

CRS Report for Congress

The First Day of a New Congress: A Guide to Proceedings on the House Floor

Updated December 8, 2006

Mildred Amer
Specialist in American National Government
Government and Finance Division



Prepared for Members and
Committees of Congress

The First Day of a New Congress: A Guide to Proceedings on the House Floor

Summary

This report focuses on the floor activities of the House during its first formal session in a new Congress, and serves as a guide for those participating in or watching these proceedings.

The House is not a continuing body. It ends at the conclusion of each two-year Congress and must reconstitute itself at the beginning of the next Congress. Article 1, Section 2 of the Constitution sets terms for Members of the House at two years. The House must choose its Speaker and officers and determine the chamber's internal rules every two years.

The Constitution mandates that Congress convene at noon on January 3, unless it has earlier passed a law designating a different day. Although no officers have been elected when the House first convenes, some officers from the previous Congress perform certain functions.

The House follows a well-established first day routine of electing and swearing in the Speaker, administering the oath of office to its Members, electing and swearing in its administrative officers, and adopting its rules of procedure. It also establishes its daily hour of meeting.

On opening day, the House usually adopts resolutions assigning its Members to serve on committees. This process usually extends throughout January and often for several more weeks. The committee assignment process occurs primarily within the party groups — the Republican Conference and the Democratic Caucus. Assignments cannot be considered on the House floor until both of these groups have adopted rules governing committee assignments.

Other routine organizational business may also be taken up on the House floor on the first day. The Speaker usually announces his policies on certain floor practices; a resolution is adopted providing for a joint session of Congress to receive the President's State of the Union Message; and often a resolution is adopted to allow a judge or a Member of Congress to administer the oath of office to Members-elect who are absent due to illness or other reasons.

Some resolutions on opening day are dependent on specific circumstances and do not occur at the beginning of each new Congress. In inaugural years, the House must adopt a resolution to authorize the use of the Capitol for the inauguration activities. At the outset of a new Congress following a presidential election, the House must also adopt a resolution providing for the counting of electoral votes for the President and Vice President of the United States by the new Congress.

Contents

Introduction	1
The House Convenes	1
Election of the Speaker	2
Swearing in of the Speaker	4
Oath of Office	4
Announcement of Party Leaders	6
Election of Officers	6
Notification to Other Body and to President	7
Adoption of House Rules of Procedure	7
Daily Meeting Time for the House	10
Committee Organization	10
Other First-Day Floor Actions	11

The First Day of a New Congress: A Guide to Proceedings on the House Floor

Introduction

The House of Representatives follows a well-established routine on the opening day of a new Congress. The proceedings include electing and swearing in the Speaker, swearing in its Members, electing and swearing in its administrative officers, and adopting its rules of procedure. Also, resolutions assigning Members to committees may be adopted.

The House must take these actions at the beginning of each new Congress because it is not a continuing body. Article 1, Section 2 of the Constitution sets terms for Members of the House at two years. Thus, the House ends at the conclusion of each two-year Congress and must reconstitute itself at the beginning of a new Congress.¹

The House Convenes

The Constitution mandates that a new Congress convene at noon on January 3 each odd numbered year unless it has earlier passed a law designating a different day. For example, the 109th convened on a different day (January 4, 2005); the 108th convened on January 7, 2003. The 104th through 106th Congresses convened on January 4, 1995, January 7, 1997, and January 6, 1999, respectively. The 107th Congress, however, convened on January 3, 2001. Although no officers have been elected when the House first convenes, some officers from the previous Congress perform certain functions. The previous Clerk of the House calls the House to order and presides over the chamber until the Speaker is sworn in. In the absence of the Clerk, the Sergeant at Arms performs this duty.²

The chaplain offers a prayer, and the Members-elect and their guests recite the Pledge of Allegiance. The Clerk then directs a reading clerk to call the roll of all Members-elect to establish that a quorum is present. In current practice, the roll is not actually called by a clerk; the Members-elect record their presence by inserting their official voting cards (obtained prior to opening day) in the chamber's electronic

¹ For information on convening of the House, see William Holmes Brown, "Assembly of Congress," in *House Practice, A Guide to the Rules, Precedents, and Procedures of the House of Representatives* (Washington: GPO, 2003), pp. 157-165. For information on organizational meetings held prior to the formal start of a new Congress, see CRS Report RS21339, *Congress' Early Organizational Meetings*, by Judy Schneider.

