



Congress of the United States
House of Representatives

OFFICE OF THE SPEAKER

Dear Representative Elect,

Congratulations on your election to the United States House of Representatives. You are now a part of the people's House; the most directly representative body of Congress. Because of our close relation to the American people, the Founders required that any bills regarding the raising of revenue – i.e. taxes – must start in the House. As the federal representatives closest to the people, the House has a unique ability to voice the interests and concerns of the people.

The House of Representatives is the body that gets the job done in the fastest way possible. Being the larger of the two bodies in Congress, this efficiency does not always come easily. By following the principle of majority rule, however, the House allows a simple majority of the people's representatives to accomplish the important tasks set before it. This stands in contrast to the Senate, which requires an overburdening super majority to accomplish anything, significantly hindering efficiency.

The Founders established the House to be a check on the Senate and the Executive Branch. With this responsibility comes the powers of impeachment, oversight, and the requirement that all bills go through the House before becoming a law. Because of its unique ability to express the interests and concerns of the people, the House's role as a check against the other branches is crucial to ensure that we have, in the words of Lincoln, "a government of the people, by the people, for the people."

To help prepare you for the important role you are about to undertake as a United States Representative, I have directed the Parliamentarian of the House to compile an informational packet on the House. This packet has important information on how the House operates, and it will help guide you as you represent your constituents.

I am sincerely looking forward to working with you and the rest of the Members this session as we work together to govern this great nation.

Sincerely,

HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

ONE HUNDRED SEVENTEENTH CONGRESS

FIRST SESSION { CONVENED JUNE 28, 2021 }

SECOND SESSION { CONVENED JULY 25, 2022 }

MANUAL OF THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES



SEEKING RECOGNITION

When you wish to speak or make a motion, you must wait until no other Member holds the floor. When the floor is open, stand and address the Speaker (i.e. say “Madam Speaker” or “Mr. Speaker”). Do not proceed until the Speaker has recognized you. The Speaker will normally recognize the Member who first seeks recognition. However, when more than one Member seeks recognition at the same time, priority is given first to the Majority Leader and then to the Minority Leader. If neither Leader seeks recognition, the Speaker will recognize the Member who first sought recognition, in the opinion of the Chair.

The House often operates under “managed debate” where one person from each party “manages” the time for debate. That person will then yield a certain amount of time to a different person to speak, and the Speaker will alternate between the two “managers” until all time has been used or both managers yield back the time they still had.

Certain motions allow you to interrupt a Member who currently holds the floor. If you are making one of those motions, you will stand and address the Speaker, stating the motion (i.e. “Mr. Speaker, point of order.”). The Speaker will then direct the Member speaking to hold, and the House will dispose of your motion.

If you wish to ask a question of the Member who currently holds the floor, you must stand, address the Speaker, and ask if the Member would yield for a question (i.e. say “Mr. Speaker, would the Member yield for a question.”). If a Member yields for a question, the Member will keep the floor. However, if the Member yields generally, not just for a question, the Member will lose the floor. Therefore, many Members, when asked if they will yield for a question, will clarify “I will yield for a question without yielding the floor.”

DEBATE

In the House of Representatives, all debate must be germane to the question (that means it must be related to the question. So, you can’t debate about going to war when the bill is about education).

Time for debate is normally limited. When it is limited, it can be handled in a few different ways. Sometimes debate is limited in time only, but there is no limit to who can speak or to which party controls the time. Other times the debate is limited and the time is evenly divided between the majority and the minority, and any Member can seek recognition and use the time reserved for his or her party. Finally, debate can be limited with the time evenly divided between the majority and the minority, with one Member from each side controlling the time and yielding time to other Members on his or her side.

In the House, debate can be ended by a vote to “move the previous question.” This motion can be made and seconded (see the next section on motions for more information), but it is also automatically voted on when time for debate has expired. Often when the House is operating under a Special Rule (more on those later) and some other time limit agreements, the previous question is automatically ordered when time has expired, and there will not be a separate vote on that motion.

MOTIONS

In General:

In order to make a motion, you must have the floor. Once that you have the floor, you can make your motion. Many motions require a second. If your motion requires a second, any other Member can second the motion by simply saying “second” or “I second that motion.” If no Member seconds the motion immediately, the Speaker will ask if there is a second. If there is no second at that time, the motion falls. Many motions are simple motions and can just be stated. However, with more complex motions, the Speaker, or any other Member, can request that the motion be “reduced to writing.” If such a request is made, you will need to write your motion and then give the written motion to the clerk.

Amendments

There are many different types of amendments. I am going to try to simplify the process here, but please realize that the actual amendment process in the House can be much more complex than how it’s explained here.

