

## Legislative Party Caucuses

Party caucuses are the principal partisan vehicles in most state legislatures; in fact, 84 chambers indicated that they have active political caucuses. The Nebraska Legislature is a nonpartisan body and, therefore, has no political party organization. The following 12 chambers have political party caucuses, but they do not play an active role.

Alabama Senate	Mississippi Senate and House
Arkansas Senate and House	South Carolina Senate
Colorado House	Texas Senate and House
Louisiana Senate and House	District of Columbia Council

**Role of party caucuses.** The role and power of political party caucuses vary from state to state and even from chamber to chamber. Generally, they operate in three primary areas—legislative organization, information gathering and dissemination and policy formulation. In 44 states, American Samoa and Puerto Rico, party caucuses play a major role in legislative organization by nominating or electing key leaders. In 74 chambers, members receive briefings on major policy issues during caucus meetings. Caucus meetings also are used to establish policy; this is true in over four-fifths of the legislatures. Tables 99-2.9 and 99-2.10 indicate the major functions of legislative party caucuses.

**Caucus rules.** Most legislative party caucuses have not developed formal rules for their proceedings. More often, caucus business is governed by informal rules loosely based on senate or house parliamentary procedure, by unwritten caucus traditions or simply by the style of the caucus leader who presides over the meeting. In 19 legislative bodies, however, one or both caucuses have written rules, and they are:

Arizona Senate (majority)	Oregon House (majority)
Florida Senate (majority) and House	Pennsylvania House (minority)
Georgia Senate and House	Rhode Island Senate
Kansas House	Tennessee Senate
Massachusetts House	Virginia Senate and House
Michigan House	Washington Senate
Missouri House	West Virginia Senate
Oklahoma House	American Samoa Senate (majority)

**Open and closed caucus meetings.** The question of whether caucus meetings should be open to the public and press or restricted only to members has resulted in some controversy around the country.

Legislators may prefer to keep all party discussions and "haggling" private. Closed meetings offer legislative caucuses the ability to plan coherent strategy, allow brainstorming among veteran and freshman legislators, and provide caucus members a time when they can give candid, personal opinions "without others in the room." According to some, it is the only time that party members can freely vent and share ideas. Caucuses also may choose to close their meetings when discussing sensitive matters, such as personnel issues.

However, there are other viewpoints. Some feel that open caucuses are in the best interest of the public. Legislators gather at caucuses to discuss the public's business. The public has a right to observe these discussions and to be informed about what happens at such meetings. Open legislative caucuses are another way to encourage open government; they allow some much-needed sunshine into an area of public policymaking that should not be kept dark.

Tables 99-2.11 and 99-2.12 show the extent to which majority and minority caucus meetings are open or closed.

**Table 99-2.9 Main Functions of the Majority Caucus**

State (1)	To nominate chamber officer candidates	To elect caucus leaders	To review the daily calendar	To get briefings on major issues	To get direction or feedback from members	To form caucus policy	To develop party positions	To plan floor strategy	To recruit candidates
Alabama									
Alaska	B	B	B	B	B	B	B	B	
Arizona	B	B	S	B	B	B	B	B	
Arkansas									
California	H	B		H	B	B	B	B	B
Colorado	B	B		S	S				
Connecticut	B	B	B	B	B	B	B	B	H
Delaware	H	H	H	H	H	H	H	H	H
Florida	B	B	B	B	B	B	B	B	B
Georgia	B	B	H	B	S	B	B	B	S
Hawaii		H		H	H	H	H	H	
Idaho	S	S		B	B	S	S	B	
Illinois	S			B	B	B	B	B	
Indiana	S	B		B	B	H	H	H	
Iowa	H	B	B	B	S	B	B	B	B
Kansas	B	B	B	B	B	B	B	B	B
Kentucky	H	B	B	S	B	B	B	B	H
Louisiana									
Maine	B	B	B	B	B	B	B	B	H
Maryland	S	S		S	S	S	S	S	
Massachusetts	B	B	S	B	B	B	B	B	
Michigan	S	B	B	B	S	B	B	B	S
Minnesota	B	B	H	B	B	B	B	B	B
Mississippi									
Missouri	B	B	H	B	H	H	B	B	H
Montana	B	B		B	B	B	B		

