

THE U.S. SENATE
FOREIGN RELATIONS
COMMITTEE SUITE



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The Senate Committee on Foreign Relations was established in 1816 as one of the original eleven permanent standing committees of the Senate. Throughout its history, the Foreign Relations Committee has been instrumental in developing



The Senate Foreign Relations Committee Room (S-116)

and influencing U.S. foreign policy. The committee considers, debates, and negotiates important treaties and legislation that support the national interest. It also holds jurisdiction over all diplomatic nominations. Through these powers, the committee has helped shape foreign policy of broad significance, in matters of war and peace and international relations.

The committee receives honored guests and conducts official business in its historic, two-room suite, located in the northeast corner of the Senate extension, built between 1851 and 1868.



History

Like many Senate spaces in the Capitol, S-116 and S-117 have served many different committees and offices. The first known use of S-116 was as the Senate folding room. It was here that publications were stored and where clerks prepared documents, bills, and speeches for distribution. Eventually this service was transferred to the Government Printing Office. The Senate Committee on Patents, which held jurisdiction over patents and patent law, moved into S-116 in the 1870s. It was during the Patent Committee's nearly two-decade occupancy of the room that artist Constantino Brumidi executed the fresco of American innovator Robert Fulton above the entrance to the committee room.



Robert Fulton depicted in the lunette over S-116, then used by the Committee on Patents from 1872-1895

This follows a precedent applied throughout the Capitol's corridors of relating the figurative murals to the achievements or work of the committee in the nearby room. The fresco above the door to S-116 depicts Fulton with his left hand resting on mechanical diagrams and his right hand gesturing towards a steamboat traveling the Hudson River—references to Fulton's success at harnessing steam engine technology to create the first viable commercial steamboat service in the early 19th century. Brumidi incorporated emblems representing science, agriculture, navigation, and the arts on the ceiling in the spacious lobby outside S-116, known as the Patent Corridor.

The original occupant of S-117 was the Senate Committee on Post-Offices and Post-Roads. To recognize this committee, Brumidi painted a fresco above the room's entrance depicting Benjamin Franklin, the first postmaster general, surrounded by his inventions.



The Retrenchment Committee using S-116

The two rooms, S-116 and S-117, continued to serve separate purposes until 1931. Occupants of the rooms reflected the concerns of a growing nation, including the committees on Retrenchment, Patents, Agriculture, Immigration, Territories, Female Suffrage, and Naval Affairs. In 1931, S-116 and S-117 became associated as a suite to accommodate the needs of the Naval Affairs Committee. Shortly after, in 1933, the Committee on Foreign Relations moved into the two-room suite, an assignment it retains to this day. While the Foreign Relations Committee maintains several offices throughout the Capitol complex, the two rooms in the Capitol have become symbolic of the committee and its notable diplomatic work.

Occupancy

The following occupancy lists are compiled from a variety of resources, including architectural plans, guidebooks, contemporary records, and the annual directory of the United States Congress—first published in 1869.

S-116

1869	Senate Folding Room
1870-1871	Committee on Retrenchment
1872-1881	Committee on Patents
1882-1884	Committee on Patents and Committee on Female Suffrage
1885-1895	Committee on Patents
1896-1914	Senate Post-Office
1915	Committee on Agriculture and Forestry
1916	Committee on Contingent Expenses
1917	Committee on Industrial Expositions
1918-1924	Committee on Immigration
1925	Committee on Territories
1926-1928	Committee on Territories and Insular Possessions
1929-1930	Committee on Printing
1931-1932	Committee on Naval Affairs
1933-present	Committee on Foreign Relations

S-117

1869-1895	Committee on Post-Offices and Post-Roads
1896-1901	Committee on Foreign Relations
1902-1909	Committee on Printing
1910-1914	Committee on Agriculture and Forestry
1915	Committee on the Library
1915-1917	Committee on Agriculture and Forestry
1918-1920	Committee on Census
1921-1923	Committee on Enrolled Bills
1924-1932	Committee on Naval Affairs
1933-present	Committee on Foreign Relations

Decorative Highlights

The Senate extension and its companion House extension, designed by Thomas U. Walter and built by Montgomery C. Meigs, were meant to inspire visitors to reflect upon the Capitol as a symbol of American democracy and to showcase the nation's accomplishments, resources, and wealth. To this end, the extensions featured elaborate wall and ceiling murals, as well as the finest workmanship, the most exquisite building materials, and the latest technologies. Offices boasted high vaulted ceilings, ornamental cast-iron door and window frames, interior wood shutters, carved marble mantels, and marble baseboards, in addition to unique decorative details. Colorful floor tiles from Minton, Hollins & Company of England were used throughout to enliven spaces and add pattern. Accompanying this architectural grandeur, ventilation, heating, water closets, and gas lighting provided valuable comfort to the occupants.



The central floor medallion in S-116

Natural light floods S-117 through the four generously proportioned windows. Today, the corner room's windows offer views north to Union Station and east to the Supreme Court building. Ornamental bands of stylized leaves decorate the arched cast-iron window and door frames. The room retains its original marble mantel, crowned by a gilded Neoclassical Revival mirror whose



The mantel and mirror in S-117

frame features a prominent cornice with bead-and-reel and egg-and-dart ornaments, fluted pilasters, and acanthus leaves that delicately wrap around the corners of the frame.

Aside from the windows, the room is lit by a central crystal chandelier, four inverted crystal cone pendant lights, and eight

sconces installed on the window frames. The pendant lights were added in the 1960s and were designed to integrate with the committee room's existing 19th-century chandelier and sconces. While not the original light fixtures, the chandelier and sconces are early 20th-century pieces reminiscent of new, vibrant chandeliers that were appearing in Senate spaces at the time. The newly constructed 1909 Senate Russell Office Building's committee rooms sparkled with silver and crystal fixtures, and in 1910 seven striking crystal chandeliers acquired from the White House were installed in the Capitol. These bright, vivid lights offered a welcome contrast to the darker, dull metal ones that hung in most extension spaces, so silver and crystal chandeliers were purchased for many Capitol offices.

The painted decoration on the ceiling in S-117 emphasizes the architectural vault lines and dates from the turn of the 20th century, when a comprehensive decorative campaign for the Capitol was implemented. While some of the colors have

changed with repainting over the years, the style of ornamentation holds true to the original design.

Room S-116, which was first used as the folding room, was probably very plainly decorated. Initially there were not even fireplaces. The two existing marble mantels were presumably installed in 1872 when the prominent Committee on Patents was assigned the room. The Rococo Revival mirrors that rest on the mantels feature a central cartouche, scrolls, stylized leaves, and flowers. The decorative painted banding on the ceiling in S-116 probably dates to sometime after 1900 and is documented in images as early as 1946. The impressive, obround-shaped committee table fills the room and accommodates every current member of the committee. Each senator has an assigned seat, marked by an engraved brass nameplate. A bronze bust of Cordell Hull by George Conlon oversees the activities of the Foreign Relations Committee from the central window well. Hull's commemoration in the Foreign Relations Committee Room is fitting given his work as secretary of state, promoting peace and international alliances and establishing the United Nations.



Cordell Hull
by George Conlon, 1944/1945

S-116 Committee Room, Fulton lunette, S-116 medallion, and
S-117 mantel images courtesy Architect of the Capitol

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