² See House Rule II, clause 2, Sec. 641, *Constitution, Jefferson's Manual, and Rules of the House of Representatives*, 108th Cong., H. Doc. 107-284 (Washington: GPO, 2003).

voting machines. Once the call of the roll is completed, a majority having registered their names, a quorum (218) is proved present. This action fulfills the requirements of Article I of the Constitution that no business be conducted by the House without a quorum being present. The Clerk then announces the election of the Resident Commissioner from Puerto Rico (when applicable) and the Delegates (one each) from the District of Columbia, Guam, the U.S. Virgin Islands, and American Samoa,³ and reports any deaths or resignations since the election.⁴

A quorum being present, the first order of official business is the election of the presiding officer, the Speaker of the House of Representatives.⁵

Election of the Speaker

The candidates for Speaker are nominated from the floor by the leaders of their respective parties. Traditionally, there is one candidate from the majority party and one from the minority party, selected by the Republican Conference and the Democratic Caucus at their early organizational meetings.⁶ Debate on the nomination of candidates for Speaker is allowed but not customary.⁷ Instead, the nominations are followed immediately by a *viva voce* roll call vote — that is, a vote in which the Members-elect respond orally to the calling of their names. In this vote, the Members-elect call out the last names of their choices for Speaker when their names are called by the Clerk. The Clerk appoints Members-elect to serve as

³ The Resident Commissioner from Puerto Rico serves a four-year term.

⁴ At the beginning of the 109th Congress, the Clerk announced the death of Rep. Robert Matsui of California since the last regular election for Representatives to the 109th Congress. See The Clerk [Jeffrey J. Trandahl], “Announcement by the Clerk,” *Congressional Record*, daily edition, vol. 151, Jan. 4, 2005, p. H2. In the 107th Congress, the Clerk announced the death of Rep. Julian Dixon of California since the last regular election for Representatives to the 107th Congress. See The Clerk [Jeffrey J. Trandahl], “Announcement by the Clerk,” *Congressional Record*, daily edition, vol. 147, Jan. 3, 2001, p. H2. In the 106th Congress, the Clerk announced that he had received a letter from Rep. Newt Gingrich, who announced that he would not seek reelection as Speaker of the House or take his seat as a Member from the Sixth District of Georgia. See The Clerk [Jeffrey J. Trandahl], “Resignation As Member of the House of Representatives,” *Congressional Record*, vol. 145, Jan. 6, 1999, p. 42.

⁵ For more information on the Speaker, see CRS Report RL30857, *Speakers of the House: Elections, 1913-2005*, by James V. Saturno. See also House Rule I.

⁶ Although the Speaker has always been a Member of the House, this is not a requirement. For example, at the commencement of the 105th Congress, two former Members, in addition to the two party nominees and another incumbent Member, received votes for Speaker. In the 107th - 109th Congresses, one incumbent Member other than the two party nominees received a vote for Speaker.

⁷ At the commencement of the 105th Congress, the chair of the Democratic Caucus rose to “a question of the highest constitutional privilege” to offer a resolution calling for the postponement of the election of the Speaker until the completion of a pending investigation. His resolution proposed the election of an interim Speaker, but the motion was tabled. See Rep. Vic Fazio, remarks in the House, *Congressional Record*, vol. 143, Jan. 7, 1997, pp. 115-116.

majority and minority tellers, usually two each, to ascertain the vote.⁸ The majority party is able to assure the election of its candidate because the vote is usually along straight party lines.⁹ The candidates themselves, however, often vote “present.”¹⁰

The following excerpts are the proceedings for the election of the Speaker in the 109th Congress.

ELECTION OF SPEAKER¹¹

The CLERK. Pursuant to law and to precedent, the next order of business is the election of the Speaker of the House of Representatives for the 109th Congress.

Nominations are now in order.

The Clerk recognizes the gentlewoman from Ohio (Ms. PRYCE).

Ms. PRYCE. Mr. Clerk, ... as chairman of the House Republican Conference, I am directed by the unanimous vote of that conference, and am very honored to present for election to the office of the Speaker of the House of Representatives of the 109th Congress of the United States of America, the name of the Honorable J. DENNIS HASTERT, a Representative-elect from the State of Illinois.

