."

Despite the fact that Senate offices typically have more than twice the staff of their counterparts in the House, the organization charts of the two Chambers are very similar.

Not surprisingly, the Member occupies the pinnacle of the power structure, but who's next in line?

In the vast majority of offices, the chief of staff is the Member's strong right-arm, the most important hiring decision the Member makes—sometimes, the only one. An effective chief influences every aspect of the Member's political and professional life.

You'll sometimes hear the position referred to as an administrative assistant. Don't be misled. In non-congressional parlance, administrative assistant may be a euphemism for executive secretary, which is an important position, but an effective chief of staff carries considerably more responsibility.

In the absence of the Member, the chief is the boss. Even in the Member's presence, the chief makes decisions affecting how things get done. On one level, the chief functions very much like a Chief Operating Officer (COO), holding everyone else within his or her domain accountable to the Member's mission and goals, supervising every aspect of the congressional office. The chief oversees the legislative and communication operations and helps coordinate relations between the Member's personal office, on the one hand, and committees and leadership, on the other. The chief also coordinates the activities of the DC office with the Member's district or state office. Sometimes the chief even coordinates interaction between the office and the Member's family.

In addition, the chief has a hand in policy initiatives and even re-election efforts. Although the chief is legally prohibited from participating in campaign activities during working hours, he or she is usually the liaison between the congressional office and the Member's campaign staff—particularly if the chief played a role in getting the Member elected in the first place.

Some chiefs are former campaign managers, but the nature of a government office and a campaign are quite different. Conventional wisdom suggests that individuals that have experience on the Hill or previously served on the Member's senior staff at another level of government may be better suited for the task. This is why there is a great deal of turnover among new chiefs of staff in the first year of a freshman legislator's term. For a campaign manager to be a successful chief of staff he or she needs to re-learn how to manage people and operate in an atmosphere that more closely resembles a small business than a political campaign.

Despite the responsibilities heaped on the chief, there are no legally mandated qualifications for the job: no experience or age requirements, no degree or certification requirement—nothing. As a result, it's not common but entirely possible for a Harvard Law School graduate to be working the phones in the front office under the supervision of a chief of staff whose academic achievements stopped at graduation from high school. Far more important than degrees are a chief's personal qualities, primarily political acumen, competence and loyalty.

Regardless of what sort of relationship exists between the Member and the chief at the time of the appointment, if they survive the first term together, they are likely to become life-long friends and confidants.

The Member will usually be less involved in the hiring of other staff, taking a collaborative role in the selection of senior positions but pretty much leaving others to the chief. The Member is likely to be involved in selecting a legislative director or communications director, for example, but far less involved, if at all, in hiring legislative correspondents, a staff assistant or receptionist.

The focus of staff members who report to the chief fall into four basic categories:

Legislative

Communication

Outreach and Constituent Service

Support and Administrative Staff

The legislative team deals with what many think of as the main job of Congress: the making and amending of laws. These staff members manage the legislative process throughout all its stages: developing policy positions, researching legislative and political options, drafting bills and amendments, and shepherding them through the legislative thicket. They review incoming constituent mail on policy issues and conduct specialized research on key measures of interest to being advanced by the Member. They meet with individuals, constituent groups and lobbyists who have an interest in issues of importance to the Member's constituents or the committees on which he or she serves.

Legislative staff must be knowledgeable in the processes and peculiarities of the Congress, its history and traditions, including myriad rules, procedures and precedents, and the jurisdiction of committees and leadership. They must possess near-encyclopedic knowledge of issues for which they are responsible and be able to respond swiftly to questions from the Member or constituents.

A "B+" may be a satisfactory grade in college, but a legislative staff member who gives the boss a memo on an issue that is only 90 percent accurate and balanced will soon feel the sting of rebuke. The legislative staff must earn and maintain a level of trust that ensures any information it provides will be accepted and acted upon.

The legislative team is usually a three-tiered hierarchy that consists of the legislative director (LD), legislative assistants (LAs) and several legislative correspondents (LCs).

