

Hi, this is Chris Micheli with the Sacramento governmental relations firm of Aprea & Micheli, and an Adjunct Professor at McGeorge School of Law. Today's podcast is an overview of the federal legislative branch.

The United States Congress is bicameral in nature, meaning it has two houses, consisting of a 100-member United States Senate and 435-member US House of Representatives. The terms for the US Senators are six years in length with about one-third of the Senators being elected every two-year session. On the other hand, the terms for members of the House of Representatives are two years, with all 435 members standing for election every two years. Note that there are no term limits for service in Congress.

Now, there are a number of legislative branch support agencies that assist the Congress with its different functions. Among them are the Library of Congress, which is the nation's oldest federal cultural institution. It serves as the research arm of Congress. It's also the largest library in the world and it houses the Congressional Research Service, or CRS, which provides non-partisan research and analysis on legislative and other oversight issues that are of interest to the United States Congress. It also assists members of Congress in their responses to specific questions and by preparing reports on legislative issues in anticipation of questions and other types of emerging issues. The CRS works with members, and committees, and members of congressional staff to work on these issues in problem areas, assess the implications of different proposed policies, and otherwise address the different needs.

There's also the Congressional Budget Office, or CBO, which began in 1975 and provides non-partisan fiscal and policy analysis to both houses of Congress. Their major work includes the annual Economic and Budget Outlook that includes spending and revenue estimates for the next decade. The CBO does an analysis of the President's budget proposals and, of course, looks at different spending and revenue estimates for specific legislative proposals being undertaken and considered by the Congress.

There's also the General Accounting Office, or GAO, which also supports Congress. It does various analyses and evaluations, and even investigative functions. Generally, the Congress asked the GAO to study the programs and expenditures of different parts of the federal government. It often engages in these investigations, is sometimes referred to as the watchdog for Congress. It's deemed to be independent and non-partisan, and again, looks at how the federal government's executive branch usually is spending taxpayer dollars.

It also gathers specific information to lend to Congress in doing investigations whether executive branch agencies are properly and efficiently doing their jobs. They routinely ask questions about government programs and evaluate whether or not the objectives of those programs in good public service is being provided to taxpayers.

There's also the Office of Legislative Counsel that serves both the House and the Senate while there's a single agency in the California Legislative Counsel Office. Each house of Congress has its own counsel and, of course, just like California's Legislative Counsel, the Senate council and the House council provide legislative bill drafting services to the members of the Senate and the House and their respective committees. They're non-partisan and they don't work on policy. Instead, they draft

bills and review and analyze proposed legislation to ensure that they meet all the rules for properly drafted bills.

Then, of course, the Congress is staffed by in excess of 30,000 staff members, whether they're official officers, they work on the personal staff of members of Congress at the Capitol or in their district offices, they work for the respective caucuses in the House and Senate, Democrat and Republican, or they work in the committees and the subcommittees. They analyze the policy and fiscal implications of federal legislation, and they have a very significant role providing research and policy analysis and other work. Generally more in a partisan approach than, say, the legislatures around the states.

This gives you an overview of the federal branch of government and the support agencies that work with the US House and the US Senate. Thanks for joining this podcast. Hope you enjoyed it.