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Suspension of the Rules in the House: Principal Features

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"Suspension of the rules" is a procedure that the House of Representatives often uses on the floor to act expeditiously on relatively noncontroversial legislation.[1] This procedure is governed primarily by clause 1 of House Rule XV. When a bill or some other matter is considered "under suspension," floor debate is limited, all floor amendments are prohibited, and a two-thirds vote is required for final passage. For more information on the legislative process, see [http://www.crs.gov/products/guides/guidehome.shtml].

Cited in U.S. v. Byun, No. 07-10254, archived August 15, 2008

Typically, a Member whom the Speaker has recognized will say, for example, "Mr. Speaker, I move to suspend the rules and pass the bill, H.R. 1234." By making that motion, the Member triggers the use of the suspension procedure under Rule XV. However, this same procedure can be used for other legislative purposes. For example, a Member can move to suspend the rules and agree to a conference report, or concur in a Senate amendment to a House bill, or take some other action.

There are nine principal features of the suspension procedure.

- **First, the Speaker controls the use of this procedure.** No Member has a right to make a suspension motion. The Speaker decides who to recognize for suspension motions.

- **Second, suspension motions are in order only on Mondays, Tuesdays, and Wednesdays, and during the final days of the annual congressional session.** The House sometimes agrees to consider suspension motions on other days, by agreeing to either a unanimous consent request or a special rule for that purpose.

- **Third, there are only 40 minutes of debate on a suspension motion and the bill (or other action) to which it relates.** Time control is

[1] This report was written by Stanley Bach, a former Senior Specialist in the Legislative Process at CRS. The listed author updated the report and can respond to inquiries on the subject.

usually divided between the chairman and the ranking minority member of the committee or subcommittee with jurisdiction over the bill. However, if the ranking minority member supports the bill, another Member who opposes it can claim control of half the time for debate.

- **Fourth, when a bill is considered under suspension, no floor amendments are in order.** The Member making the motion, however, can include amendments as part of his or her motion. In that case, the Member moves to suspend the rules and pass the bill *as amended*.

- **Fifth, after the 40 minutes of debate, there is a single vote on suspending the rules and passing the bill.** The House does not vote first on whether to suspend the rules and then on whether to pass the bill. Both questions are decided by one vote.

- **Sixth, a two-thirds vote of the House is required to pass a bill under suspension of the rules.** This is a two-thirds vote of the Members present and voting, a quorum being present. If a suspension motion fails to receive the required two-thirds vote, the House can consider the bill in question again, often under procedures that require only a simple majority vote to pass it.

- **Seventh, the Speaker can postpone rollcall votes on suspension motions until later on the same day or the following day, and cluster them to occur one after the other.** When there is a series of such rollcall votes, Members have 15 minutes to vote on the first motion but they usually have only five minutes to vote on each of the other motions.

Cited in U.S. v. Byun, No. 07-10254 Archived August 15, 2008

- **Eighth, there is no requirement that a bill must be reported from committee before the House can consider it under suspension.** One advantage of the suspension procedure is that the committee to which a bill was referred does not have to meet formally to vote on reporting it or to prepare a written report on the bill.

- **Ninth, the suspension procedure automatically waives all points of order against the bill (or other action) and against its consideration.** The procedure suspends all rules of the House except those that govern the suspension procedure itself.

There is no suspension calendar. Instead, during the last floor session of each week, a member of the majority party leadership usually makes a public announcement on the floor about the bills that have been scheduled tentatively for consideration under suspension during the following week.

For additional information, see the Parliamentarian's notes following clause 1 of Rule XV in the *House Rules and Manual*; pp. 871-879 of *House Practice;* and vol. 6, chap. 21, sec. 9-15 of *Deschler's Precedents*.