The legislative director oversees the day-to-day activities of the legislative staff—four or five people in the House and more than 10 in the Senate—and is responsible for developing a strategy for pursuing the Member's legislative agenda. The LD also reviews all legislative staff work done within the office to ensure it is consistent and reflects the Member's point of view. In addition, he or she works with the Member to map out support or opposition to efforts endorsed by the leadership or the executive branch. The LD also has the task of keeping the Member abreast of key provisions in legislation being debated on the floor or under consideration within committees and subcommittees.

Although some chiefs of staff have deputies (more common in the Senate than the House), the LD is second only to the chief in most offices.

Legislative assistants commonly have several committees or topics for which they are responsible. It is their job to audit the work going on in committees and advance the Member's interest on specific legislation. In the House, they also draft answers to constituent, agency or committee inquiries associated with their areas of specialty. An LA in the Senate doesn't usually draft correspondence but works closely with staff that does.

Legislative correspondent is the entry-level position in the legislative hierarchy, but LCs are often the best-informed team members when it comes to specific bills or amendments. Their survival depends on it. They are the ones who coordinate responses to all kinds of inquiries regarding questions on which a Member has already taken a position. Such responses usually start with a pre-approved text, but the LC should conduct further research to verify that its contents are still current. That's why the LC position is considered the best place to learn about a piece of legislation and its consequences.

There are ample opportunities for LCs to learn. There are sometimes more than 10,000 pieces of legislation introduced during each Congress—and each of them is the most important measure in the world to somebody. The ability to quickly research and reduce complex issues into easy-to-understand language is among the most valuable skills in any congressional office.

The demand for such skills adds to the challenges facing the legislative director, who must teach and mentor a new LC, one fresh out of law school, perhaps, to abandon overly complex, yet accurate and precise legal writing in favor of a style that constituents find straightforward, factual and reassuring.

Constituent Mail

The biggest challenge for legislative staff is constituent mail. Every office gets lots of it. Some House offices receive up to 100,000 communications per year from their constituents. Senate offices can receive many times that. As a new legislative correspondent or legislative assistant in the House, answering constituent mail may very well take up 50 to 75 percent of your day.

Communications take many forms. There is the written letter—or what you will learn to call "snail mail." This is the traditional handwritten or typed letter from an individual constituent on an issue of great importance to him or her. It has always been as good as gold in a congressional office because someone went to a great deal of effort to exercise one of his or her prerogatives as a citizen—almost akin to a sacrament in a civil religion.

Today, the hand-written or typed letter is just as valuable, though shrinking as the main form of constituent communication. First, due to the ease with which people can communicate by email, it has supplanted the handwritten letter. Second, the September 11, 2001 attacks and the subsequent anthrax attack on Capitol Hill a month later resulted in all letters and packages being sent to an outside facility for irradiation. This terrorism protection measure has dramatically slowed the mail process on Capitol Hill since it takes 10-14 days to process mail through this facility. By the time an office receives a letter to the time it can answer and turn it around, a month has usually passed before the constituent gets a response. And that's the best-case scenario.

Finally, there are professional firms that are now counterfeiting personal letters from constituents. Jeff Birnbaum, writing in *The Washington Post,* described companies that special interest groups hire to compose letters for constituents to sign. As if to prove the market value of these letters, these operators can receive $75 to $125 for each letter they are able to convince a constituent to sign. This practice is not new, but the latest technology has taken it to a new level that will dilute the value of authentic letters since congressional offices won't know which ones are from constituents and which ones are from hired writers.

Another variation of this is the postcard campaign, where organizations generate postcards on behalf of their members. The cards are usually identical and unsigned. The silver lining is that when these postcards bombard you, an organization is essentially giving you its mailing list that can be harvested and used to communicate your own message to the constituent.

Another source of communication is constituent phone calls. Most offices will respond in writing to phone calls in the same way they respond to written correspondence. Phone calls are personal and require a constituent to take action and verbally state an opinion. A smart office will promptly write to the caller and store the name, phone, address and issue in a database.

Although "snail mail" has traditionally been constituents' favored mode of communication, the highest volume of constituent communication is now email. According to the Congressional Management Foundation, Congress received 313 million emails in 2006 and anecdotal evidence suggests that number continues to climb. Offices need to respond to emails from their district just as they would a letter.

