

Our House

Pennsylvania



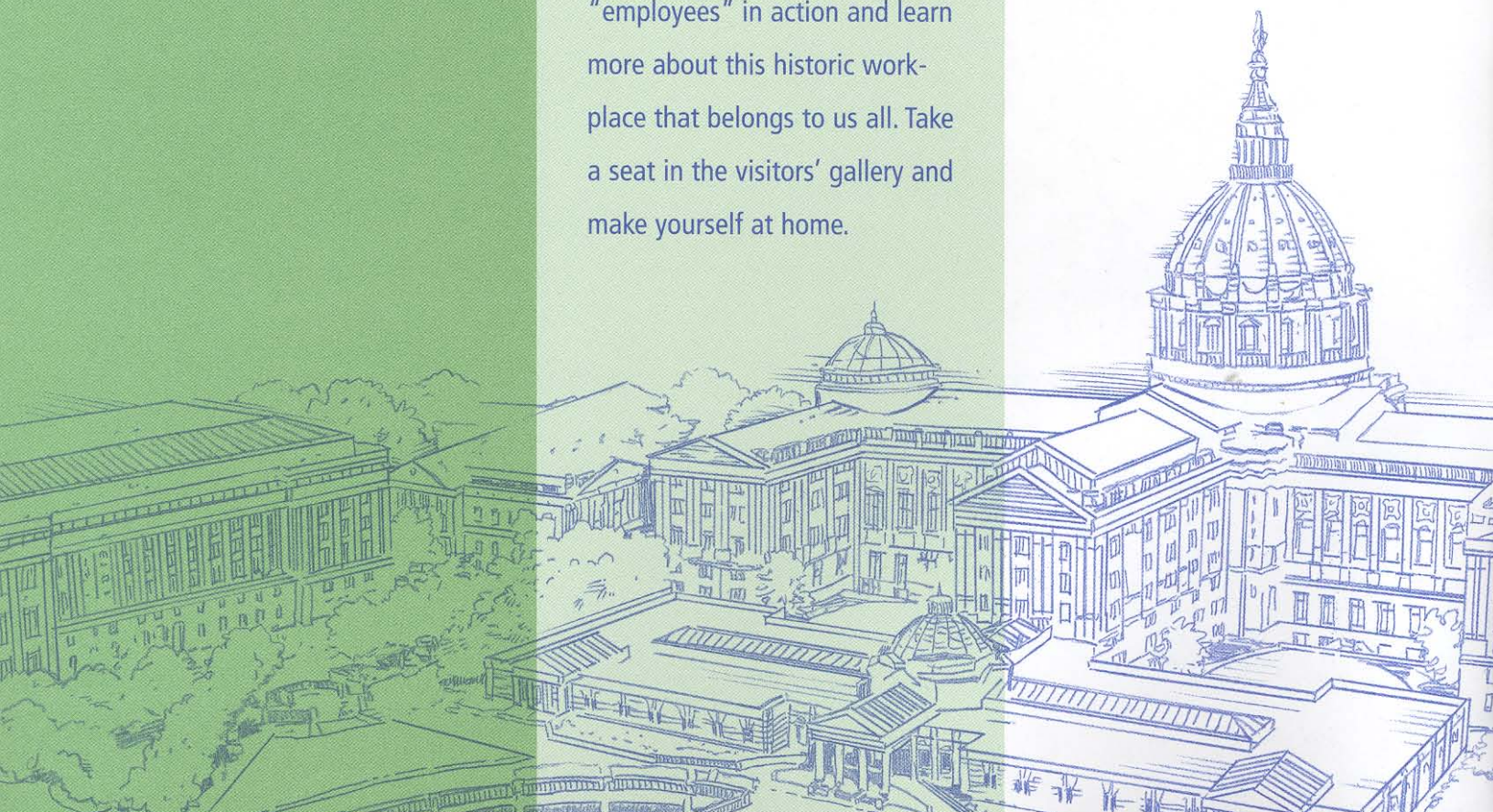
A VISITOR'S GUIDE TO THE PA HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES



COMMONWEALTH OF PENNSYLVANIA HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

our House

Every two years, the voters of Pennsylvania send legislators from their districts to work for them here in the House of Representatives. As Pennsylvania citizens, we are the employers of our representatives and the landlords of the building in which they work. Your visit to the House of Representatives is an opportunity to observe your "employees" in action and learn more about this historic workplace that belongs to us all. Take a seat in the visitors' gallery and make yourself at home.





A buzz of sound, moving figures, and a flurry of paper. Activities on the House Floor can appear confusing the first time you observe. Actually, the House conducts its business in a well-controlled, orderly fashion, according to practices and procedures that have survived for centuries. The following pages will help you understand the order within the activity by explaining *who's who*, *what's what*, and *the actual language used on the House Floor*. Unfortunately, you can't master it all in one visit. But your time in the House of Representatives will be more meaningful if we take a look at it from your vantage point in the visitors' gallery.