The CLERK. The Chair recognizes the gentleman from New Jersey (Mr. MENENDEZ).

Mr. MENENDEZ. Mr. Clerk, as chairman of the Democratic Caucus, I am directed by the unanimous vote of that caucus to present for election to the office of the Speaker of the House of Representatives for the 109th Congress ... the Honorable NANCY PELOSI, a Representative-elect from the State of California.

The CLERK. The Honorable J. DENNIS HASTERT, a Representative-elect from the State of Illinois, and the Honorable NANCY PELOSI, a Representative-elect from the State of California, have been placed in nomination.

Are there any further nominations?

There being no further nominations, the Clerk will appoint tellers.

⁸ Tellers are Members or clerks who count votes cast on the House floor. Vote totals are announced but not the votes of individual Members.

⁹ Note that the Independent Members usually vote for the candidate of the party with which they have chosen to caucus.

¹⁰ In the 105th Congress, one incumbent Member, who was not the nominee of either party but who received a vote for Speaker, cast his vote for a former Member of the House. In the 108th and 109th Congresses, the Democratic nominee for Speaker voted for herself.

¹¹ All excerpts are taken from the *Congressional Record*, daily edition, vol. 151, Jan.4, 2005, pp. H2-H3.

The Clerk appoints the gentleman from Ohio (Mr. NEY), the gentleman from California (Mr. LARSON), the gentlewoman from Connecticut (Mrs. JOHNSON), and the gentlewoman from Ohio (Ms. KAPTUR).

The tellers will come forward and take their seats at the desk in front of the Speaker's rostrum.

The roll will now be called, and those responding to their names will indicate by surname the nominee of their choice.

The reading clerk will now call the roll.

The tellers having taken their places, the House proceeded to vote for the Speaker.¹²

The CLERK. The tellers agree in their tallies that the total number of votes cast is 427, of which the Honorable J. DENNIS HASTERT of the State of Illinois has received 226, the Honorable NANCY PELOSI of the State of California has received 199, and the Honorable JOHN MURTHA of the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania has received 1, with 1 recorded as "present."

Therefore, the Honorable J. DENNIS HASTERT of the State of Illinois is duly elected Speaker of the House of Representatives for the 109th Congress, having received a majority of all votes cast.

Swearing in of the Speaker

Next, the newly elected Speaker, escorted by leaders of both parties and often Representatives-elect from his home state, is introduced to the chamber by the minority leader, who first delivers a short statement from the chair. The Speaker often responds with a statement of his own and then takes the oath of office.¹³ By precedent, the "dean" of the House, the most senior (longest-serving) Member (regardless of party), administers the oath to the Speaker on the dais. His oath is identical to that of the other Members.¹⁴

Oath of Office

After taking the oath, the Speaker administers the following oath of office to all Members of the House, *en masse*, including the nonvoting Delegates and Resident

¹² Prior to the voting for Speaker in the 106th Congress, a parliamentary inquiry was made by the Resident Commissioner from Puerto Rico and another Member-elect about the Delegates in the House being allowed to cast ballots for Speaker. The Clerk announced, however, that "Representatives-elect are the only individuals qualified to vote in the election of the Speaker."

¹³ In the 106th Congress, the Speaker broke with tradition and delivered his remarks from the floor of the House rather than the dais. See Rep. Dennis Hastert, remarks in the House, *Congressional Record*, daily edition, vol. 145, Jan. 6, 1999, pp. H4-H5.

¹⁴ Rep. John Dingell (D-MI) is the dean of the House in the 109th Congress and will be the dean in the 110th Congress.

Commissioner. The oath, which follows, is in the form of a question, to which the newly elected Members respond in the affirmative:

I do solemnly swear (or affirm) that I will support and defend the Constitution of the United States against all enemies, foreign and domestic; that I will bear true faith and allegiance to the same; that I take this obligation freely, without any mental reservation or purpose of evasion, and that I will well and faithfully discharge the duties of the office on which I am about to enter. So help me God.

