

CRS Report for Congress

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Bills, Resolutions, Nominations, and Treaties: Origins, Deadlines, Requirements, and Uses

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In each chamber of Congress, four forms of legislative measure may be introduced (or, for resolutions, submitted) and acted on: (1) bills, (2) joint resolutions, (3) concurrent resolutions, and (4) simple resolutions. The rules of the two houses include references to these four types of measures, and 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 also used for the purpose of proposing an amendment to the Constitution. The other two forms of resolutions are used for the internal business of Congress itself.

In addition, under the Constitution the Senate acts on two forms of executive business: (1) nominations and (2) treaties. 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 table on the following page compares the formal characteristics and uses of these six different kinds of business before Congress:

- **Form of Business:** bill, joint resolution, concurrent resolution, simple resolution, nomination, or treaty.
- **Designation:** series in which the measure or executive business is numbered.
- **Origin:** who may formally introduce, submit, or transmit to Congress the measure or executive business.
- **Deadline for action:** point at which the measure or executive business ceases to be available for action (unless earlier disposed of).
- **Requirements for approval:** institutions required to act for the measure or executive business to be approved.
- **Use:** purpose or product that results from successful action on the measure or executive business.



Table 1. Forms of Business Before Congress

Form of Business	Designation ^a	Origin	Deadline for action ^b	Requirements for approval	Use
Legislative Business (Measures)					
Bill	S. H.R.	Member of chamber of introduction	Final adjournment of a Congress	Both chambers and President	Law (statute)
Joint Resolution (except to amend Constitution)	S.J.Res. H.J.Res.	Member of chamber of submission	Final adjournment of a Congress	Both chambers and President	Law (statute)
Joint Resolution (to amend Constitution)	S.J.Res. H.J.Res.	Member of chamber of submission	Final adjournment of a Congress ^c	Both chambers ^c	Constitutional amendment
Concurrent Resolution	S. Con. Res. H. Con. Res.	Member of chamber of submission	Final adjournment of a Congress	Both chambers	Regulation of Congress as a whole
Resolution ("simple resolution")	S. Res. H. Res.	Member of chamber of submission	Final adjournment of a Congress	Chamber of origin	Regulation of chamber of origin
Executive Business					
Nomination	[by name]	President	Adjournment of a session of the Senate, or a Senate recess of over 30 days ^d	Senate	Confirmation (advice and consent to appointment)
Treaty	Treaty Doc. ^e	President	Indefinite	Senate	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 measure, the designation is followed by a sequence number (e.g., "H.R. 1").

^b Deadline unless the business is earlier disposed of, or (for nominations and treaties) unless withdrawn by the President. For legislative measures, the maximum is the two-year life span of a Congress.

^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 Deadline unless, when the Senate recesses or adjourns its session, it orders that nominations not be returned to the President. Otherwise, the maximum is the one-year life span of a session.

^e This designation is followed by the number of the Congress and a sequence number (e.g., "Treaty Doc. 105-1"). 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").