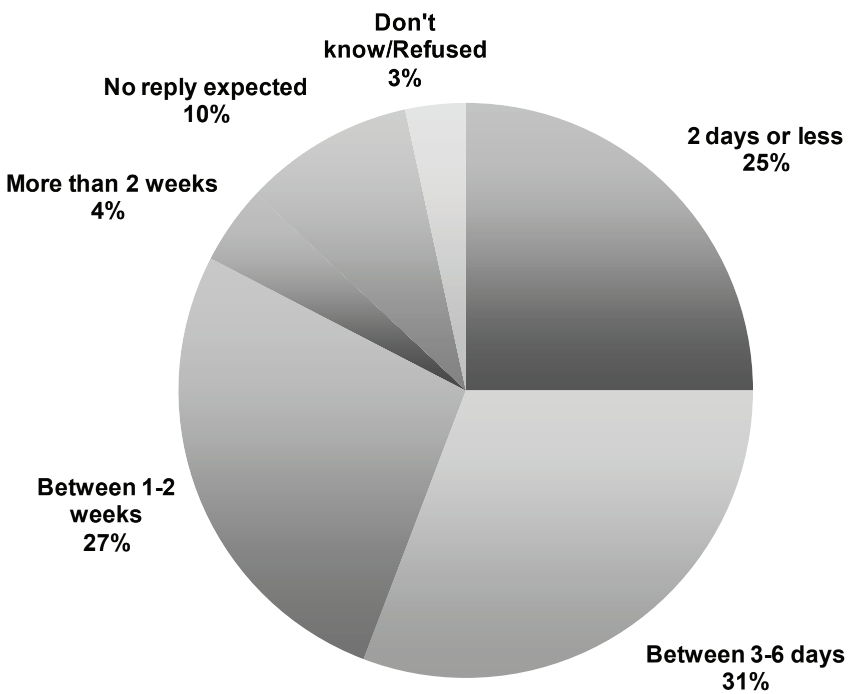
According to a January 2010 study done by the Congressional Institute, *Helping a 221-Year-Old Institution Harness Cutting-Edge Communication Technologies: Research Findings to Enhance Congressional Contact with Constituents and the Media*, from the constituent's perspective, there's nothing really wrong with replying to an email via snail-mail. The January 2010 survey found that 73 percent of respondents told us that if they sent an email to the Member of Congress, they'd expect an email reply; however 90 percent of respondents said that if they received a written reply instead, that would be satisfactory.

However, from an efficiency and budgetary perspective, an office is better off responding to an email with an email, for a couple of reasons. First, the constituent has already shown his or her preferred means of communication. Second, sending an email instead of a letter saves much money, by avoiding the costs associated with snail mail, including paying for paper, envelopes, postage and for folding the documents.

Professional companies are generating large volumes of email on behalf of various organizations. Some companies sell web modules that allow an organization to automatically generate emails from their membership to congressional offices. While some of these efforts may be legitimate liaisons between advocates and their supporters, these emails are often generated by slick campaigns that only reveal a small portion of the information available on an issue. For instance, in 2005 a major cancer organization contracted with one of these organizations. They whipped their membership into a frenzy by telling them that Congress was trying to pass a law that would outlaw breast cancer screenings. Nothing, of course, could have been further from the truth. The underlying legislation was a small business health care bill that would have allowed any small association to form a group for health insurance purposes, and operate under the same Federal law that governed the health care plans of labor unions and large corporations. By operating under Federal law these small associations might have evaded state mandates, but all of the union and corporate plans covered under Federal law had coverage for breast cancer screenings. These email-generating campaigns are often thinly disguised fundraising efforts designed to create lots of smoke even if there is only a small fire.

That doesn't mean an office can avoid answering these emails. The more inaccurate the information the constituent receives, the more important it is to generate a response that sets the record straight. And, as with the postcard campaigns discussed earlier, an office can harvest the email addresses of constituents who've indicated they care about a certain issue.

Constituents have high expectations when it comes to responses to their emails.



Constituents expect rapid responses to their communications. The January 2009 Congressional Institute study found that a majority (55.8 percent) expected a reply to an email query within one week. In fact, 25 percent said they expect a reply within two days—a fairly common standard for customer service departments in big corporations.

How does an office answer this massive volume of mail? It does so with enormous amounts of time, effort and technology. In the House, every legislative person writes or reviews mail. In the Senate, legislative correspondents generally draft all responses, but the more senior legislative staff will provide guidance and approval.

