

United States Congress

The United States Congress is the nation's bicameral legislative body in Washington, D.C. The Senate is made up of 100 senators, two from each state who are elected for six-year terms. Elections occur on a rotating basis; about one-third of the Senate is up for re-election every two years. The 435 members of the House of Representatives are each elected for two years from districts within each state determined by population. Each chamber of Congress is divided into committees that focus on specific legislative areas. Committee members are generally the first to hear and work on bills.

Contacting Your Federal Elected Officials

Look up your elected officials by address at advocacy.ounceofprevention.org. The U.S. Capitol switchboard at (202) 224-3121 can transfer calls to the appropriate legislator's office.

It can be difficult to contact federal representatives directly. When you call their offices, you will most likely speak to a staff member. You can ask for the legislative aide who handles the issue you are calling about or leave a message about your opinions on legislation with the person who answers the phone. Federal legislators have staff members who generally take care of the day-to-day policy issues, briefing them before important debates and votes.

Senators and representatives are usually available in their district offices

during congressional breaks. You can schedule meetings with them or invite them to local programs or events by contacting the district office and speaking to the scheduler. They may also hold town hall meetings or appear at public events where you can communicate directly with them.

If you are in Washington, DC, you can visit your elected officials in their offices. This can be a great way to build relationships and to advocate for issues directly. Most legislators offer weekly constituent events, open to all visitors from their home district. Also, staff members are usually available to give tours and answer questions whenever the office is open. Call the office before your visit for more details. For further tips on visiting your representative, see page 12.

For more information about bills being considered by either chamber of Congress, voting records, or committees, go to www.house.gov, www.senate.gov, or www.thomas.gov.