This oath is mandated by Article VI of the Constitution, and its text is set by statute (5 U.S.C. 3331). As the Members-elect raise their right hand, they are not required to hold anything in their left hand. Many have held a family bible or other scripture in their left hand, but there is no requirement that anything be held when the oath is taken. The same is true for Representatives who re-enact the event with their families and the Speaker in the Speaker's office after the formal ceremony. Photographers are present, and many Members choose to hold something meaningful in their left hand. These objects have often been, but are not limited to, a family heirloom or something else of special significance; but to repeat, nothing is required. It is up to those being photographed to determine what, if anything, a Member holds in his/her left hand.

Occasionally, the swearing in of a Member-elect is delayed. When this happens, the Member-elect is sworn in at a later date in the House chamber or elsewhere by someone designated by the Speaker. When the oath is not administered in the House chamber, it is usually given by other Members or judges to Representatives-elect not able to appear in person in the House. The locations have often been at other sites in Washington, DC or other parts of the country.¹⁵

¹⁵ In the 105th Congress, the swearing in of Rep.-elect Frank Tejeda of Texas and Julia Carson of Indiana was delayed because of illness. Rep. Tejeda was sworn in Jan. 8, 1997, and Rep. Carson on Jan. 9, 1997. Both were sworn in by federal judges outside Washington, DC. See Rep. Richard Gephardt, "Authorizing the Speaker or His Deputy to Administer the Oath to the Honorable Frank Tejeda and the Honorable Julia Carson," *Congressional Record*, vol. 143, Jan. 7, 1997, p.143-144. In the 106th Congress, two ill Members, Reps.-elect George Miller, and Sam Farr, were sworn in at their California homes by judges on Jan. 7, 1999, and Jan. 8, 1999, respectively. See Rep. Robert Menendez, "Authorizing the Speaker or His Deputy to Administer the Oath of Office to the Honorable George Miller and the Honorable Sam Farr of California," *Congressional Record*, vol. 145, Jan. 6, 1999, p. 246. In the 108th Congress, Rep.-elect Darlene Hooley of Oregon took the oath of office on Jan. 27, 2003, in the House chamber. See The Speaker [J. Dennis Hastert], "Swearing in of Member-Elect," *Congressional Record*, daily edition, vol. 149, Jan. 27, 2003, p. H150. In the 109th Congress, Reps.-elect Mike Honda, Tom Osborne, Luis Guterrez, and Chris Cannon took the oath of office on Jan. 25, 2005, in the House chamber. See The Speaker [J. Dennis Hastert], "Swearing in of Members-Elect," *Congressional Record*, daily edition, vol. 151, Jan. 25, 2005, p. H171.

If the swearing in of a Member is challenged, the Speaker, pursuant to House precedents, will ask this Member-elect to remain seated while the others are sworn in. The House then determines the disposition of the challenge.¹⁶

Announcement of Party Leaders¹⁷

After the Speaker administers the oath of office, he receives reports from the chairmen of the two party organizations, the Republican Conference and the Democratic Caucus, who announce their parties' choices for majority and minority leaders.

MAJORITY LEADER

Ms. PRYCE. Mr. Speaker, as chairman of the Republican Conference, I am directed by that conference to notify the House officially that the Republican Members have selected as their majority leader the gentleman from Texas, the Honorable TOM DELAY.

MINORITY LEADER

Mr. MENENDEZ. Mr. Speaker, as chairman of the Democratic Caucus, I have been directed to report to the House that the Democratic Members have selected as minority leader the gentlewoman from California, the Honorable NANCY PELOSI.

The chairmen then announce the names of those elected to serve as majority and minority whips. The whips are the assistant floor leaders.

Election of Officers

Next, the House turns to the election of its administrative officers: Chief Administrative Officer, Chaplain, Clerk, and Sergeant at Arms.¹⁸ The resolution nominating the slate of candidates is offered by the chairman of the conference of the majority party. The minority party proposes its own roster of candidates as an amendment to the majority party's resolution. By tradition, neither the resolution nor the amendment is debated, although the slate can be divided with a separate vote on

¹⁶ This last occurred on Jan. 3, 1985, when the seating of Rep.-elect Richard McIntyre of the Eighth Congressional District of Indiana was challenged. In that incident, the House adopted a resolution referring the challenge to the House Administration Committee for further examination. The Member-elect's opponent, Frank McCloskey, was ultimately seated. See William Holmes Brown, "Election Contests and Disputes," in *House Practice, A Guide to the Rules and Procedures of the House of Representatives*, pp. 475-480, and Rep. James Wright, "Referring Election of a Member from the Eighth Congressional District of Indiana to the Committee on House Administration," *Congressional Record*, vol. 131, Jan. 3, 1985, pp. 381-388.

