



CRS Report for Congress

Bills, Resolutions, Nominations, and Treaties: Characteristics, Requirements, and Uses

Richard S. Beth
Specialist on the Congress and Legislative Process
Government and Finance Division

In each chamber of Congress, four forms of legislative measure may be introduced (or, for resolutions, submitted) and acted on: bills, joint resolutions, concurrent resolutions, and resolutions of one house (“simple resolutions”). In addition, under the Constitution the Senate acts on two forms of executive business: nominations and treaties. This report provides a tabular comparison of the formal characteristics and uses of these six different kinds of business. For more information on legislative process, see [<http://www.crs.gov/products/guides/guidehome.shtml>].

The rules of the two houses include references to the four types of measure, but generally take for granted the distinctions among them, which have developed in the course of congressional history. Today, a bill or joint resolution is used when the purpose is to make law; a joint resolution is used also for the purpose of proposing an amendment to the Constitution. The other two forms of resolution are used for internal business of Congress itself. (For specific examples of how each form of measure is used, see CRS Report 98-706, *Bills and Resolutions: Examples of How Each Kind is Used*.) Executive business is so called because it is transmitted by the President, who must obtain the advice and consent of the Senate before the nomination or treaty becomes effective.

The following table compares all six of the forms of business on which Congress acts in terms of the following characteristics:

- **Designation:** series in which business of each form is numbered.
- **Origin:** who may formally introduce, submit, or transmit to Congress business of each form.
- **Deadline for action:** point at which business of each form ceases to be available for action (if not earlier disposed of).
- **Requirements for approval:** institutions that must act for business of each form to be enacted, finally agreed to, or advised and consented to.
- **Product or Use:** result of successful action on business of each form.

Table 1. Forms of Business Before Congress

Form of Business	Designation ^a	Origin	Deadline for action ^b	Requirements for approval	Product or Use
Legislative Business (Measures)					
Bill	S. H.R.	Introduced by Member of chamber	Final adjournment of a Congress	Both chambers and President	Law (statute)
Joint Resolution (except to amend Constitution)	S.J.Res. H.J.Res.	Submitted by Member of chamber	Final adjournment of a Congress	Both chambers and President	Law (statute)
Joint Resolution (to amend Constitution)	S.J.Res. H.J.Res.	Submitted by Member of chamber	Final adjournment of a Congress ^c	Both chambers (by two-thirds' vote) ^c	Constitutional amendment
Concurrent Resolution	S.Con.Res. H.Con.Res.	Submitted by Member of chamber	Final adjournment of a Congress	Both chambers	Regulation of Congress as a whole
Resolution ("simple resolution")	S.Res. H.Res.	Submitted by Member of chamber	Final adjournment of a Congress	Chamber of origin	Regulation of chamber of origin
Executive Business					
Nomination	PN ^d or by name and position	Transmitted by President	Adjournment of a session of the Senate, or a Senate recess of over 30 days ^e	Senate	Confirmation (advice and consent to appointment)
Treaty	Treaty Doc. ^f	Transmitted by President	Indefinite	Senate (by two-thirds' vote)	Advice and consent to ratification

- a. Designations beginning with "S." are used for Senate measures; those beginning with "H." for House measures. For each form of business, within each Congress, the designation is followed by a sequence number (e.g., "H.R. 1" or "PN100").
- b. Deadline unless the business is earlier disposed of, or (for nominations and treaties) unless withdrawn by the President.
- c. After action by Congress, the amendment must also be ratified by three-fourths of the states, usually within a time period specified in the joint resolution.
- d. A PN number designates a Presidential nominating message, which may contain more than one nomination. Conversely, a renominated nominee, or one nominated for more than one position, will be associated with more than one PN number.
- e. Deadline unless, when the Senate recesses or adjourns its session, it orders that nominations, or specified ones, not be returned to the President. The maximum deadline is the final adjournment of a Congress.
- f. This designation is followed by the number of the Congress and a sequence number (e.g., "Treaty Doc. 110-1"). Before the 97th Congress, the form used was "Ex." followed by a sequence letter and the number of the Congress and session (e.g., "Ex. A, 96-1").