

Patricia (Tish) Speed Schwartz
Chief Clerk/Administrator, House Committee on the Judiciary

Institution: New Congress

The First Few Weeks

Detailed overview of the administrative tasks of committees at the start of a new Congress.

Interview recorded April 19, 2007

At the beginning of a new Congress, it's basically you've got new Members, so you have to do rosters, lists, find out who their point of contacts were in their office. So, in each Member's office, you would need their LA, you would need their chief of staff, you would need their appointment secretary. Those were the points of contact. So, you'd have to make the calls and create this master list for both the Democrats and Republicans. Then you'd also—the professional staff would meet, would schedule meetings with each of the Members. So, they'd go around and introduce themselves. And you know, let them know that this is the staff, and what can we do for them, and what their particular goals were in the process. They would also meet with the chairman, but this was cursory in the beginning.

For the support staff it would be actually archiving, getting rid of all the files from—we'd usually keep—the way I had set it up, you would usually keep the last two years on hand. So three years out, you'd have a Congress behind, and then you'd retire the third year, that would be gone. And you'd start all new files, because it's a brand new Congress—all new issues, all new Members. You'd usually have to put together for the Members some sort of a cheat sheet of who the Members were, you—and what their little background was. That was as much for us as it was for them. We also did a pictorial directory of the staff, because the Members didn't know who they were either. So, we'd do all these pictures, and put it in the drawer of the desks, and they'd sit down. And they could just open the drawer and oh, that's who that is. Because they don't know who these people are, they're just roaming around, doing their thing.