¹⁷ The excerpts are taken from the *Congressional Record*, daily edition, vol. 151, Jan. 4, 2005, p. H6.

¹⁸ In the 102nd Congress, the office of postmaster was abolished, and that of doorkeeper was abolished in the 104th Congress. Their duties have been assumed by other officers.

any or all officers.¹⁹ Again, however, because of its numerical advantage, the majority is able to defeat the minority substitute, and to adopt the resolution naming its chosen candidates. Then, the Speaker administers the oath to the newly elected officers.

Notification to Other Body and to President

The House then considers resolutions which formally notify the Senate and the President that it has elected its leaders, is assembled, and is ready to receive messages from them. Subsequently, the majority and minority leaders and clerk of the House, as well as two Senators (usually the majority and minority leaders), appointed by the Vice President, telephone the President with the news that the Congress is ready to begin its work.

Adoption of House Rules of Procedure

The next order of business is the adoption of the rules of the House. Although the rules of one Congress are not binding on the next, the House usually approves its rules by adopting *en bloc* the rules of the previous Congress with amendments. Normally, prior to the first day of a new Congress, task forces of both the majority and the minority party have worked on any changes they wish to implement in the House's standing rules. In modern times, the majority party's rules package has always prevailed.

The proposed rules are offered in the form of a House resolution. Since there are then no existing House rules, the resolution is considered under "general parliamentary law," which the House interprets to mean the rules in force in the preceding Congress.²⁰ Debate is normally limited to one hour, and the majority party manager traditionally yields half the time to the minority manager "for purposes of debate only" to discuss an alternative proposal. Because of that stipulation, no Member can offer an amendment to the rules proposal, and the minority substitute is not formally considered.

At the end of debate time, the majority manager moves the previous question. The majority party's numerical advantage assures the adoption of this motion. The effect is to force an immediate vote on the question of final approval of the majority's own pending rules package. Therefore, any opportunity for the minority to offer an amendment is precluded.²¹ If that motion were defeated, the minority would be

¹⁹ Rep. Pryce, "Election of Clerk of the House, Sergeant at Arms, Chief Administrative Officer, and Chaplain," *Congressional Record*, daily edition, vol. 151, Jan. 4, 2005, p. H6.

²⁰ For a summary of the procedures the House follows in the brief period of time it is in session prior to the formal adoption of its own rules, see William Holmes Brown, "Assembly of Congress," in *House Practice, A Guide to the Rules and Procedures of the House of Representatives*, pp. 163-164.

²¹ Given that the rules of the House in the last Congress apply generally, the minority party is given the right to offer a motion to commit the rules package to committee for further (continued...)

entitled to offer an amendment to the majority's rules package. Normally, this does not happen, and the rules are usually adopted on a party-line roll-call vote.²² If the rules package were to be defeated, the House would continue to operate under general parliamentary law until another rules package was adopted.

In the 104th Congress, with a change in party control for the first time in some 40 years, there were major changes in the House rules.²³ These included term limits for the Speaker (no more than four consecutive Congresses) as well as for committee and subcommittee chairs (no more than three consecutive Congresses). A ban on proxy voting in committees and subcommittees was also adopted. In addition, the House modified its sunshine rules to provide for more open committee sessions; voted to require a three-fifths majority vote for all tax increases; mandated a comprehensive House audit and other administrative reforms; and abolished some committees, renamed others, and consolidated jurisdictions.²⁴

In the 105th Congress, the House approved a more modest rules package.²⁵ Included was a provision allowing the incumbent members of the House Committee on Standards of Official Conduct to finish a pending investigation by serving on a temporary Select Committee on Ethics through January 21, 1997. The new rules also prohibited the distribution of campaign contributions on the House floor, provided for the development of a system of drug testing for Members, officers, and employees, clarified voting on increases in income tax rates, and required non-governmental agencies testifying before House committees to provide a list of federal grants and contracts received in the past three years. In addition, the name of the

²¹ (...continued)

examination. While this motion traditionally loses, it does give the minority party the opportunity to include "instructions" to the committee for changes in the text of the proposed rules. These instructions are, in essence, an amendment, which typically contains selected portions of the minority's rules package. The outcome, however, remains certain: the majority party rules prevail.

