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Potential Committee Vacancies in the 117th Congress

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Congressional committees are a critical part of the legislative process. Committees serve as gatekeepers for legislation, considering and amending bills before they reach the floor. Hearings and investigations shape policy debates and provide critical oversight.

At the beginning of each Congress, Members receive their committee assignments. Members pursue membership on committees that align with their interests and priorities, and their **assignments are determined by the Democratic Caucus and the Republican Conference - with heavy influence from party leadership and steering committees.**¹ When determining committee assignments, the parties weigh member preferences along with seniority, regional balance, and balance among ideological and identity caucuses.² Committee vacancies present opportunities for returning members to gain spots on new committees and for incoming freshmen to get their initial assignments. Vacancies for committee chairs and ranking members can have major policy implications because those leaders shape committees' priorities.

Committee vacancies may occur due to a preexisting vacancy or because a previous member retired, ran for another office, or lost reelection. On the Democratic side, Members can receive waivers that allow them to serve on additional committees beyond the caps in Democratic Caucus rules.³ While returning members usually have the option to remain on their previous committees (except for committees with term limits⁴), **a returning Democratic committee member using a waiver is not guaranteed the option to keep the committee slot.** The Democratic Caucus uses waivers to distribute remaining committee slots after all members, including incoming freshmen, have hit their caps.

The actual number of vacancies going into the 117th Congress depends on the final partisan composition of the House, which is reflected in the committee ratios negotiated by Democratic and Republican leaders. Given that the number of House Democrats is decreasing and the number of Republicans is increasing, **the vacancies listed here effectively reflect an upper bound of Democratic committee slots and lower bound of Republican committee slots.** Returning members who switch committees will create additional vacancies not reflected here.

¹ The Speaker and Minority Leader directly recommend appointments to the House Administration and Rules Committees as well as joint and select committees. The Democratic Steering and Policy Committee and Republican Steering Committee recommend appointments to other committees.

² For example, the Democratic Steering and Policy Committee may consider the representation of the Congressional Black Caucus, Congressional Hispanic Caucus, Congressional Asian Pacific American Caucus, Congressional Progressive Caucus, New Democrat Coalition, and Blue Dog Coalition on certain committees.

³ In general, Democratic Caucus rules limit members to one "exclusive" committee (Appropriations, Energy & Commerce, Financial Services, Rules, and Ways & Means) or two "non-exclusive" committees (most remaining committees). There are special rules for Budget, Ethics, House Administration, and Intelligence.

⁴ Members of the Ethics Committee are limited to serving no more than three out of five successive Congresses. Members of the Intelligence Committee are limited to four Congresses.

Committee <i>exclusive (*) and term-limited (^) committees marked⁵</i>	Vacancies out of current committee slots	
	<i>Democrats (waivers)⁶</i>	<i>Republicans⁷</i>
Agriculture	12 (9) out of 26	4 out of 22
Appropriations*	3 (0) out of 30	4 out of 23
Armed Services	5 (0) out of 31	7 out of 26
Budget ⁸	8 out of 22	3 out of 14
Education and Labor	3 (1) out of 28	3 out of 22
Energy and Commerce*	4 (0) out of 31	6 out of 24
Ethics ⁹	0 out of 5	2 out of 5
Financial Services*	11 (7) out of 34	2 out of 26
Foreign Affairs	4 (3) out of 26	3 out of 22
Homeland Security	9 (7) out of 18	2 out of 14
House Administration ¹⁰	1 out of 6	1 out of 3
Judiciary	2 (0) out of 24	2 out of 17
Natural Resources	16 (13) out of 26	2 out of 20
Oversight and Reform	15 (13) out of 24	0 out of 18
Rules* ¹¹	2 (1) out of 9	1 out of 4
Science, Space, and Technology	15 (11) out of 22	2 out of 17
Small Business	8 (7) out of 14	1 out of 10
Transportation and Infrastructure	4 (0) out of 37	3 out of 30
Veterans' Affairs	7 (4) out of 16	1 out of 12
Ways and Means*	1 (0) out of 25	2 out of 17
Permanent Select Committee on Intelligence [^]	1 out of 13	2 out of 9
Total	131 (76) out of 467	53 out of 355

⁵ Except for Financial Services, exclusive committees rarely have waivers. Members hitting term limits are not reflected in vacancy totals.

⁶ The number of returning members with waivers appears in parentheses. While these returning members may wish to keep their current slots, incoming freshmen will receive their assignments first. The actual number of vacancies on most committees may be lower once committee ratios are negotiated.

⁷ The actual number of vacancies on most committees may be greater once committee ratios are negotiated.

⁸ Several seats on the Budget Committee are set aside for members of the Appropriations, Ways & Means, and Rules Committees, and Democratic members of exclusive committees do not need waivers to serve on the Budget Committee. The remaining seats are open to any members.

⁹ The Ethics Committee stays at a 1:1 ratio (currently 5 majority and 5 minority members).

¹⁰ The House Administration Committee stays at a 2:1 ratio (currently 6 majority and 3 minority members).

¹¹ The Rules Committee will stay at 9 majority and 4 minority members.

Democratic Chair Vacancies¹² (3)

Agriculture

Declared Candidates (by seniority): David Scott (GA), Jim Costa (CA)

Appropriations

Declared Candidates: Marcy Kaptur (OH), Rosa DeLauro (CT), Debbie Wasserman Schultz (FL)

Foreign Affairs

Declared Candidates: Brad Sherman (CA), Gregory W. Meeks (NY), Joaquin Castro (TX)

Republican Ranking Member Vacancies¹³ (4)

Agriculture

Declared Candidates (by seniority): Glenn Thompson (PA), Austin Scott (GA), Rick Crawford (AR)

Armed Services

Declared Candidates: Mike Turner (OH), Mike Rogers (AL)

Energy and Commerce

Declared Candidates: Michael Burgess (TX), Bob Latta (OH), Cathy McMorris Rodgers (WA)

Natural Resources

Declared Candidates: Bruce Westerman (AR), Paul Gosar (AZ)

Veterans' Affairs

Declared Candidates: TBD

¹² Democratic vacancies are due to retirement or lost reelections.

¹³ In addition to retirements and lost reelections, Republican vacancies can occur due to Republican Conference term limits (three consecutive terms as chair or ranking member).