order in the House

who's who in the House

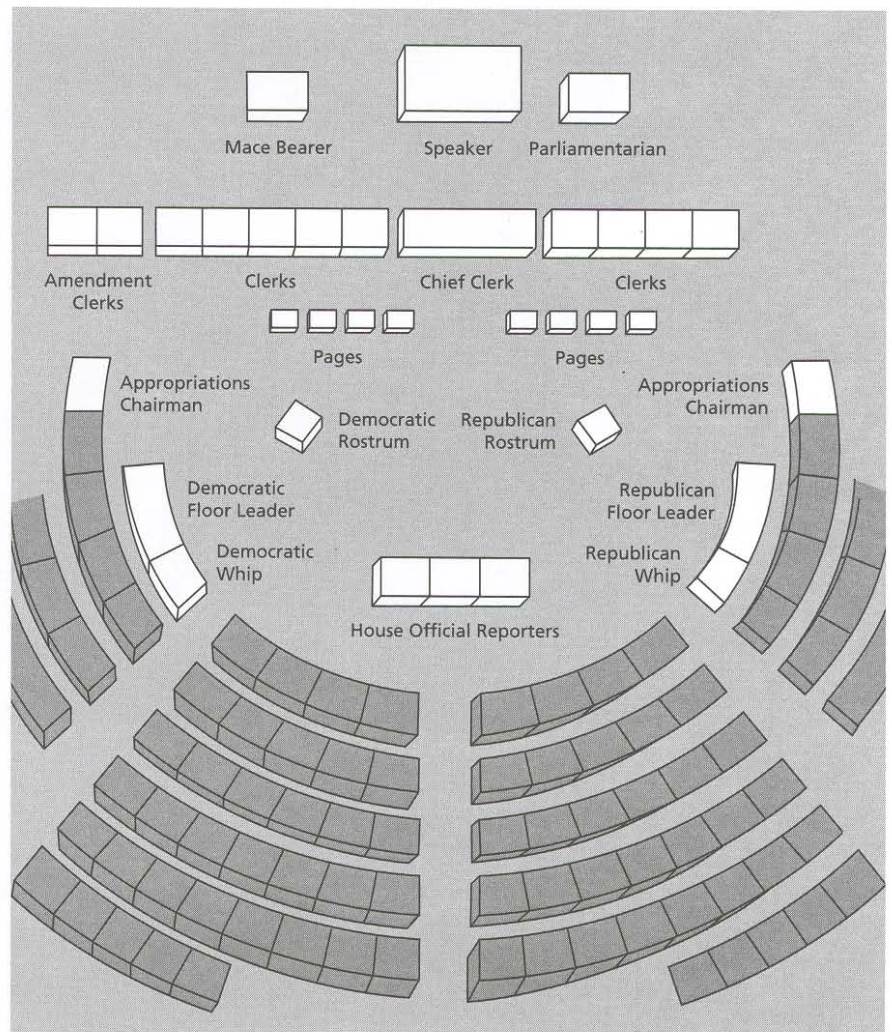
What are they saying?

What are they doing?

Where are they going?

And who's who!?

What takes place on the House Floor can be fascinating when you understand the roles and functions of the people who work here. For one thing, everyone you see on the Floor of the House is not a legislator. But you can differentiate elected representatives from House employees by where they conduct their business on the Floor.



Equal Parts

Notice first that the House is divided by a center aisle into two equal parts. Viewed from your perspective, members of the Democratic party sit at desks to the left of the aisle, Republican members are seated on the right—an arrangement that has been the tradition for 180 years. Officers, employees,

and other staff sit facing House members on benches and at desks arranged around the Speaker's rostrum, which is set precisely in the center of the highest tier. As you match this seating chart with the individuals you see from the gallery, you will have a better idea of what is happening on the Floor.

1 Speaker of the House

The presiding officer and central figure of the House stands at the elevated rostrum which faces the center aisle. Elected by members of the House, the Speaker conducts each session, maintains the proper order of events on the Floor, and votes on every issue. Occasionally, the Speaker leaves the rostrum in order to join a debate, placing another member in charge temporarily.

2 Parliamentarian

The Parliamentarian is a lawyer who stands at the Speaker's elbow, providing expert advice on all legal matters that arise during a session, especially issues of parliamentary procedure.

