



Legislative Lingo: A Guide to Senate and House Procedure

Center Forward Basics
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Overview

Every two years, at the beginning of each Congress, both the House of Representatives and Senate are responsible for adopting rules that govern the procedure and process of their respective bodies. These rules are complex and are not often well-known or understood, but understanding the rules and how to use them can be the difference between legislative triumph or defeat. This is a basic guide to common terms used in House and Senate process and procedure.

To my colleagues in the Senate... let's learn about the House

The Glossary

Calendar: refers to the official list of measures, motions, and matters that become eligible for floor consideration after submission. The U.S. House maintains four calendars: Union, House, Private, Discharge. A summary of the calendars can be found [here](#).

Committee of the Whole: is a committee consisting of all members. It is subject to different rules of procedure to increase participation and expedite debate and is typically used for legislation considered more controversial.

Discharge Petition: used to force a bill out of committee. A successful petition requires the signatures of 218 members, which is a majority of the House.

Motion to Recommit: Also referred to as an MTR, is a vote that sends a bill back to the committee of jurisdiction. An MTR may be offered with or without instructions and essentially offers the minority party one last chance to offer amendments. An MTR can be used to effectively kill pending legislation.

Motion to Reconsider: allows the House one opportunity to review its decision on any question on which it has voted. The motion to reconsider must be offered on the same day as the original vote or on the next legislative day.

Previous Question: is a non-debatable motion adopted by majority vote that which, when agreed to, cuts off further debate on a pending question, prevents the offering of additional amendments, and brings an immediate vote on the question.

Reconciliation: recommends changes to existing law to achieve spending or revenue goals contemplated by the budget resolution. Budget reconciliation bills can be expedited and are not subject to legislative stalling tactics.

To my colleagues in the House... let's learn about the Senate

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Center Forward brings together members of Congress, not-for profits, academic experts, trade associations, corporations and unions to find common ground. Our mission: to give centrist allies the information they need to craft common sense solutions, and provide those allies the support they need to turn those ideas into results.

In order to meet our challenges we need to put aside the partisan bickering that has gridlocked Washington and come together to find common sense solutions.

For more information, please visit www.center-forward.org.

Other Resources

- United States Congress - [Legislative Glossary](#)
- Congressional Research Service
 - [House and Senate Rules of Procedure: A Comparison](#)
 - [Commonly Used Motions and Requests in the House of Representatives](#)
- United States Senate - [Reference Glossary](#)
- Indiana University Center on Representative Government
 - [The Legislative Process](#)
 - [Congressional Glossary](#)
- United States House of Representatives
 - [The Legislative Process](#)
 - [A Guide to the Rules, Precedents, and Procedures of the House](#)

calendars: [Legislative](#) and [Executive](#).

Cloture: the method by which a supermajority (typically, three-fifths) of the Senate agrees to limit further debate of a bill, amendment, or other matter. Cloture is invoked to overcome a filibuster.

Filibuster: refers to extended debate that has the effect of preventing a vote as Senate rules contain no mechanism to force a vote. A vote occurs only when debate ends naturally or if cloture is invoked.

Motion to Proceed to Consider: is a motion that, if agreed to by majority vote, brings a measure or matter before to the chamber for consideration. It is often referred to simply as a “motion to proceed.”

Motion to Reconsider: permits the reconsideration of any question decided by vote. It is typically followed by a motion to table the motion to reconsider, and therefore secures the outcome of the vote.

Rider: is an amendment to a bill that is unrelated to the subject of the bill. The formal name for an unrelated amendment is "non-germane." While the Senate does not require germaneness for proposed amendments, the House requires germaneness at all times unless a special rule has made an exception.

Unanimous Consent: refers to all members on the floor consenting to a request. Without objection, no vote is required.

Procedures in both the House and the Senate

The Glossary

Concurrent Resolution: is used for legislative business within both chambers of Congress. It is not used for proposing changes to existing law. Designated by either H.Con.Res. or S.Con.Res.

Joint Resolution: is used to propose changes in existing law, or to propose an amendment to the U.S. Constitution. Designated by either H.J.Res. or S.J.Res.

Motion to Table: if adopted by a majority vote, ends any further debate and permanently kills the pending matter.

Quorum: refers to the minimum number of members that must be present to conduct business. With no vacancies, quorum in the Senate is 51 senators and in the House it's 218 representatives.

Suspension of the Rules: refers to a motion that may be used in both chambers to accelerate the passage of typically non-controversial measures or matters.

Simple Resolution: is used for legislative business by only one chamber and only affects business within the chamber of origin. Designated by either H.Res. or S.Res.

Links to Other Resources

- United States Congress – Legislative Glossary
<https://www.congress.gov/help/legislative-glossary>
- Congressional Research Service – House and Senate Rules of Procedure: A Comparison
<https://www.senate.gov/reference/resources/pdf/RL30945.pdf>
- United States Senate – Reference Glossary
<https://www.senate.gov/reference/glossary.htm>
- United States House of Representatives – A Guide to the Rules, Precedents, and Procedures of the House
<https://www.gpo.gov/fdsys/pkg/GPO-HPRACTICE-115/pdf/GPO-HPRACTICE-115.pdf>
- Congressional Research Service – Commonly Used Motions and Requests in the House of Representatives
<https://fas.org/sgp/crs/misc/RL32207.pdf>
- Indiana University Center on Representative Government – The Legislative Process
<http://corg.indiana.edu/legislative-process>
- Indiana University Center on Representative Government – Congressional Glossary
<http://corg.indiana.edu/congressional-glossary>
- United States House of Representatives – The Legislative Process
http://www.house.gov/content/learn/legislative_process/