Bills, Resolutions, and many motions can be amended (changed). There are three forms of amendments, striking out existing text, inserting new text, or striking out existing text and inserting replacement text. For example, a portion of a bill that says “\$5,000,000 will be given to the United States Marine Corps and the United States Air Force,” could be amended by inserting “and the United States Army,” by striking “and the United States Air Force,” or by striking “United States Air Force” and inserting “United States Army.”

In addition to those three forms, there are three different classifications of amendments. The first is a perfecting amendment, which can be either striking out existing text or inserting new text. The second is a substitute amendment which strikes out existing text and inserts replacement text in one specific section (or part of a section) in the legislation. The third classification is an amendment in the nature of a substitute, which also strikes out existing text and inserts replacement text, but it strikes the entire piece of legislation and proposes new text.

In the United States Congress, there are two degrees of amendments, conveniently labeled “first degree” and “second degree” amendments. A first degree amendment modifies the bill, resolution, or motion on the floor. A second degree amendment would modify a first degree amendment. A second degree (or an amendment to an amendment) cannot be amended (that would be a third degree amendment). One note is that an amendment in the nature of a substitute is considered original text for the purposes of amendments, so an amendment to that is a first degree amendment which could be amended by a second degree.

It is important to note that in the House, any amendment to a bill or resolution must be germane.

Previous Question

To bring the current question to a vote, you can move the previous question. To do that, you will obtain the floor and say, “Mr. Speaker, I move the previous question.” This motion is not debatable and requires a majority vote. If the motion passes, the House will immediately vote on the question. If the House is operating under a special rule (more on that later) or unanimous consent request limiting time, you cannot move the previous question. However, you could ask unanimous consent that the previous question be ordered.

Recommit

A motion to recommit is a motion to send the bill back to the committee that referred it. This motion can be made with or without instructions. If it includes instructions, it tells the committee exactly what they need to do. If there are no instructions, the committee can take any action that it wishes (including simply reporting the bill again). In the House, it is customary for members of the minority to make this motion after the time for debate on a bill has finished. Although the motion rarely passes, it gives the minority the ability to display their opposition to a bill, and to propose instructions on how to fix it. The Rules of the House state that minority must always have the ability to make a motion to recommit before a vote on final passage of a bill. However, this motion must be made by the minority leader or the leader’s designee.

Point of Order

If you believe a rule of the House has been violated, you would rise to a point of order. To do this, you would stand and say “Mr. Speaker, point of order.” You can raise a point of order even if another Member has the floor, and it does not require a second. Sometimes the point of order is obvious, and you will not need to say anything else. If the Speaker has any question on the point of order, he will ask for clarification. A point of order is not debatable, but the Speaker may ask questions if he needs additional information to make his decision.

Appeal the decision of the Chair

If you disagree with the decision of the Speaker, you can appeal the decision of the Chair by saying, “Mr. Speaker, I appeal the decision of the Chair.” This motion requires a second and is debatable. Once debate has ended, the Speaker will ask “shall the decision of the Chair stand as the judgment of the Senate.” A “yea” vote would be to uphold the decision of the Chair, a “no” vote would be to overturn the decision of the Chair.

Parliamentary inquiry

At times, the parliamentary procedure in the House can be confusing. If you have a question about the parliamentary procedure and how it is being applied in a certain case, you would rise to a parliamentary inquiry simply by saying, “Mr. Speaker, parliamentary inquiry.” To make a parliamentary inquiry, you can interrupt a Member who has the floor. Once the Speaker has recognized you, you will state your question. The Speaker will then answer the question.

House Manual
Office of the Parliamentarian

VOTING

Unless the House uses unanimous consent, it needs to vote to do anything. Unless required by the Constitution, U.S. law, or the House Rules, the House's default voting mechanism is a voice vote. When a voice vote occurs, the Presiding Office will state "the question occurs on _____ (i.e. the amendment, the adoption of S. 5, the motion to recess, etc.). All in favor say 'aye.'" If you are in favor of the motion, you would say "aye." If you oppose the motion, then wait. After those in favor vote, the Speaker will say "All opposed say 'nay.'" If you are opposed, now you would say "nay." After this, the Presiding Office will announce who he thinks prevailed by saying "The ayes (or nays) appear to have it." At this time, if you disagree with how the Speaker is going to call it, you can ask for a recorded vote by saying "Mr. Speaker, I ask for the yeas and nays." If no one requests a recorded vote, the Speaker will officially announce the results by saying "they ayes (or nays) do have it, the motion is agreed to (or not agreed to)."

Under the Constitution, a request for the yeas and nays requires the support of one fifth of the Members present. To determine if there is sufficient support for ordering the yeas and nays, the Speaker will say, "All in favor of a recorded vote will rise." After counting to ensure there is sufficient support, the Speaker will either say, "A sufficient number having risen, the yeas and nays are ordered," or "there is not a sufficient second to order the yeas and nays."