3 Mace Bearer

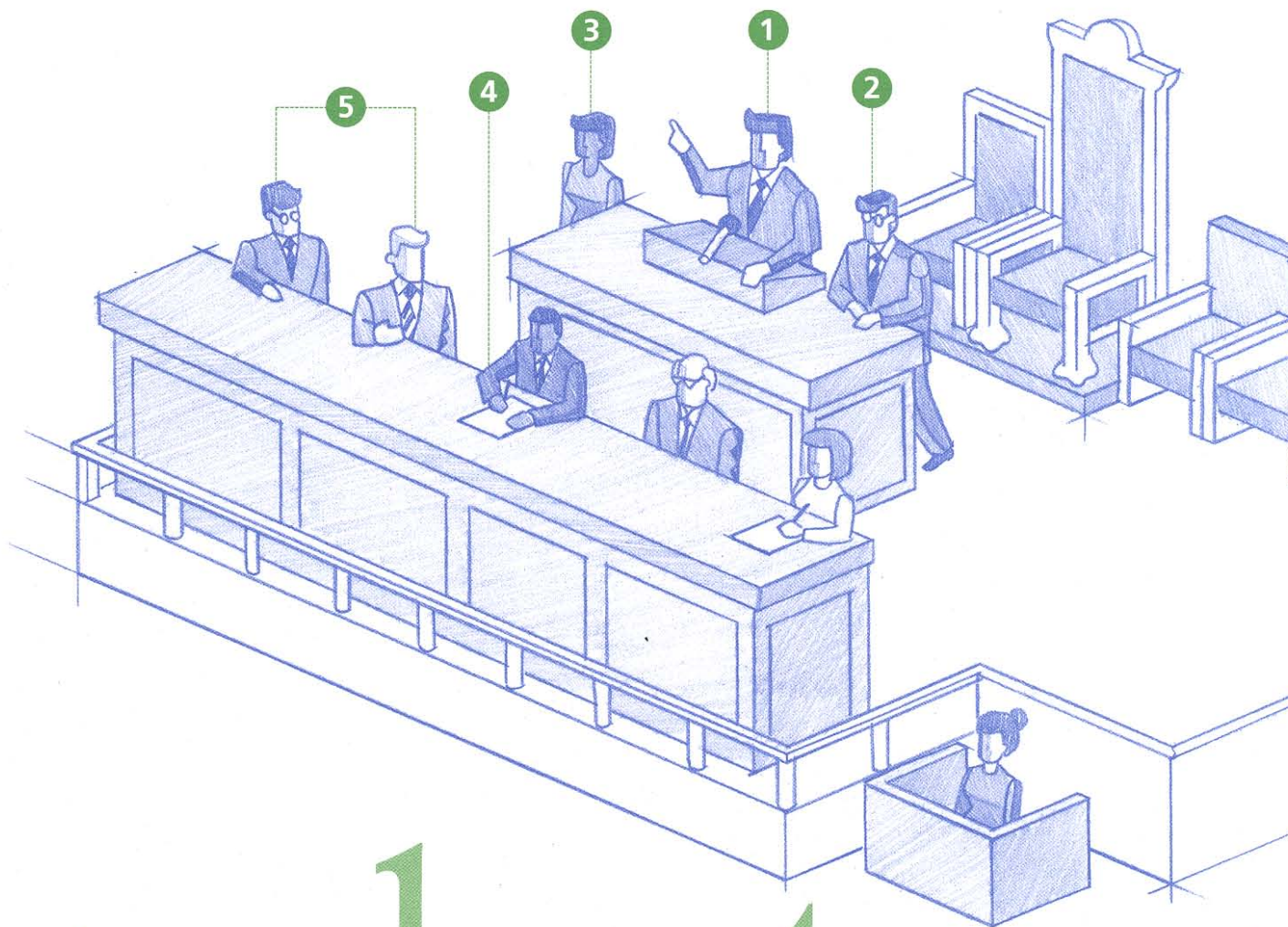
This official precedes the Speaker to the rostrum before each day's session, carrying the mace, or symbol of authority. When the session adjourns for the day, the Mace Bearer rises from the desk to the Speaker's right, removes the mace from its special pedestal and ceremoniously escorts the Speaker from the chamber.

4 Chief Clerk

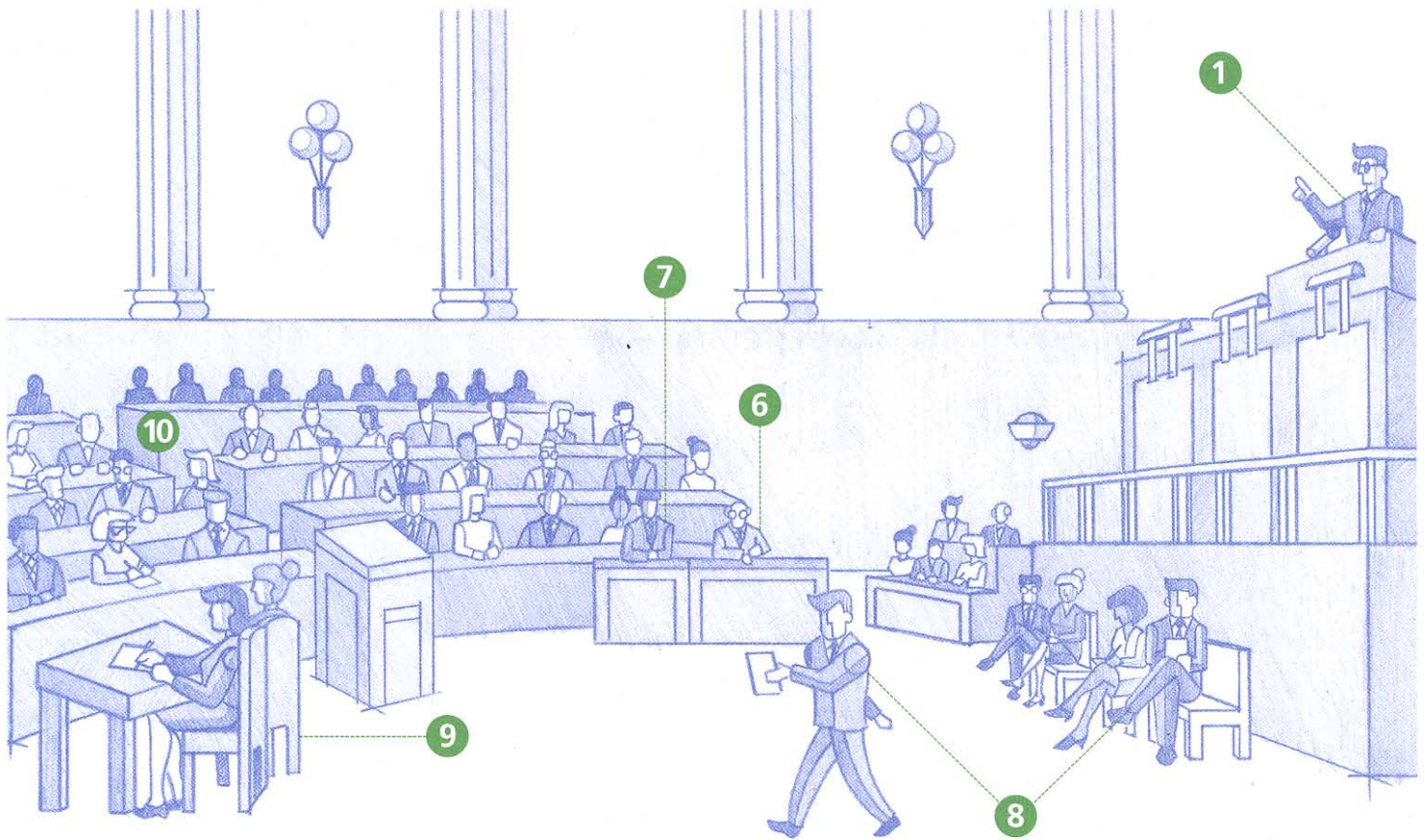
This House-elected official is responsible for day-to-day operations of the House. The Chief Clerk also convenes the House to elect the Speaker each term and supervises the printing of all bills and journals.

