

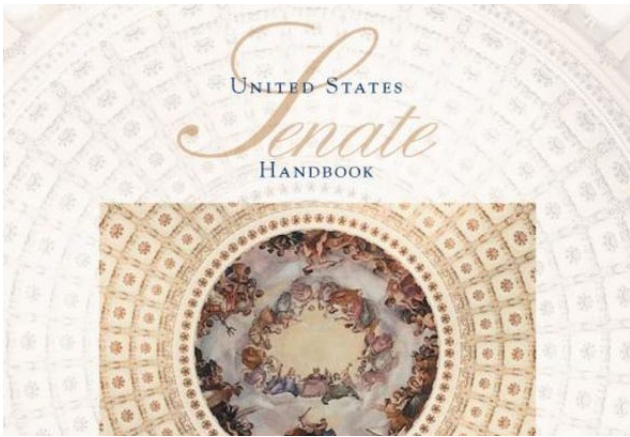
How Senators Fudge Expenses, Part 1

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The first part of catching a corrupt Senator is knowing when they are breaking the Rules, Thanks to USA TODAY, you will now have a much easier time figuring that out:

Senate has a secret book of rules

Donovan Slack and Paul Singer, USA TODAY



The U.S. Senate Handbook(Photo: None)

WASHINGTON — The U.S. Senate has for years lived by a secret book of rules that governs everything from how many sheets of paper and potted plants each Senate office is allotted to when Senators can use taxpayer money to charter planes or boats.

The document has never been available to the public — until now.

USA TODAY has obtained and is making available on our website a copy of the 380-page U.S. Senate Handbook, which describes itself as "a compilation of the policies and regulations governing office administration, equipment and services, security and financial management."

U.S. Senate Handbook:

[Table of Contents \(PDF\)](#)

[Part I: Administration \(PDF\)](#)

[Part I: Appendices \(PDF\)](#)

[Part II: Equipment and Services \(PDF\)](#)

[Part IV: Financial Management \(PDF\)](#)

[Part IV: Appendices \(PDF\)](#)

The handbook reads something like an employee manual, explaining how new senators and staff members can get ID cards and how many parking passes each senator will be issued. But it also contains detailed rules on how each senator can spend their official, multi-million-dollar, taxpayer-funded budget on things like meals and travel.

Yet, because it has not been released, it's been impossible for the public to know whether a senator has violated the rules — for example by charging taxpayers for an improper charter flight.

The handbook is referenced in rules published by the Senate Ethics Committee, Congressional Research Service reports and history books. But the Rules Committee, which produces the handbook, does not release it. The Library of Congress does not even have a copy.

Asked for a copy by USA TODAY, the committee provided a book called the "Senate Manual," which includes rules for legislating, a few historical documents and some Senate trivia like "Electoral Votes, President and Vice President, 1789-2013." When pressed, Rules Committee spokesman Phillip Rumsey said the handbook is not public.

"In the past, the Senate handbook has not been made publicly available because it contains sensitive security information regarding Senate operations," he said. "The handbook is currently undergoing significant revisions and updates, and when the new version is completed, the Senate Rules committee will consider making the handbook available to the public."

The U.S. House of Representatives, on the other hand, has published its handbook online for years.

In light of the Senate's security concerns, USA TODAY is not publishing the 10-page section of the handbook governing Senate security, which includes information about law enforcement operations and explains how to respond to a bomb threat.

The handbook lays out detailed rules for spending the approximately \$3 million-\$4 million each senator is allocated annually in taxpayer funds to operate their offices. The total for each senator is based on population of his or her state and the distance from Washington.

The Senate pays the actual bills from those accounts when senators submit expense reports, accompanied by receipts or other supporting documentation. Travel expenses are generally limited to those "essential to the transaction of official business."

Senators are allowed to charter planes or boats if it would be "advantageous to the Senate." USA TODAY has [reported](#) that senators took nearly \$1 million worth of charter flights last year at taxpayer expense.

B. Special

1. General:

- a) The hire of boat, automobile, aircraft, or other conveyance will be allowed if authorized or approved as advantageous to the Senate whenever the Member or employee is engaged on official business outside his/her designated duty station.
- b) Where two or more persons travel together by means of such special conveyance, that fact, together with the names of those accompanying him/her, must be stated by each traveler on his/her travel voucher and the aggregate cost reimbursable will be subject to the limitation stated above.
- c) If the hire of a special conveyance includes payment by the traveler of the incidental expenses of gasoline or oil, rent of garage, hangar, or boathouse, subsistence of operator, ferrage, tolls, operator waiting time, charges for returning conveyances to the original point of hire, etc., the same should be first paid, if practicable, by the person furnishing the accommodation, or his/her operator, and itemized in the bill.

2. Rental Cars:

Prohibited expenses include "personal services," gifts, flowers and awards or certificates and entertainment, "such as alcohol or movies." And senators cannot hire family members with official funds.

The handbook also offers some remarkable insights into the byzantine customs of the Senate. For example, office space is assigned by seniority, and if two senators took office on the same day, the one who is a former member of House will get preference over the one who is a former governor.

The architect of the Capitol can provide a compact refrigerator for a senator's office and a piano for events. And "each Senator receives annual paper allowances for blank paper, letterhead paper and envelopes" based on population with a formula of "one and one-third sheets of blank paper per adult constituent." Thus the Illinois senators each receive 11,605,333 sheets of blank paper; the West Virginia senators receive only 1,874,667.

Congressional watchdogs say it's imperative that the Senate handbook be made public.

"If it's describing Senate rules of procedure, and it's not public information and even describes and offers guidance to senators as to how they're supposed to use official resources and it's not public, that is outrageous," said Craig Holman, chief legislative affairs representative for nonpartisan watchdog Public Citizen.

"I mean that's the type of guidance that the public should be able to see as well as senators and Senate staff so we can all monitor compliance with the rules."

Two years ago, the ethics watchdog group Citizens for Responsibility and Ethics in Washington asked the Senate Rules Committee to release the handbook.

"Good government groups, journalists and the public-at-large should have access to the Handbook so they can evaluate senators' conduct in light of its guidance," CREW argued in a March 2012 [letter](#) to the committee. "Without access to the Handbook, no one even knows the standards to which senators and Senate employees and officers are held."

The Rules Committee never responded to CREW's request.