In the House, a vote by the yeas and nays will be conducted by electronic device. The Clerk's Office will give members their voting devices. These devices will allow members to vote yes, no, or abstain from voting and will keep a record of how each member voted.

If the House's electronic voting system malfunctions, a vote by the yeas and nays will be conducted as a roll call vote. During a roll call vote, the names of Members will be called in alphabetical order and when a Member's name is called, he or she shall, without debate, declare his or her assent or dissent to the question (i.e. say "Yes" or "No"). After the vote, the Speaker will announce the results, telling how many Members voted for each side.

COMMITTEES

The committee system is one of the most important systems in the House. It allows a small group of Members to closely evaluate every bill that is introduced. Every bill that is introduced will be referred to at least one committee. Most bills will only go to one committee, but if it is a large, complex bill covering topics under the jurisdiction of multiple committees, it will be referred to each of those committees.

When a committee considers the bill, they can hold "hearings" where witnesses will tell them why they think the bill is a good (or bad) idea. The committee can also have "mark up sessions" where they will propose amendments to the bill. It is important to note that the committee cannot actually amend the bill; only the full House has that power. A committee will propose amendments that must later be adopted by the House.

Once the committee has finished any hearings and mark up on a bill, it can then report the bill to the House (send it to the House Calendar to be brought to the floor at a later time). A committee can also table the legislation and never report it to the House.

BRINGING A BILL TO THE FLOOR

In the House, there are many different ways to bring a bill to the floor. If the bill has been reported from committee, there are three methods to bring it to the floor: suspension of the rules, a special rule, or a unanimous consent request. The two most common methods are suspension of the rules or a special rule. If a bill has not been reported from committee, the only way to bring it to the floor is a discharge petition. Let's take a look at each of these methods:

Suspension of the Rules

Suspension of the rules, commonly simply referred to as "suspension," is an easy way to bring up and pass non-controversial bills. To try to pass a bill by suspension, you would make the motion, "Mr. Speaker, I move to suspend the rules and pass the bill (insert bill number)." This motion is debatable for 10 minutes equally divided between the person who made the motion and someone who opposes the motion and does not allow for any amendments to the bill. After the debate has expired, the previous question is automatically ordered and the vote will be whether or not to suspend the rules and pass the bill. It requires a two-thirds majority to pass a bill under suspension (which is why it is usually used for non-controversial bills).

Special Rule

A special rule is a resolution from the Rules Committee that sets the rules for consideration of a bill. The special rule can set the amount of time for debate, as well as set rules for amendments. A special rule can allow all amendments, only allow a certain number, only allow certain members to make amendments, or not allow any amendments. A special rule can also provide for the adoption of any or all committee amendments. A member of the rules committee can call up the resolution from the Rules Committee providing for a special rule. This is a privileged motion and is debatable for 10 minutes equally divided between the Chair and the Ranking Member of the Rules Committee. After the debate has expired, the previous question is automatically ordered and the vote will be whether or not to adopt the resolution.

Unanimous Consent

A bill can be brought to the floor by unanimous consent. However, if any Member objects to the request, it fails. A consent request could set limitations on debate and amendments, but these limits make the request even more unlikely to succeed. This method is used very rarely in the House because it can be so difficult to have unanimous consent.

Discharge Petition

If a bill is stuck in committee, you can remove the bill from the committee by a discharge petition. To do this, you must file a discharge petition with the Clerk of the House. The petition must be signed by a majority of the Members of the House. Any Member who signed the petition can call up the petition by obtaining the floor and saying "Mr. Speaker, I call up the discharge petition on the bill (insert bill number)." This is a privileged motion, so it is debatable for 10 minutes equally divided between the person who made the motion and an opponent of the motion. After the debate has expired, the previous question is automatically ordered and the vote will be whether or not to adopt the petition (a majority vote). If the vote passes, the bill will be discharged from the committee and placed on the

House Manual
Office of the Parliamentarian

calendar (it will be as if the committee reported the bill). Now, any member who signed the petition can make a motion to proceed to the consideration of that bill. This motion to proceed is a privileged motion, so it is debatable for 10 minutes equally divided between the person who made the motion and an opponent of the motion, and then the question is on the motion to proceed. As an alternative to the motion to proceed, after the bill has been discharged, you can request the Rules Committee to create a special rule for the bill, or you can try to pass the bill by suspension.

Note: This Manual refers to the Rules of the House of Representative for Generation Joshua's iGovern Summer Camp. The iGovern Rules of the House are substantially similar to the Rules of the House of Representatives, but have been amended to reflect time and size constraints at iGovern. Therefore, some of the specifics regarding amounts of time and citations of rules in this Manual will differ from the U.S. House. However, the general information is consistent with the procedures of the House of Representatives.