5 Assistant Clerks and Reporters

Several aides are appointed to assist the Chief Clerk in keeping track of bills, amendments, messages from the Senate, motions, resolutions, and any other business the House considers. Their desks line the tier below the Speaker's rostrum, with the Chief Clerk seated at the center.



seating chart



6 Majority and Minority Leaders

These are the official Floor Leaders elected by their respective party members to speak for the majority and minority political parties in the House of Representatives. Floor Leaders are responsible for formulating their party's strategy. They lead the Floor debate from desks which face each other across the center aisle. House procedures allow them to speak on the Floor as often as they wish.

7 Majority and Minority Whips

Whips are the Assistant Floor Leaders. They act as links between their party members and Majority and Minority Leaders, keeping them informed and encouraging their votes along party lines. Like the Floor Leaders, their desks are placed opposite one another on each side of the center aisle.

8 Pages

The young men and women weaving through the aisles of the House are Pages. They deliver messages, distribute paperwork, and run errands for members. Each party employs its own group of Pages.

9 Official House Reporters

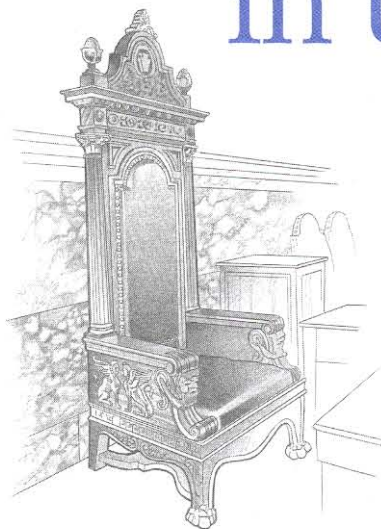
These are employees of the Chief Clerk's office who transcribe the official remarks made on the Floor of the House and enter them into the *House Journal*.

10 The Members

Facing away from you, but towards the Speaker, are the members of the House. Pennsylvania elects 203 state representatives, each serving one legislative district of approximately 60,000 people. A member of the House serves a two-year term and must be a U.S. citizen at least 21 years of age, a Pennsylvania resident for at least four years, and a resident of his or her legislative district for at least one year prior to the general election.

what's what in the House

From any angle, the House of Representatives is breathtaking. Regal columns, gleaming gold and glass, historic furnishings, rare marble, and priceless works of art impress first-time visitors and House veterans alike. Some of these furnishings and features are as old as the Capitol itself—or close to it. Others are more modern additions.

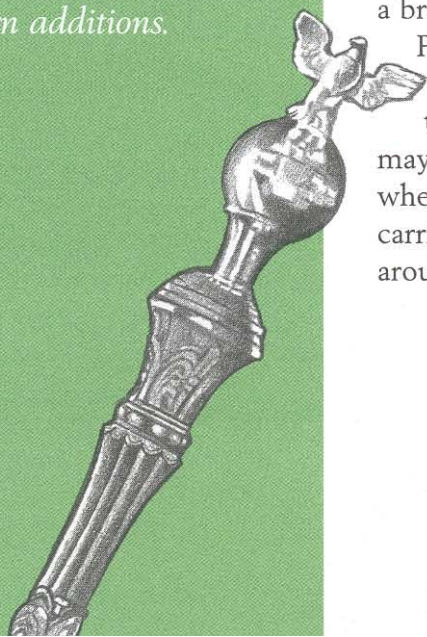


A Speaker's Chair

This throne-like emblem of rank sits directly behind the Speaker's rostrum. Architect Joseph Huston designed the chair in 1906, the year the Capitol was dedicated.

B Mace

Look for the House symbol of authority, peace, order, and respect for law resting in its pedestal to the right of the Speaker. Its substantial base is solid mahogany, intricately carved and capped by a brass globe engraved with the Pennsylvania coat of arms. An American eagle perches on top. The tradition of the mace may date to the Roman Republic when attendants of Roman consuls carried bundles of sticks wrapped around an axe to enforce order.