**Table 99-2.9 Main Functions of the Majority Caucus, cont'd.**

State (1)	To nominate chamber officer candidates	To elect caucus leaders	To review the daily calendar	To get briefings on major issues	To get direction or feedback from members	To form caucus policy	To develop party positions	To plan floor strategy	To recruit candidates
Nebraska									
Nevada	S	B	S	B	B	B	B	B	S
New Hampshire	H		H	H	H	H		H	H
New Jersey	S	B	B	B	B	B	B	B	
New Mexico	B	B		S	B	B	B	B	H
New York	H	H	H	H	H	H	H	H	H
North Carolina	B	B		B	B	B	B	B	H
North Dakota	B	B			B	B	B		
Ohio		B	H	B	B	B	B	B	B
Oklahoma	B	B		B	B	B	B	B	H
Oregon	B	B	S	B	B	B	B	B	S
Pennsylvania	B	B	B	B	B	B	B	B	S
Rhode Island	S	S		B	B	S			
South Carolina		H	H	H	H	H	H	H	H
South Dakota	B	B	B	B	B	B	B	B	B
Tennessee		B		B	S	B	B	H	
Texas									
Utah	B	B	B	B	B	B	B	B	B
Vermont	B	B	H	H	H	H	B	B	
Virginia	B	B	H	B	B	B	B	B	B
Washington	B	B	S	B	B	B	B	B	
West Virginia	B			B	B	B	B	S	
Wisconsin	B	B	S	B	S	B	B	B	B
Wyoming	S	B		S	S	B	S	H	
American Samoa		S			S	S	S	S	S
District of Columbia									
Puerto Rico	S	S				S	S	S	

**Table 99-2.9 Main Functions of the Majority Caucus, cont'd.**

## Key:

S=Senate

H=House or Assembly

B=Both chambers

## Note:

1. The following chambers did not return a survey: Delaware Senate, Hawaii Senate, Maryland House, New Hampshire Senate, New York Senate, American Samoa House, Guam Senate, Northern Mariana Islands Senate and House, Puerto Rico House and Virgin Islands Senate.

**Table 99-2.10 Main Functions of the Minority Caucus**

State (1)	To nominate chamber officer candidates	To elect caucus leaders	To review the daily calendar	To get briefings on major issues	To get direction or feedback from members	To form caucus policy	To develop party positions	To plan floor strategy	To recruit candidates
Alabama									
Alaska	B	B	B	B	B	B	B	B	
Arizona	H	B		B	B	B	B	B	
Arkansas									
California		B		H	B	B	B	B	B
Colorado	S	B		S	S				
Connecticut	B	B	B	B	B	B	B	B	H
Delaware		H		H	H	H	H		
Florida	B	B	B	B	B	B	B	B	B
Georgia	B	B	H	B	S	B	B	B	S
Hawaii		H		H	H	H	H	H	H
Idaho		S		B	B	S	S	B	
Illinois	S			B	B	B	B	B	
Indiana	S	B		B	B	H	H	H	
Iowa	H	B		B	S	B	B		B
Kansas	S	B	B	B	B	B	B	B	B
Kentucky		B	S	S	S	S	S	S	H
Louisiana						H		H	
Maine	B	B	B	B	B	B	B	B	H
Maryland		S		S	S	S	S	S	
Massachusetts	B	B	S	B	B	B	B	B	
Michigan	S	B	S	B	S	B	B	B	S
Minnesota	H	B	H	B	B	B	B	B	B
Mississippi									
Missouri	H	B		B	H	H	B	B	H
Montana	B	B		B	B	B	B		

**Table 99-2.10 Main Functions of the Minority Caucus, cont'd.**

State (1)	To nominate chamber officer candidates	To elect caucus leaders	To review the daily calendar	To get briefings on major issues	To get direction or feedback from members	To form caucus policy	To develop party positions	To plan floor strategy	To recruit candidates
Nebraska									
Nevada	S	B		B	B	B	B	B	S
New Hampshire	H		H	H	H	H		H	H
New Jersey	S	B	B	B	B	B	B	B	
New Mexico	B	B		S	B	B	B	B	H
New York	H	H	H	H	H	H	H	H	H
North Carolina	H	B		B	B	B	B	B	H
North Dakota		B			B	B	B		
Ohio		B	H	B	B	B	B	B	B
Oklahoma	B	B		B	B	B	B	B	H
Oregon	B	B	S	B	B	B	B	B	S
Pennsylvania	S	B	B	B	B	B	B	B	S
Rhode Island	S	S		S	S	S			
South Carolina		H	H	H	H	H	H	H	H
South Dakota		B	B	B	B	B	B	B	B
Tennessee		B		B	S	B	B	H	
Texas									
Utah	B	B	S	B	B	B	B	B	B
Vermont	B	B	H	H	H	H	B	B	
Virginia	H	B	H	B	B	B	B	B	B
Washington		B	S	B	B	B	B	S	
West Virginia	B			B	B	B	B	S	
Wisconsin	B	B	S	B	S	B	B	B	B
Wyoming	S	B		S	S	B	S	H	
American Samoa									
District of Columbia									
Puerto Rico									

**Table 99-2.10 Main Functions of the Minority Caucus, cont'd.**

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## Note:

1. The following chambers did not return a survey: Delaware Senate, Hawaii Senate, Maryland House, New Hampshire Senate, New York Senate, American Samoa House, Guam Senate, Northern Mariana Islands Senate and House, Puerto Rico House and Virgin Islands Senate.