Generally, all messages are "logged into" a computer database. That database allows an office to identify the constituent's name and mailing and email addresses. The software also allows the user to attach an "issue code" which identifies issues that are important to a constituent. Finally, a record of previous letters and responses by that constituent is kept in the database.

The letter drafting process is different in each office, but generally speaking, offices try to answer as many letters as possible with a form response. This is an essentially identical letter written to people who have identical concerns. The Congressional Institute's 2010 study found most offices take one to two weeks to reply to a constituent query about public policy, with very specialized replies requiring up to one month. Some offices report that they can turn around 90 percent of their email in two to three days. But even at this high level of performance, some 10,000 letters—200 per week—require original text to be drafted.

The degree to which the Member directly participates in this process varies. The best offices have the Member review all major new text. For instance, a legislative assistant may notice that a lot of letters and emails are coming in regarding an upcoming tax bill. The legislative assistant will likely want to brief the Member, explain the issue and seek his or her guidance as to how to respond. The legislative assistant then drafts a response based on the Member's position. The legislative director and the chief of staff will review the letter. In most offices, the Member will make a final clearance, especially on a major issue. Once the letter is complete, it is usually mailed to letter writers and callers, and emailed to people who prefer email.

It should be noted that many Members insist on seeing and signing all correspondence. Without judging the relative merits of that noble-sounding ideal, it takes a lot of effort for these offices to keep up with constituent expectations for a response, especially when the staff is accurately reflecting the Member's views.

The process sounds redundant, and it is. That is because the written word lasts forever. A junior staffer writing an inaccurate or offensive response could cost the Member dearly. There is a guiding principle about letters and emails: Never write anything you are not prepared to defend if your worst enemy gets a hold of it, because he will.

Additionally, all of these letters make up a library of "approved text" that can be used by other staff to write portions of other individual responses.

Most importantly, once the letter has gone out, a permanent computer record is made. This can be used to generate proactive email newsletters that keep constituents informed on issues you know are important to them. How do you know what they care about? They clearly told you so themselves when they wrote their letter.

The process is cumbersome and creative staff members in congressional offices are always looking for innovative ways to reduce steps and speed up the process. Only a seriously out-of-touch Member or chief of staff would tell you their mail system could not be improved.

Communications Staff

The communications director, who's sometimes called a press secretary, handles communications of a different sort but is involved in more than just public relations. Effective communication is essential to political and legislative success, so the position has evolved into one of the most significant in any congressional office. These days, the communications director is involved in every aspect of the office. He or she has to be. No function in a congressional office can be performed well without consideration of the others.

In the information age with so many means of communicating information, an office must have a communications strategy and a comprehensive plan for accomplishing the office's goals. Without it, a communications director is likely to be found flailing about and doing little more than reacting to news made by others.

And, like Caesar's wife, it is important for the communications director to be above reproach. Members must be able to trust that they will accurately express the officials' thoughts, opinions and positions to the media. And the media must be able to trust that when a communications director speaks, it is with the Member's voice and that the information imparted is reliable. A seemingly innocuous misstep can prove fatal to a lawmaker's career. That's why most congressional offices prohibit staff other than those responsible for communications from talking to the media—even casually.

Communications directors also help manage the Members' public appearances; prepare materials for public distribution; write newspaper columns and speak on radio shows; help coordinate state or district scheduling; and sometimes act as legislative assistants, overseeing activities surrounding measures such as those involving media regulation. We write a great deal more about communication later in the book.

Outreach and Constituent Services Staff

Outreach and Constituent Services may seem to describe many of the activities that have been ascribed to members of the legislative team, but legislative activities are centered in Washington, DC, while Outreach and Constituent Services are usually executed from within the district.

Outreach is primarily a communications function directed by the district or state director and carried out by key staff members, who attend countless meetings of Rotary and other service clubs, farm groups and veterans' organizations and visit senior centers, churches and schools on behalf of the Member. They also work closely with the communications director to ensure press coverage for local events that the Member will attend. For many constituents, outreach staff is tantamount to speaking with the Member since they are immediately accessible and presumably provide a direct conduit to the Member.