C Members' Desks

Legislators sit with members of their own party in semi-circular rows of desks facing the Speaker's rostrum. The varnished mahogany desks date to the dedication of the Capitol in 1906. Made in Pennsylvania, these splendid desks are now heirlooms, complete with inkwells and a private footlocker to one side for stowing a pair of hightop boots or galoshes.

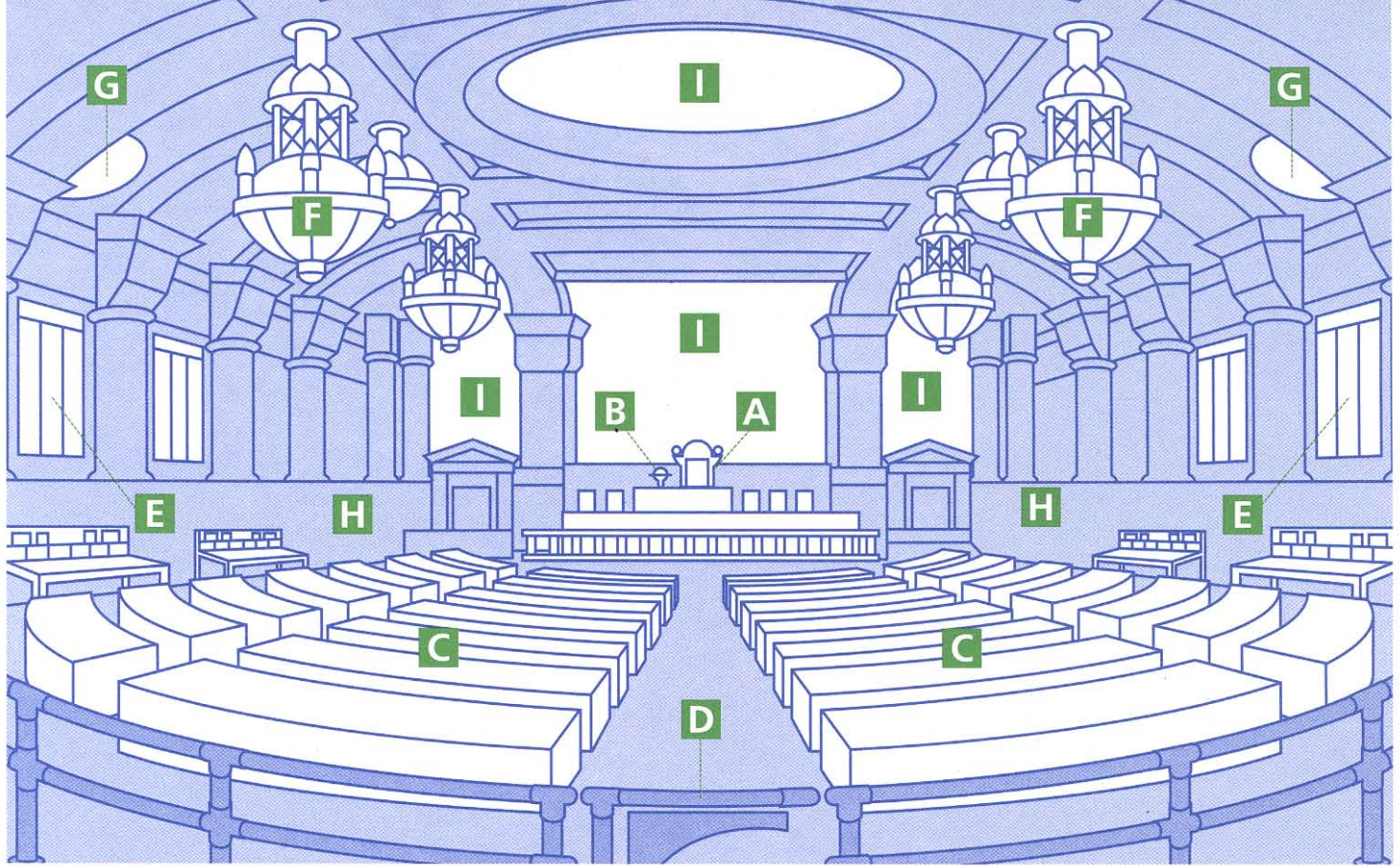
D The Brass Rail

As defined by House rules, the Floor of the House is the area between the Speaker's rostrum and the brass rail. The brass rail runs behind the last row of members' desks, just below the visitors' gallery. Technically, members standing behind the brass rail are not on the Floor and can neither speak in debate nor vote on a question before the House.

OUT OF THE FIRE

English-born Stephen Hills designed and built the original Harrisburg Capitol which was completed and furnished in 1822 for approximately \$244,500. Seventy-five years later, the great dome crashed and burned in a fire which may have been caused by a faulty fireplace flue. Philadelphia architect Joseph Huston designed a replacement for the ruined structure in the Italian Renaissance style. The magnificent building, which cost \$13 million, was dedicated by Theodore Roosevelt on October 4, 1906.





E Electronic Roll Call Boards

If you observe a vote, you will most likely see a large tally board flashing on opposite walls of the House. Installed in 1961, the tally boards list members' names by party in alphabetical order. Members vote at their desks by pressing green or red buttons which light the respective “yea” and “nay” columns on each board to display the vote.

