

CRS Report for Congress

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Committee System: Rules Changes in the House, 104th Congress

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Summary

The election of a Republican majority in the House for the first time in 40 years brought extensive change to the committee system. Many of the changes were previously recommended by the Republican members of the Joint Committee on the Organization of Congress which reported during the 103d Congress, but on which no action was taken. Others have traditionally been included in the Republican alternative to the Democratic rules package adopted on the opening day of a new Congress. Still others were part of the Contract with America.

This fact sheet details changes in the committee system contained in H. Res. 6, the rules of the House for the 104th Congress.

Committee Structure

Committee Abolition: Three committees were abolished: District of Columbia, Post Office and Civil Service, and Merchant Marine and Fisheries.

Assignments: H. Res. 6 prohibits all members from serving on more than two committees and four subcommittees, with exceptions approved by the House upon recommendation of respective party caucus or conference. Further, Budget Committee members terms are changed from three terms in five Congresses to four term in six Congresses. Membership on the Intelligence Committee is changed from three terms to four, while the chairman and ranking member is allowed to serve a fifth term.

Chairmen: Effective with the 104th Congress, committee and subcommittee chairmen are limited to serve no more than three terms as chairmen.

Jurisdiction: H. Res. 6 transfers jurisdiction from the District of Columbia and Post Office and Civil Service Committees to the Government Reform and Oversight Committee. From the Merchant Marine and Fisheries Committee, merchant marine is transferred to the

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National Security Committee; Coast Guard to the Transportation and Infrastructure Committee; and fisheries and endangered species to the Resources Committee. From the Commerce Committee, Glass-Steagall is transferred to the Banking and Financial Services Committee; food inspection to the Agriculture Committee; railroads and inland waterways to the Transportation and Infrastructure Committee; Trans-Alaska Pipeline to the Resources Committee; and energy research and development to the Science Committee.

Name Changes: Several committees were given new names: Banking and Financial Services (Banking, Finance and Urban Affairs); Commerce (Energy and Commerce); Economic and Educational Opportunities (Education and Labor); Government Reform and Oversight (Government Operations); House Oversight (House Administration); International Relations (Foreign Affairs); National Security (Armed Services); Resources (Natural Resources); Science (Science, Space, and Technology); and Transportation and Infrastructure (Public Works and Transportation).

Subcommittee Structure: H. Res. 6 prohibits committees from having more than 5 subcommittees, except for Appropriations (13), Government Reform and Oversight (7), and Transportation and Infrastructure (6).

Vice-Chairman: H. Res. 6 permits any majority member, not the senior most ranking majority member, to be designated as the vice-chair of the committee or subcommittee.

Committee Procedure

Openness: H. Res. 6 prohibits committee meetings from being closed to the public except by majority roll call vote if the meeting would endanger national security, compromise sensitive information, or defame any person. Further, broadcast coverage is allowed for any open hearing or meeting.

Oversight: H. Res. 6 requires all committees to adopt oversight plans and submit them to the House Oversight and Government Reform and Oversight Committee by February 15 of the first session. The Government Reform and Oversight Committee is required to report the plans back to the House by March 31 with recommendations.

Proxy voting: H. Res. 6 prohibits proxy voting in both committee and subcommittee.

Quorums: H. Res. 6 eliminates “rolling quorums”. Committees are allowed to adopt a one-third quorum rule for any business except reporting, which still requires a majority. A point of order can be made against any bill reported without a majority present.

Referral: H. Res. 6 prohibits joint referrals. The Speaker can designate a committee of primary jurisdiction upon introduction. Split and sequential referrals, either upon introduction or after the primary committee reports, are allowed.

Transcripts: H. Res. 6 requires hearing and meeting transcripts to be substantially verbatim accounts of the proceedings.

Voting: H. Res. 6 requires committee reports to include the names of members voting for or against any amendments or the motion to report.

Committee Staff

Allocation: H. Res. 6 requires committee chairman to provide sufficient staff to subcommittees, who lose independent hiring authority

Funding: H. Res. 6 consolidates the separate salary authorization levels for statutory and investigative staff into a single, two year committee expense resolution.

Number: Committee staff will be reduced by at least one third from the 103d Congress levels.

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