**Table 99-2.11 Openness of the Majority Caucus Meetings**

State (1)	Always open to caucus staff	Always open to the public	Always open to the press	Usually open to caucus staff	Usually open to the public	Usually open to the press	Usually closed to caucus staff	Usually closed to the public	Usually closed to the press	Always closed to caucus staff	Always closed to the public	Always closed to the press
Alabama												
Alaska							B	B	B			
Arizona	B	B	B									
Arkansas								S	S			
California							B				B	B
Colorado	B	B	B									
Connecticut				S		S	H				H	H
Delaware				H				H				H
Florida	B	S	S		H	H						
Georgia	S				S	S						
Hawaii	H										H	H
Idaho										B	B	B
Illinois				H			S				B	B
Indiana							S			H	B	B
Iowa	B							H			S	B
Kansas	B	H	H		S	S						
Kentucky	B	B	B									
Louisiana												
Maine	B				B	B						
Maryland												
Massachusetts								H	H			
Michigan				B	S	S		H	H			
Minnesota	H	H	H	S					S		S	
Mississippi												
Missouri							S				B	B
Montana	B	B	B									

Table 99-2.11 Openness of the Majority Caucus Meetings, cont'd.

State (1)	Always open to caucus staff	Always open to the public	Always open to the press	Usually open to caucus staff	Usually open to the public	Usually open to the press	Usually closed to caucus staff	Usually closed to the public	Usually closed to the press	Always closed to caucus staff	Always closed to the public	Always closed to the press
Nebraska												
Nevada	B							H	H		S	S
New Hampshire	H										H	H
New Jersey				B				S	S		H	H
New Mexico				B							B	B
New York				H								
North Carolina				B				H	H			S
North Dakota	B	B	B									
Ohio				S			H				B	B
Oklahoma				B				H	H		S	S
Oregon				B							B	B
Pennsylvania				H			S				B	B
Rhode Island	S	S	S	H	H	H						
South Carolina	H	H	H									
South Dakota	B										B	B
Tennessee	S	S	S	H	H	H						
Texas				H							H	H
Utah				S	B	B						
Vermont	S	S	S		H	H						
Virginia	H			S				H	H			
Washington				B				B	S			
West Virginia							S	S	S		H	H
Wisconsin				B	B	B						
Wyoming								S	S		H	
American Samoa	S	S	S									
District of Columbia												
Puerto Rico										S	S	S

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1. The following chambers did not return a survey: Delaware Senate, Hawaii Senate, Maryland House, New Hampshire Senate, New York Senate, American Samoa House, Guam Senate, Northern Mariana Islands Senate and House, Puerto Rico House and Virgin Islands Senate.

Table 99-2.12 Openness of the Minority Caucus Meetings

State (1)	Always open to caucus staff	Always open to the public	Always open to the press	Usually open to caucus staff	Usually open to the public	Usually open to the press	Usually closed to caucus staff	Usually closed to the public	Usually closed to the press	Always closed to caucus staff	Always closed to the public	Always closed to the press
Alabama												
Alaska				B	B	B						
Arizona	B	B	B									
Arkansas								S	S			
California							B				B	B
Colorado	B	B	B									
Connecticut	S						H				H	H
Delaware							H	H				H
Florida	B	S	S		H	H						
Georgia	S				S	S						
Hawaii	H										H	H
Idaho							S	S	S	H	H	H
Illinois				H			S				B	B
Indiana							S			H	B	B
Iowa	B							H			S	B
Kansas	B	H	H		S	S						
Kentucky	B	B	B									
Louisiana	H										H	H
Maine	H			S	H	H		S	S			
Maryland												
Massachusetts								H	H			
Michigan				B				B	B			
Minnesota				B				H	H			
Mississippi												
Missouri							S				B	B
Montana	B	B	B									

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State (1)	Always open to caucus staff	Always open to the public	Always open to the press	Usually open to caucus staff	Usually open to the public	Usually open to the press	Usually closed to caucus staff	Usually closed to the public	Usually closed to the press	Always closed to caucus staff	Always closed to the public	Always closed to the press
Nebraska												
Nevada	B										B	B
New Hampshire	H							H	H			
New Jersey				B				S	S		H	H
New Mexico				B							B	B
New York				H								
North Carolina				B				H	H			S
North Dakota	B	B	B									
Ohio				S			H				B	B
Oklahoma				B				H	H		S	S
Oregon	S			H		S					H	H
Pennsylvania				H			S				B	B
Rhode Island	S	S	S									
South Carolina												
South Dakota	B	B	B									
Tennessee	S	S	S	H								
Texas				H							H	H
Utah	S	B	B									
Vermont	S	S	S		H	H						
Virginia	H			S				H	H			
Washington				B				B	S			
West Virginia							S	S	S		H	H
Wisconsin				B	B	B						
Wyoming		H	H	S	S							
American Samoa												
District of Columbia												
Puerto Rico										S	S	S

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