F Crystal

The six huge crystal chandeliers which light the House are amazing contrasts of size and delicacy. Each large fixture weighs 4½ tons, the two smaller ones 2 tons each. Yet, these enormous iron and brass fixtures painted in 18-karat gold manage to look as if they float in space. Routine maintenance is far from routine in this House. Workers must build scaffolding to reach the chandeliers, then spend a day-and-a-half cleaning and checking them and changing their 1,450 light bulbs!

G Stained Glass

Brilliant circles of stained glass are set like jewels just below the arches of the ceiling on both sides of the House. Artist William B. Van Ingen, a student of stained glass artisan Louis Tiffany, created the 24 windows, each measuring 10 feet in diameter, weighing 200 pounds, and framed by 22-karat gold-leaf embellishments.

H Marble

The marble you see along the perimeter of the House chamber is unlike any other in the Western hemisphere. This rare marble of creamy buff with tones of rose and grey was imported from the French Pyrenees exclusively for the Pennsylvania House of Representatives.

I Murals

The House contains a colorful panorama of Pennsylvania history in the murals of Edwin Austin Abbey. The most commanding of

the series hangs behind the Speaker's rostrum and dominates the far wall in front of you. It is called “The Apotheosis of Pennsylvania” and, like the stage set of a play, it creates a context for the business which takes place before it. The artist depicts the Commonwealth as a ruler on a throne. At her feet are the explorers, pioneers, scientists, industrialists, and military figures who shaped Pennsylvania's history.

Flanking the center mural are two others—“Penn's Treaty with the Indians” to the left and “The Reading of the Declaration of Independence” to your right.

The House ceiling is a work of art in itself with its ornate geometry of gold leaf buttoned at the center by a charming painted illustration. In “The Hours,” Abbey represents the passage of time in the form of 24 maidens revolving in an endless circle amidst the moon, the sun, and the stars of the Milky Way.

the language of the floor

As in any occupation, legislators speak a language all their own. Understanding everything on the House Floor would take some serious study. But knowing some of the more frequently used terms and phrases will help to decode the “legislative” you are hearing. Here are a few translations to get you started.

“Mr. Speaker” or “Madam Speaker.”

Members always direct their spoken remarks to the Speaker of the House even though they are intended for all members to hear. In turn, the Speaker responds directly to “the gentleman” or “gentlewoman” who has spoken. That is why the record of statements spoken on the Floor is known as “dialogue,” not “conversation.”

“We request leaves of absence.”

At the start of each session, party leaders must ask the Speaker to excuse the absence of members who are ill or whose business requires them to be elsewhere for the day. This is followed by the master roll call, which determines which members are present. A quorum, or majority, of the elected members of the House must be present to conduct business.

“Without objection, it is so ordered.”

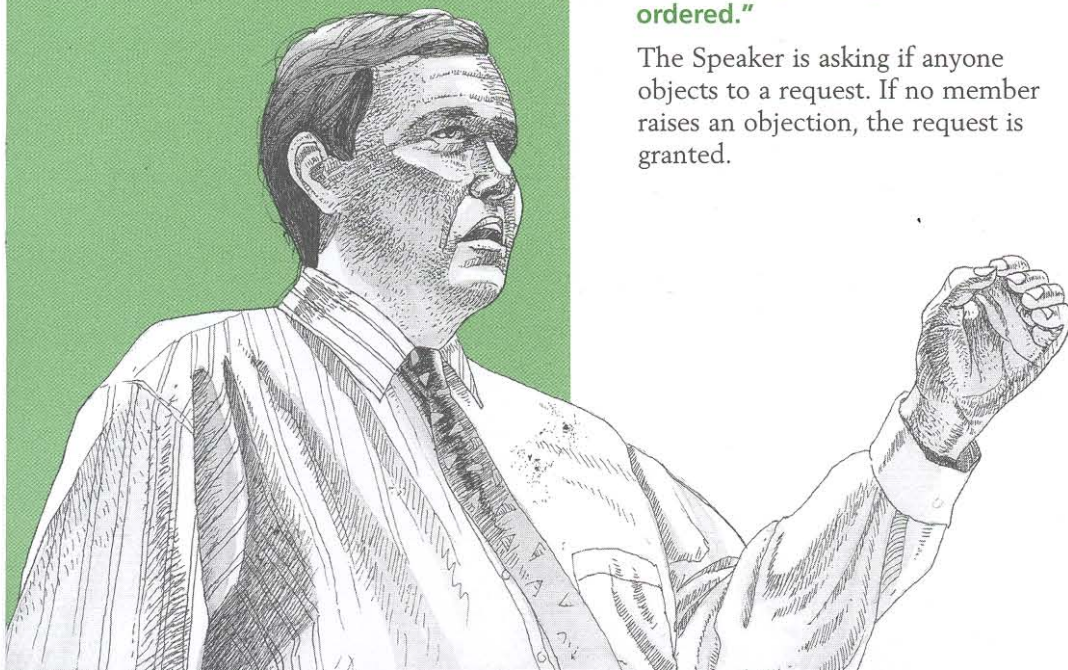
The Speaker is asking if anyone objects to a request. If no member raises an objection, the request is granted.

“The Chair refers the following bills to committee which the Clerk will read.”

You will hear this phrase early in the session as the Speaker asks the Clerk to read a list of new bills and the committees which will study them. All bills debated on the House Floor are first reviewed by a standing committee or subcommittee with expertise in the subject area of the bill. A bill is the written version of an idea that legislators will consider making into law.