²² In 1971, the "previous question" motion to end debate on H.Res. 5 was defeated by a bipartisan coalition which sought to drop from the rules package a proposal permitting the automatic discharge of a measure from the Rules Committee if that committee had not acted on it within 31 days. This coalition voted against ordering the "previous question" motion. Thereafter, the 31-day rule was removed from the rules package by floor amendment, and the rules package passed overwhelmingly. It should be noted that the consideration of H.Res. 5 was delayed by one day by unanimous consent, and the House operated under "general parliamentary law" for most of the two session days. See "Rules of the House," *Congressional Record*, vol. 117, Jan. 21, 1971, pp. 13-15; and "Rules of the House," *Congressional Record*, vol. 117, Jan. 22, 1971, pp. 132-144.

²³ Rep. Armev, "Rules of the House," *Congressional Record*, vol. 141, Jan. 4, 1995, pp. 462-530.

²⁴ For more information, see CRS Report 95-187, *Committee System Rules Changes in the House, 104th Congress*, by Judy Schneider.

²⁵ Rep. Armev, "Rules of the House," *Congressional Record*, vol. 143, Jan. 7, 1997, pp. 121-141.

Committee on Economic and Educational Opportunities was changed to the Committee on Education and the Workforce.²⁶

At the commencement of the 106th Congress, the House adopted its rules in a recodified, substantially revised format.²⁷ This was the first comprehensive revision of its rules since 1880, and the number of rules was cut nearly in half. Included in the rules changes were provisions to encourage committees to plan oversight activities before the convening of a new Congress, establishment of a limit of six subcommittees for committees that maintain an oversight committee, and two ethics-related changes. One requires committee consultants to abide by the Code of Official Conduct, and the other conforms House rules to the Supreme Court decision relating to honoraria.²⁸

In addition, the names of three committees were changed. The House Oversight Committee was renamed the Committee on House Administration; the Committee on Government Reform and Oversight was renamed the Committee on Government Reform; and the Committee on National Security was renamed the Committee on Armed Services.²⁹

With the adoption of the rules for the 107th Congress, the House abolished the Committee on Banking and Financial Services and replaced it with a new Committee on Financial Services; renamed the Committee on Commerce the Committee on Energy and Commerce; required enhanced oversight planning by committees; repealed the automatic public debt measure rule (Rule 23) to now require a vote on any measure to change the public debt limit; and amended the House gift rule to clarify that it applies to all House employees.³⁰

The rules adopted for the 108th Congress included changes that resulted from the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001.³¹ Rule I, clause 8(b) was amended to require the Speaker to submit to the clerk of the House a list of Members to assume his responsibilities in the event of a vacancy; Rule I, clause 12 was amended to permit the Speaker to declare an emergency recess in the event of an impending threat to the

²⁶ For more information, see CRS Report 97-138, *Committee System Rules Changes in the House, 105th Congress*, by Judy Schneider.

²⁷ Rep. Arney, "Rules of the House," *Congressional Record*, vol. 145, Jan. 6, 1999, pp. 47-235.

²⁸ *United States v. National Treasury Employees Union*, 513 U.S. 454 (1995).

²⁹ For more information, see CRS Report RS20017, *Committee System: Rules Changes in the House, 106th Congress*, by Judy Schneider.

³⁰ Rep. Arney, "Rules of the House," *Congressional Record*, daily edition, vol. 147, Jan. 3, 2001, pp. H6-H18. For more information, see CRS Report RS20769, *Committee System: Rules Changes in the House, 107th Congress*, by Judy Schneider.

³¹ Rep. Delay, "Rules of the House," *Congressional Record*, daily edition, vol. 149, Jan. 7, 2003, pp. H6-H23. See also CRS Report RS21388, *House Rules Changes Affecting Floor Proceedings in the 108th Congress*, by Elizabeth Rybicki; CRS Report RS21382, *Committee System Rules Changes in the House, 108th Congress*, by Judy Schneider; and CRS Report RS21439, *House Ethics Rules Changes for the 108th Congress*, by Mildred Amer.

safety of Congress; a Select Committee on Homeland Security was established; and under a new provision of Rule XX, clause 5, the Speaker, without appeal, can adjust the number of Members present needed for a quorum.