Outreach staff listen to questions, concerns and needs and, when appropriate, pass them along to the constituent service staff. Constituent service has become increasingly important as government has grown in size and complexity, making it difficult for the average citizen to find his or her way through the Federal bureaucracy.

Efforts on behalf of constituents are referred to as casework. Most involve immigration law, Social Security benefits, small business issues, the military and veterans' benefits, but there are literally hundreds of situations that might lead to the Member or his staff being called upon for assistance.

Although the majority of casework is handled at the district or state level, there are congressional offices that prefer to run constituent services out of Washington, DC.

There is no right or wrong place to do it—as long as it gets results.

Obviously, staff can generate considerable good will for their boss by serving as ombudsmen for constituents in dealings with Federal agencies, but they have to know precisely how far they can go. Some of the biggest scandals in recent congressional history have resulted when Members were asked to help convince agencies to bend the rules. Past examples include ABSCAM, the Keating Five, and a more recent case where a Senator inappropriately called a U.S. Attorney to inquire about the status of a legal investigation (offices should never intervene in legal matters).

To help avoid such pitfalls, most district offices employ a director of constituent services to set parameters, but in some cases these activities are overseen by a district or state director or even the chief of staff. As a further safeguard, all employees are now required to take ethics training within a few months of joining a congressional staff.

The district director in the House and the state director in the Senate perform the role of the chief of staff at the local level. Most supervise the activities of five or so people in a congressional district and as many as 20 in a Senator's state office. It is up to the district director to track political developments at the grassroots level and to build relationships with elected officials. When a Member wants to know what constituents are thinking or how they will react to an issue, a bill or an action, it is usually the state or district director who is called. On a day-to-day basis, however, these local directors usually report to the chief of staff.

There has always been interdependence among staff at the local office as well as in DC. The Internet and other means of enhanced communications have made it possible for those who handle what are commonly referred to as the functional needs of the congressional office—the legislative and communication teams in DC and the outreach and constituent services teams at the local level—to work even more closely. Cross-functional teams have been credited with making these offices more efficient and more effective.

Websites represent one example. In most cases, these are designed by the communications director and maintained by the computer systems administrator. Legislative staff contributes by constantly updating issue and policy information and the local outreach and constituent services personnel share noteworthy activity occurring on the home front or on issues of broad concern. Legislative directors, meanwhile, have developed a close working relationship with computer systems administrators in an effort to track correspondence and response times and keep the Member informed of the volume of communication on hot issues, as well as the opinions such correspondence contains.

Support Staff

The support team facilitates the efforts of everyone else, makes it possible for other teams to do their jobs, and keeps the wheels oiled and turning. In a congressional office, the duties of support staff vary from filing to the tasks performed by the person affectionately known as the scheduler.

As with any other organization or business, each congressional office has a staff member dedicated to serving all its technological needs. Just a few short years ago, all it took to become a computer systems administrator—or IT (information technology) manager, as they're called in some offices—was to attend a class and perform data entry to support the correspondence program. This is no longer the case. Technology tools have become essential to the successful operation of every congressional office and require specialized knowledge.

Most offices have a staff member whose specialty is technological tools and is responsible for the storage and protection of confidential data requiring sophisticated backup and redundancy systems. The systems manager also must meet the challenges presented by a network that may include work stations in five or more state or district offices, used by 18 staff members in the House and an average of 40 in the Senate, not to mention a host of laptops and other high-tech devices.

Hand-held communications devices, such as the iPhone and BlackBerry, have proliferated on the Hill, eliminating hand-delivered messages and making the old bells-buzzer-lights system of communication obsolete. Hand-held electronic devices are tethers attaching Hill staff to their offices, and it is not uncommon to see them using their "CrackBerries" at their kid's soccer games, dinners or the movies.

The scheduler, who, in some offices, is referred to as the executive assistant, is usually the gatekeeper to the Member's inner office and, not surprisingly, maintains the Member's schedule. This itinerary not only identifies where the Member is going but where he or she has been. Keeping such a schedule is not an easy task, given the fact that plans often change several times a day as unforeseen events create detours and changes of plans.