“Will the House agree to the bill? Agreed to.”

When uttered by the Speaker, these words sound like one continuous sentence. To understand its meaning you must know that the Constitution requires that bills be considered by the House on three different days. On the first day of consideration, the Speaker simply announces that a bill has been reported to the Floor from committee; on the second day, its number and title are read again. The bill is debated on the third day of consideration. When the Speaker uses the phrase above on day one or two, he or she is simply raising the bill for consideration as the Constitution requires, and then answering in the affirmative on behalf of the House members.



"I move to recommit."

Members must make a motion or "move" to make something happen on the House Floor. A "motion to recommit" means that a member wants to send a bill back to committee for further study.

"Point of order."

Members use this phrase to question a procedure which is being followed. Members may raise a point of order at any time during a debate, even if it means interrupting a colleague who is speaking.

"The Chair recognizes the gentleman (woman) from . . ."

The Speaker says this when calling on each member who wishes to speak in a debate.

"The following resolution is reported from committee."

Unlike bills, House resolutions exclusively concern the affairs of the House and, therefore, do not require the agreement of the Senate for passage. However, resolutions are like bills in that they are reviewed first by a committee. The phrase above announces that a committee has sent a resolution to the House Floor for consideration.

"Would the gentleman, Mr. Jones, please stand for interrogation?"

Members wishing to question sponsors of a bill may ask them to rise and respond to interrogation. Even though a member is requesting specific answers from a colleague, he or she still addresses all remarks to the Speaker.

"Will the House agree to the amendments which the Clerk has read?"

Committees, individual members, or the Senate may "offer amendments" or changes to bills which must then be debated and voted upon on the House Floor.

"The House will come to order."

Occasionally, the Speaker will quiet members with this statement and a rap or two of the gavel.

"The question is will the House agree to the bill (amendment, motion)?"

A "question" is the matter members are asked to vote upon. This phrase simply restates the topic which is up for a vote.

"I move the question to be placed upon the table."

Members use this phrase when they wish to put off voting on a particular issue until the House wishes to take further action on it. Members must then vote on the motion to table.

"I would like to be recorded in the affirmative (negative)."

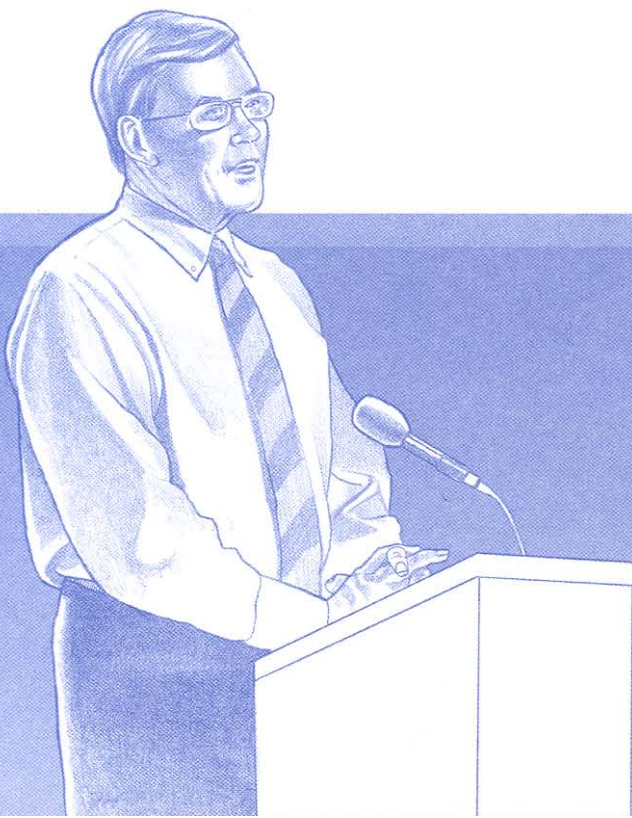
When members are prevented from voting by circumstances such as an unavoidable absence or the malfunction of a voting switch, they may ask that their intentions be entered into the official record of House proceedings. The Speaker assures the member that the vote will be entered in the *Journal* by saying, "The gentleman's remarks will be spread upon the record."

"House Bill 000 is over for the day."

This means a bill will not be voted upon on that day but will remain on the calendar to be considered on another legislative day. When a House Bill is "over temporarily," it usually is postponed until later in the same legislative day.

"I move that the House do now adjourn until Monday, March 15, unless sooner recalled by the Speaker."

Any member may request that the day's session come to an end by offering a motion in this form.

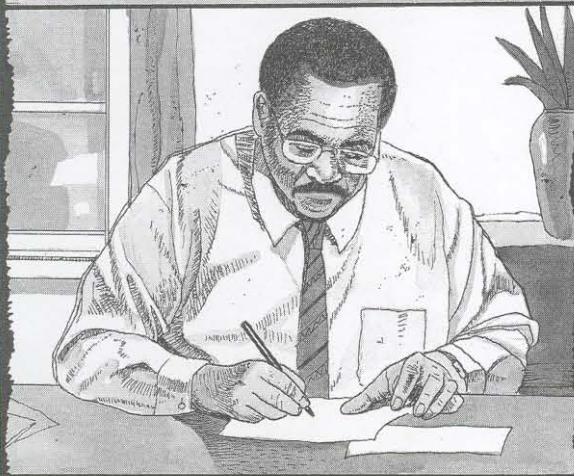


ENTERING THE DEBATE

Knowing who gets to speak and in what order can also help you follow the action on the Floor. During a debate, the prime sponsor of a bill or amendment may speak first, standing at the Democratic or Republican rostrum which faces the members on either side of the center aisle. On major bills, Floor Leaders make opening and closing remarks from their desks.

