Order Code 98-706 GOV
Updated December 8, 2006

CRS Report for Congress

Bills and Resolutions: Examples of How Each Kind Is Used

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

When Congress seeks to pass a law, it uses a bill or joint resolution, which must be passed by both houses in identical form, then presented to the President for his approval or disapproval. To regulate its own internal affairs, or for other purposes where authority of law is not necessary, Congress uses a concurrent resolution (requiring adoption by both houses) or a simple resolution (requiring action only in the house of origin). More detailed descriptions appear in CRS Report 98-728, *Bills, Resolutions, Nominations, and Treaties: Origins, Deadlines, Requirements, and Uses*.

Congress may use each of the four forms of measure it employs for a variety of purposes. This fact sheet identifies the most prevalent uses of each and, as appropriate, gives brief explanations of these uses. For more information on legislative process, see [http://www.crs.gov/products/guides/guidehome.shtml].

Bills (H.R. or S.)

- Authorization or reauthorization of federal policies, programs, and activities
- Amendment of existing law (sometimes also by joint resolution)
- Establishment of federal departments and agencies, or alteration of their structure
- Revenue (tax) legislation (originates in House only)
- Regular annual general appropriations
- Supplemental appropriations (sometimes also by joint resolution)
- Reconciliation bill (alters spending authority pursuant to instructions in a congressional budget resolution)
- Private bill (provides specified benefits to named individuals)

Joint Resolutions (S.J.Res. or H.J.Res.)

- "Incidental, inferior, or unusual purposes of legislation" (*House Manual*, section 397)
- Declaration of war
- Continuing resolution (extends appropriations for specified purposes until regular appropriations are enacted)

- Transfer of appropriations
- Adjustment of debt limit
- Alteration of date for convening of Congress
- Resolution of disapproval or approval (of specified executive action pursuant to a statute making a contingent delegation of authority)
- Extension of expiration or reporting dates under existing law (e.g., date for President to submit budget)
- Abrogation of treaty
- Congratulations, condolences, welcomes, thanks, etc. (also by simple or concurrent resolution)
- Proposed constitutional amendment (requires two-thirds vote in each house)

Concurrent Resolutions (S.Con.Res. or H.Con.Res.)

- Congressional budget resolution
- "Sense of Congress" resolution (expresses "fact, principles, opinions, and purposes of the two houses," *House Manual*, section 396. "Sense of Congress" provisions may also appear in lawmaking measures)
- Adjournment *sine die*
- Recess of either or both houses of more than three days
- Correction of conference reports or enrolled bills
- Request for return of measures presented to the President
- Creation of a joint committee
- Providing for a joint session of Congress

Simple Resolutions (H.Res. or S.Res.)

- Adoption or amendment of chamber rules
- Special rule (for considering a measure) or "order of business resolution" (House)
- Establishment of a standing order (principally Senate)
- Privileges of the House resolution (principally House; to secure a chamber's rights, safety, dignity, or integrity of proceedings, House Rule IX);
- "Blue slip resolution" (House; returns a Senate tax measure as violating House privilege to originate revenue measures)
- Personal privilege of individual Member
- Election of committee members or chamber officers
- Expulsion (requires two-thirds vote), censure, or other discipline of a Member
- Disposition of contest to a Member's election
- Committee funding
- Expenditures from chamber's contingent fund (e.g., printing House and Senate documents, also by concurrent resolution)
- Creation of a special or select committee (e.g., investigating committee)
- Resolution of ratification (advice and consent to treaty; Senate)
- Resolution of inquiry (requests factual information from executive branch; principally House)

- Providing notifications to other house, President, etc.
- Request for other house to return a measure (for technical corrections)
- "Sense of the Senate" or "sense of the House" resolution (expresses fact, principles, opinions, or purposes of one house, *House Manual*, section 395; such provisions may also appear in lawmaking measures)
- Commemorative periods (now Senate only; formerly by joint resolution)
- Citation for contempt of Congress
- Authorization of response to subpoena by Members or employees
- Discharge of committee from a measure, nomination, or treaty (Senate)
- Instructions to conferees already appointed (Senate)