The scheduler is typically responsible for the Member's personal correspondence and phone calls, so the person who holds that position must be discreet and absolutely loyal to her boss. She usually knows more about the Member's activities than anyone except the Member and chief of staff. If the Member is thinking about a bid for higher office, chances are the scheduler knows about it. If the Member is having family problems, chances are the scheduler knows about it. If the Member is avoiding the party Whip, the scheduler definitely knows about it.

Among the challenges the scheduler faces is figuring out what events the Member can and should attend. Members receive hundreds of invitations to events in Washington, DC, and the home district or state. Almost all are worthwhile, but it's humanly impossible to be at every one. In ages past, such invitations were accepted or rejected more on the basis of expediency and personal taste than strategic planning. These days, however, activities, including sporting events, are weighed against the Member's goals—and in some instances, events are actually created to help fulfill strategic goals.

In 2003, for example, President George W. Bush signed the Medicare Prescription Drug, Improvement and Modernization Act, creating a new program to provide senior citizens aid in purchasing prescription drugs.

After this, some Members made it a priority to get to every senior center in their state or district to explain the new plan and help people with the complex enrollment process. Instead of waiting for an invitation, the staff called each senior center and asked if the Member could stop by and talk to a gathering of seniors. This sort of aggressive, well-thought-out scheduling maximizes the effectiveness of the congressional office's most precious resource, the Member's time.

It has been suggested that the scheduler's duties are so crucial to achieving a Member's strategic goals that the position should be a functional category unto itself. But in the House, at least, many of the scheduler's other duties fall into the support category and include maintaining supplies, contracting for package delivery and handling expense and payroll records. (Since 1995, Congress has been subject to most of the same labor laws as any other employer and must keep track of compensatory time, overtime, distinctions between salaried and hourly employees and mandatory leave schedules.) In the Senate, where staff sizes make support functions a full-time job, the duties handled in the House by the scheduler are usually divided between two employees.

The staff assistant is another member of the support team. It's a position most people would call a receptionist, but he or she is not a receptionist in the traditional sense. The receptionist's job in a congressional office has a lot more facets. Besides being the point person on the phones and the individual who greets guests as they enter the office, providing in the process that all-important positive first impression, the staff assistant frequently manages office interns, arranges and coordinates tours of numerous DC sites that require tickets (particularly the White House) and fields requests for flags to be flown over the Capitol.

The staff assistant position is typically entry-level, taken by people hoping to work their way into a legislative, communication or administrative position. Most are successful. That's because they're usually overqualified for the job. Don't be surprised if you learn that the first person you meet when you walk into a congressional office holds an advanced degree from a highly rated college or university. For obvious reasons, staff assistant is a high-turnover position. Those who hold that job typically move up in a year or they move on.

Chapter Three Summary

- Each office has great autonomy and its own unique hierarchy. Staff tends to reflect the Member's background, interests and district.
- Senate offices typically have more than twice the staff of their counterparts in the House but the organization charts are very similar.
- In the vast majority of offices the chief of staff is the Member's strong right-arm and the most important hiring decision the Member makes.
- The focus of staff members who report to the chief fall into four basic categories: Legislative, Communication, Outreach and Constituent Services, Support and Administrative Staff.
- Legislative staff must be knowledgeable in the rules, procedures, processes and peculiarities of the Congress, its history and traditions. The legislative team is usually a three-tiered hierarchy that consists of the legislative director, legislative assistants and legislative correspondents.
- The biggest challenge for legislative staff is constituent mail. Congress receives nearly a million constituent communications every day. To answer this massive volume of mail requires enormous amounts of time, effort and technology.
- The communications director is involved in every aspect of the office. Effective communication is essential to political and legislative success. Without a strategy and plan, a communications director is likely to be found flailing about and doing little more than reacting to news made by others.
- Outreach is primarily a communications function carried out by key staff members who attend countless meetings on behalf of the Member.
- Constituent service has become increasingly important as government has grown in size and complexity, making it difficult for the average citizen to find their way through the Federal bureaucracy.

- The district director in the House and the state director in the Senate perform the role of the chief of staff at the local level.
- Technology tools have become essential to the successful operation of every congressional office and require specialized knowledge.
- The scheduler is usually the gatekeeper to the Member's inner office and maintains the Member's schedule.
- The staff assistant answers phones, greets guests as they enter the office and frequently manages interns, arranges tours and fields requests for flags to be flown over the Capitol.