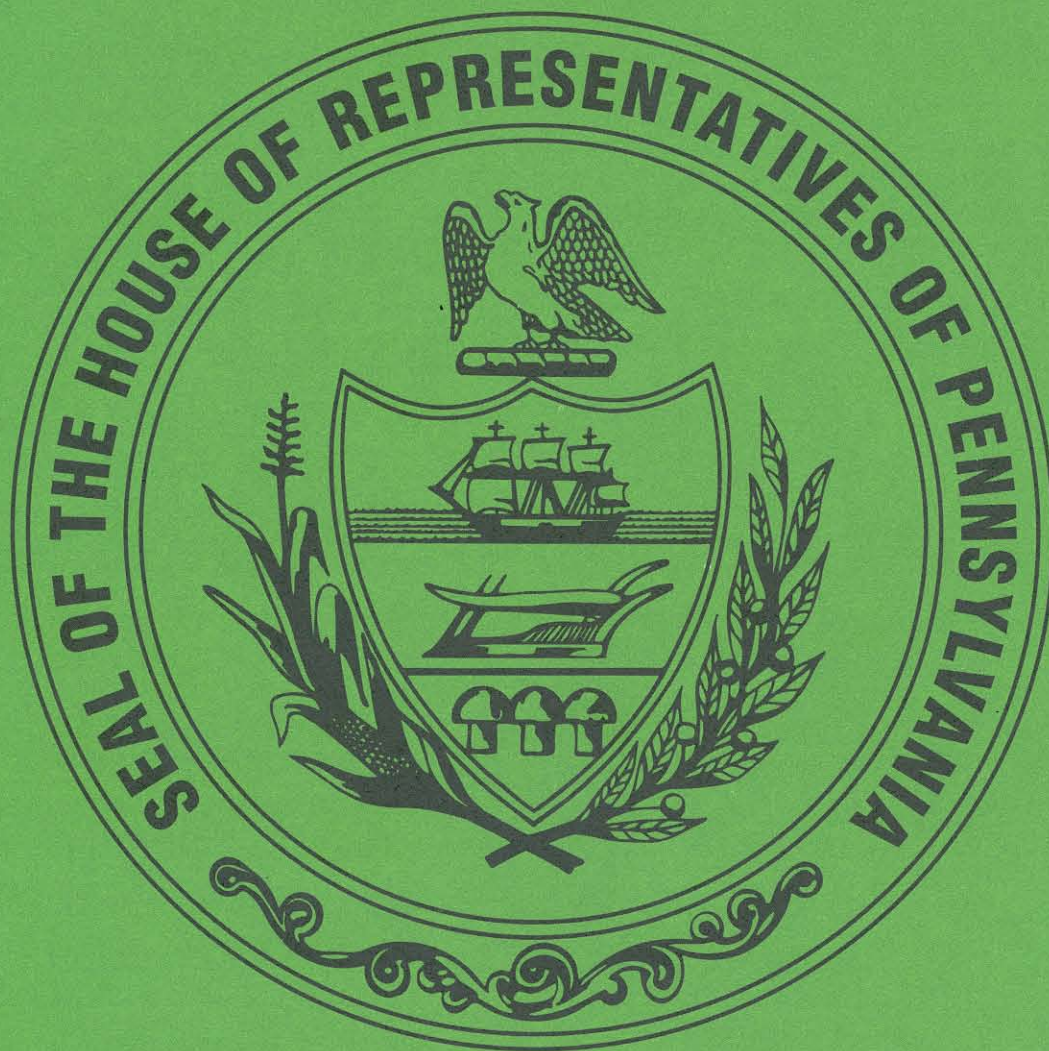
Debates are open to members who speak at microphones at the ends of aisles. The Speaker's Clerk (who doubles as Mace Bearer) records the order in which members rise, and the Speaker recognizes the same topic. Floor Leaders are the sole exception and are recognized by the Speaker as often and as soon as they rise.

elsewhere in the House



For three days each week, in sessions that can last a standard work day or late into the night, Pennsylvania legislators are on the Floor moving towards final action on laws which affect our lives. In that respect, the Floor is truly the hub of the House of Representatives. But what you are observing below the visitors' gallery often takes days, weeks, or months of preparation which legislators accomplish in other rooms of the House. So when you think of your representatives "on the job," picture them also in committee rooms evaluating bills, in caucus rooms exchanging views about bills with members of their own party, and in their offices hearing from constituents about the merits of bills which are before them.

Each legislative day brings new challenges to the House of Representatives and fresh events for visitors to observe. Your representatives welcome your opinions and invite a return visit soon.



There is much to be proud of in Pennsylvania. Magnificent land, steadfast citizens, lasting traditions, resilient spirit—and a system of government that has sustained Pennsylvania and the nation for over 300 years. *Our House Pennsylvania* is one of a series of booklets we at the House of Representatives have prepared to make our state and the everyday workings of our government more understandable to its citizens. As your representatives, this is both our responsibility and our pleasure.

Copies of this booklet may be obtained from your State Representative or from:

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