

**THE UNITED
STATES CAPITOL
ROOM S-219**



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Historical Highlights

Located in the Senate wing of the U.S. Capitol, room S-219 was constructed as part of the 1850s expansion of the building. Responding to overcrowded conditions due to the rapid growth of the nation, noted Philadelphia architect Thomas U. Walter developed an ambitious plan that added north and south extensions and a massive cast-iron dome to the original building. Walter's plan included enlarged legislative chambers and allowed for reception areas, ceremonial offices, and spacious committee accommodations.



View of the north wing of the Capitol under construction, ca. 1856



"The Senate Four" (left to right) Senators Orville Platt, John Spooner, William Allison, and Nelson Aldrich, 1903

Room assignments in the new Senate extension were made on the basis of committee importance, with space near the chamber particularly desirable. Between 1867 and 1910, the influential Senate Appropriations Committee occupied room S-219, and thus it is associated with one of the Senate's longest-serving chairmen. William Allison of Iowa chaired the Appropriations Committee for 25 years, from 1881 to 1893 and from 1895 to 1908. Senator Allison also was a member of the powerful Republican group known as "The Senate Four"—Nelson Aldrich of Rhode Island, John Spooner of Wisconsin, Orville Platt of Connecticut, and Allison—who collectively controlled much of the Senate's agenda at the turn of the 20th century. Allison's portrait, painted by Wilbur Reaser, hangs outside the south entrance to the Senate Chamber on the second floor.

In 1911, Senator Frances Warren of Wyoming moved from the chairmanship of the Military Affairs Committee to the even more influential chairmanship of the Committee on Appropria-

tions. Although he changed committees, he did not wish to change Capitol offices. Consequently, he moved his new Committee on Appropriations from S-219 to the former Military Affairs quarters on the floor below. As part of Warren's office-swapping deal, Military Affairs then occupied the old Appropriations room.

The Military Affairs committee remained in S-219 from 1911 to 1947. From this location, its members played a major role in overseeing U.S. Army operations in World War I and again in World War II. The committee was abolished when the Legislative Reorganization Act of 1946 consolidated it with the Naval Affairs Committee to form the Senate Armed Services Committee.

The Committee on Labor and Public Welfare, another committee formed under the Legislative Reorganization Act of 1946, moved into the room in 1947. Senator Robert Alphonso Taft, known as "Mr. Republican," chaired the committee at that time. His most enduring legislative accomplishment was the Labor-Management Relations Act, more widely known as the Taft-Hartley Act, which established a "cooling off" period for threatened strikes and outlawed certain



Portrait of Senator Robert Taft by Dean Keller in the Senate Reception Room, 1958

"unfair labor practices." Taft later served as Senate majority leader. In honor of his outstanding service, he was named as one of the "Famous Five," and his portrait added to the decorative wall murals in the Senate Reception Room.

The Official Reporters of Debates occupied room S-219 between 1951 and 1997. While the debates of Congress were originally recorded by a private company, in 1848 the Senate hired its first stenographers to record all proceedings and sessions of the Senate and House for the daily volumes of the *Congressional Globe* (now the *Congressional Record*). Today, Senate reporters record the debates in ten-minute shifts, using stenography machines on the Senate floor, and then return to their office to transcribe the notes. Until 1974, the Official Reporters who occupied S-219 recorded all session notes using handwritten shorthand.



Senate reporters of debates in their office,
Washington Post, June 5, 1980

From 1997 to 2001 Secretary of the Senate Gary Sisco used room S-219 as his executive office. Members of the House Judiciary Committee, led by Chairman Henry Hyde, delivered the Articles of Impeachment against President William Jefferson Clinton to the Secretary in this room on December 19, 1998.

Room S-219 is currently assigned to the Senate Committee on Rules and Administration and is used by members for meetings, policy briefings, and other events.

Art Highlights

Many of the original mid-19th century architectural and decorative elements are still in the room. Examples include the vaulted ceiling, which consists of two different types: a barrel vault along the west wall and a groin vault over the major portion of the ceiling. The room also includes elaborate cast-iron enframements around the doors and windows, and the original window shutters. Walter designed the marble fireplace as part of the 1850s extension.

A gilded Rococo Revival mirror, ornamented with scrolls, acanthus leaves, flowers, and a shell motif at its crest and base, hangs above the mantel. The elaborate floor tiles were manufactured by Minton, Hollins and Company of Stoke-Upon-Trent, England. Despite nearly 150 years of service, the tiles remain in excellent condition due to a unique “encaustic” tile-making process that used layers of colored clay imbedded in a neutral clay base to enhance color and durability.

Several pieces of furniture in S-219 are associated with the Russell Senate Office Building, the oldest of the three Senate office buildings. This historic furniture was designed and ordered in 1908 specifically for use in a senator’s office.



Gilded mirror and mid-19th century mantel in room S-219

S-219 Room History

1869 to Present

Congress	Date	Occupant
40th-61st*	1869-1911	Committee on Appropriations
62nd-79th	1911-1946	Committee on Military Affairs
80th-81st	1946-1951	Committee on Labor and Public Welfare
82nd-104th	1951-1997	Official Reporters of Debates
105th-107th	1997-2001	Secretary of the Senate
107th-	2001-present	Committee on Rules and Administration

*Floor plans showing the occupants of the Senate wing are not listed in the *Congressional Directory* until 1869.

Capitol construction photograph courtesy Architect of the Capitol

"Senate Four" image courtesy Senate Historical Office

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