

Dec. 29, 2020

Who's Who on the Senate Dais?

Casual CSPAN watchers, or anyone who attends the Senate galleries, will notice the upper chamber, or dais, is occupied by someone other than the 100 elected senators. The staff members who sit at the most prominent feature of the chamber — a raised platform with ornate stone and mahogany desks — are mostly officials appointed by the majority party. These officers take care of the Senate's day-to-day operations, especially those related to parliamentary procedure. Here's a look at the responsibilities of those important roles.

Presiding Officer

Maintains the order of the session. The Constitution states this is the vice president's responsibility, but he assumes the role only for ceremonial functions or during close votes. The Senate's president pro tempore, the majority party's senior senator, takes over in the Vice President's absence. Unlike senators on the floor, the presiding officer is not at liberty to address the Senate, other than to fulfill administrative duties.

Sergeant at Arms

The chief law enforcement, protocol, and executive officer. The sergeant at arms compels senators to enter the chamber in order to establish the quorum needed to conduct business, preserves order on the Senate floor and in the galleries, and coordinates official Senate events and visits.

Secretaries for the Majority and Minority

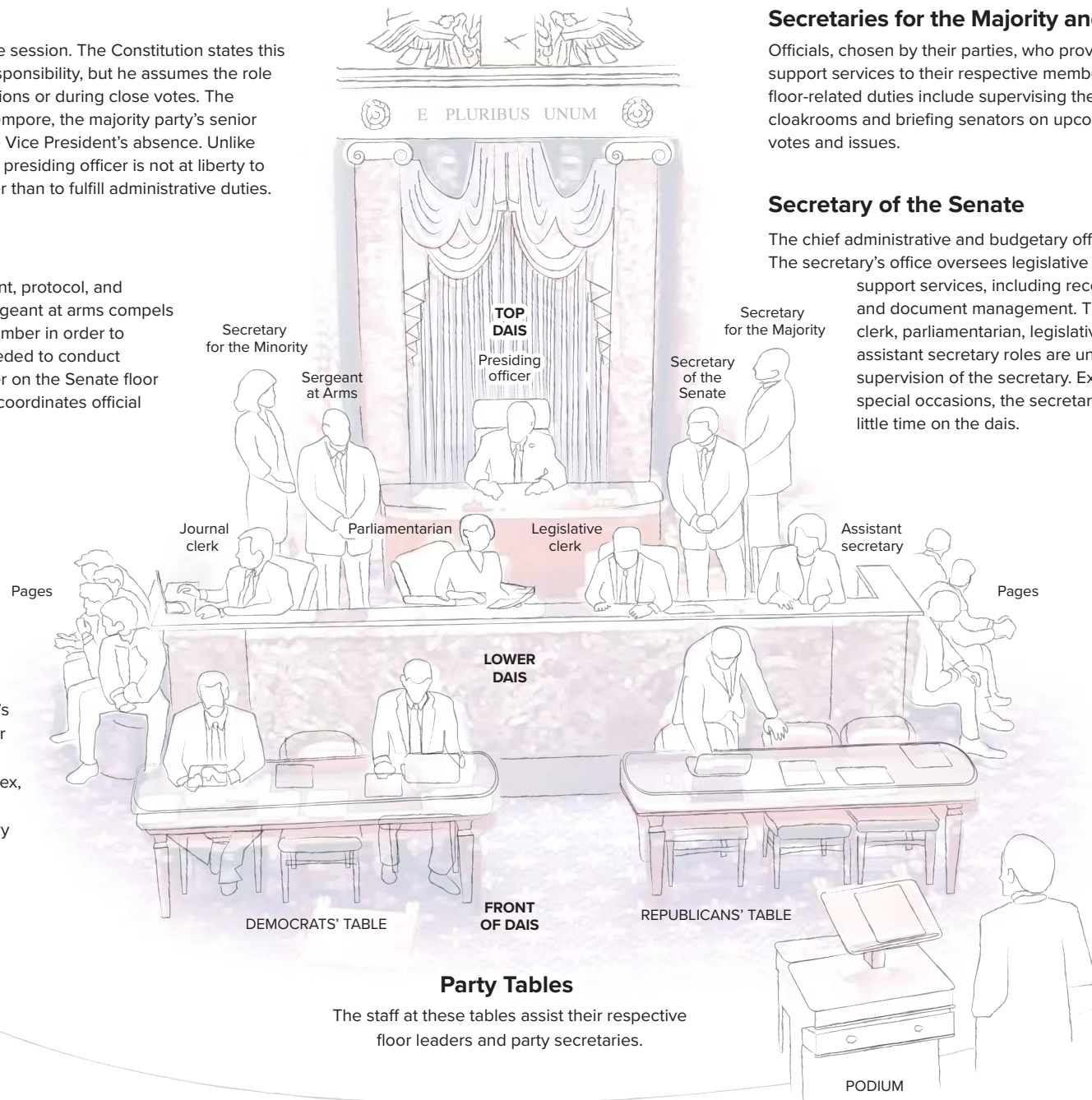
Officials, chosen by their parties, who provide support services to their respective members. Their floor-related duties include supervising their party cloakrooms and briefing senators on upcoming votes and issues.

Secretary of the Senate

The chief administrative and budgetary officer. The secretary's office oversees legislative operation support services, including record keeping and document management. The journal clerk, parliamentarian, legislative clerk and assistant secretary roles are under the supervision of the secretary. Except for special occasions, the secretary spends little time on the dais.

Pages

The high school juniors who serve as the Senate's messengers. They deliver correspondence around the Congressional complex, prepare the chamber for Senate sessions and carry bills and amendments to the desk.



MEMBERS OF THE LOWER DAIS

Journal Clerk

Records the daily minutes of the Senate and prepares them, along with a history of bills and resolutions, for publication in the Senate Journal, the official record of proceedings required by the Constitution.

Parliamentarian

Advises the presiding officer on the Senate's precedents and practices. The parliamentarian plays an important role during reconciliation process under the provisions of the Byrd Rule, which allows certain bills to be passed by a simple majority instead of the typical 60 needed to end debate and block a filibuster. The position also assists in the referral of bills to Senate committee, and serves as the Senate's official timekeeper.

Legislative Clerk

Calls and records the roll for all votes. At the direction of the presiding officer, this position reads aloud all bills, amendments, presidential and House messages, and other pending business. The legislative clerk receives all proposed and adopted amendments and maintains official copies of measures the Senate's pending measures.

Assistant Secretary

The secretary of the Senate's chief assistant. This role supervises the day-to-day administration of the office.