

Senate Democrats' Election Observer Program

*Senator Alex Padilla (D-Calif.), Ranking Member
Senate Committee on Rules and Administration*

The Senate Democrats' Election Observer Program will:

- Train and designate Democratic Senators' official staff to observe polling locations and sites where ballots are counted and elections are canvassed and certified
- Deter election interference, promote confidence in American elections, and help ensure free and fair elections in 2026
- Observe and record any election issues, including potential instances of voter interference, threats targeting election workers, impacts of election misinformation or disinformation, and any issues regarding the canvass or certification of elections
- Gather on-the-ground information about U.S. Senate elections to assist the Senate Rules Committee in addressing any potentially contested Senate elections
- Inform the Committee's legislative and oversight work related to election administration
- Operate under the same authority as the long-running House of Representatives' Election Observer program
- Be nonpartisan and not interfere with election officials in the performance of their duties or seek to influence election results in any way

Background: Since the 1980s, the Committee on House Administration has operated a congressional election observer program, based on authorities under Article I, Sections 4 and 5 of the U.S. Constitution. In October 2024, Congress passed the *Confirmation of Congressional Observer Access (COCOA) Act* (52 U.S. Code § 21083a), confirming the constitutional authority of Congress, specifically the Chair and Ranking Members of the Committee on House Administration and Senate Committee on Rules and Administration, to designate congressional election observers.

Program Specifics:

- **Role of Designated Congressional Elections Observers:** Under the direction and coordination of the Senate Rules Committee Democratic staff, official Senate staff designated as observers will observe and gather information about U.S. Senate elections and report back regarding any election issues. Designated observers will not serve as advocates or directly participate in the election process. Serving as an observer is an official, non-partisan Senate activity.
- **Process for Designating Observers:** Under the *COCOA Act*, the Rules Chair or Ranking Member can designate any Senate employees as election observers in writing. Ranking Member Padilla will, with the approval of the staff's employing Senator, designate observers in a letter to that Member.
- **Training and Oversight:** The Rules Committee Democratic staff will provide mandatory training for designated observers to ensure that all observers understand their role, the purposes of the program, and appropriate conduct at election sites.
- **Communication With Election Officials:** The Rules Committee Democratic staff will communicate closely with state election administrator associations to build awareness of the program. Election officials will also be directly notified in advance of assigning observers to specific election sites.