In the 108th Congress, the House also repealed the term limit on the Speaker; adjusted its rules regarding the motion to instruct conferees and the admission of electronic devices on the floor; reinstated as Rule 27 the automatic public debt rule (the so-called Gephardt rule) to no longer require a separate vote on any measure to change the public debt limit; and included several changes to the chamber's conflict of interest and gift rules.

The rules package for the 109th Congress included several changes to the House Ethics rules and floor procedures as well the establishment of the standing Committee on Homeland Security.³² The ethics changes provide for limited use of campaign funds for official expenses, tighter restrictions on sending franked mailings before an election, and an expansion of the rule for governing companions on officially connected travel.³³

Other 109th Congress modifications were: adding Wednesdays to the permissible days for considering suspensions motions, repeal of the corrections calendar, amending the rules of decorum and debate to allow references to the Senate, and new procedures for reducing the number of Members of the House needed for a quorum in case of a catastrophic event.

Daily Meeting Time for the House

The House establishes its daily hour of meeting by a resolution which must be renewed each session of Congress. The resolution is normally offered by the chairman of the House Rules Committee.

Committee Organization

The committee assignment process occurs largely within the party groups — the Republican Conference and the Democratic Caucus. The only action visible on the chamber floor is the adoption of resolutions which implement the committee nominations agreed upon by the conference and the caucus. The adoption of both resolutions is routine and occurs without amendment, because of the tacit understanding that each party has a right to establish its own internal distribution of work without amendment from the other.

³² Rep. Delay, "Rules of the House," *Congressional Record*, daily edition, vol. 151, Jan. 4, 2005, pp. H7-H31. See also CRS Report RL32772, *House Rules Changes Affecting Floor Proceedings in the 109th Congress*, by Thomas Carr and Elizabeth Rybicki; CRS Report RS22018, *Committee System Rules Changes in the House, 109th Congress*, by Judy Schneider; and CRS Report RS22021, *House Rules Changes Affecting the Congressional Budget Process in the 109th Congress*, by Bill Heniff, Jr.

³³ For more information, see CRS Report RS22034, *House Ethics Rules Changes in the 109th Congress*, by Mildred Amer.

Committee assignments may not be considered on the House floor until both the Republican Conference and the Democratic Caucus have adopted their own rules governing committee assignments. The House takes up some of the assignment resolutions on opening day, but their consideration extends throughout January and often for several additional weeks.

For the 109th Congress, only the majority party's resolution (H.Res. 6) designating membership on the House Rules Committee was adopted on the first day, January 4, 2005.³⁴ Remaining committee assignment resolutions were acted on through March.

Other First-Day Floor Actions

Other routine organizational business may be taken up on the House floor on the first day. For example, the Speaker customarily announces his policies with respect to certain floor practices for the duration of the Congress. Resolutions are often adopted designating certain minority party employees to special pay status, providing for a joint session of Congress to receive the President's State of the Union message, and providing for conditional adjournments of the House. Resolutions of condolence on the death of any Member that occurred subsequent to the adjournment of the last Congress may also be considered.

Some resolutions are dependent on specific circumstances and do not occur on the first day of every new Congress. For example, following a presidential election, the House must adopt a resolution providing for the counting of electoral votes for the President and Vice President by the new Congress, continue the Joint Congressional Committee on Inaugural Ceremonies, and authorize the use of the Capitol for inaugural activities.³⁵

On the first day of the 106th Congress, the House adopted a resolution (H.Res. 10) appointing the authorizing managers and implementing the necessary procedures for the impeachment trial of President William Clinton.³⁶

After the House has completed its initial organizational proceedings, it may then turn to the routine business which normally completes its legislative day. This includes the introduction of bills and resolutions, the receipt of messages from the President, and one-minute and special order speeches.

³⁴ Rep. Pryce, "Election of Members to Committee on Rules," *Congressional Record*, daily edition, vol. 151, Jan. 4, 2005, p. H31.

³⁵ *Congressional Record*, daily edition, vol. 151, Jan. 4, 2005, pp. H32-H33.

³⁶ Rep. Hyde, "Providing for Certain Appointments and Procedures Relating to the Impeachment Proceedings," *Congressional Record*, vol. 145, Jan. 6, 1999, pp. 240-245.