



**Congressional  
Research Service**

Informing the legislative debate since 1914

---

# Suspension of the Rules: House Practice in the 116<sup>th</sup> Congress (2019-2020)

December 7, 2022

**Congressional Research Service**

<https://crsreports.congress.gov>

R47327



R47327

December 7, 2022

Jane A. Hudiburg

Analyst on Congress and  
the Legislative Process

## Suspension of the Rules: House Practice in the 116<sup>th</sup> Congress (2019-2020)

Suspension of the rules is the most commonly used procedure to call up measures on the floor of the House of Representatives. As the name suggests, the procedure allows the House to suspend its standing and statutory rules in order to consider broadly supported legislation in an expedited manner. More specifically, the House temporarily sets aside its rules that govern the raising and consideration of measures and assumes a new set of constraints particular to the suspension procedure.

The suspension of the rules procedure has several parliamentary advantages: (1) it allows non-privileged measures to be raised on the House floor without the need for a special rule, (2) it enables the consideration of measures that would otherwise be subject to a point of order, and (3) it streamlines floor action by limiting debate and prohibiting floor amendments. Given these features, as well as the required two-thirds supermajority vote for passage, suspension motions are generally used to process less controversial legislation.

In the 116<sup>th</sup> Congress (2019-2020), measures considered under suspension made up 66% of the bills and resolutions that received floor action in the House (792 out of 1,195 measures). The majority of suspension measures were House bills (81%), followed by Senate bills (11%) and House resolutions (7%). The measures covered a variety of policy areas but most often addressed government operations, such as the designation of federal facilities or amending administrative policies.

Most measures that are considered in the House under the suspension procedure are sponsored by a House or Senate majority party Member. However, suspension is the most common House procedure used to consider minority-party-sponsored legislation regardless of whether the legislation originated in the House or Senate. In 2019 and 2020, minority-party Members sponsored 29% of suspension measures, compared to 16% of legislation subject to different procedures.

Most suspension measures are referred to at least one House committee before their consideration on the floor. The House Committee on Foreign Affairs was the committee of primary jurisdiction for the plurality of suspension measures considered in the 116<sup>th</sup> Congress. Additional committees—such as Energy and Commerce, Oversight and Reform, Natural Resources, and Financial Services—also served as the primary committee for a large number of suspension measures.

Suspension motions are debatable for up to 40 minutes. In most cases, a fraction of that debate time is actually used. In the 116<sup>th</sup> Congress, the average amount of time spent considering a motion to suspend the rules was 13½ minutes.

The House adopted nearly every suspension motion considered in 2019 and 2020. Approval by the House, however, did not guarantee final approval in the 116<sup>th</sup> Congress. The Senate agreed to three of the six House joint resolutions and two of the three House concurrent resolutions considered under suspension of the rules. The Senate passed 178 of the 645 House bills initially considered under suspension (28%). The President signed 256 measures into law and vetoed one measure, which was not subject to further congressional action.

This report briefly describes the suspension of the rules procedure, which is defined in clause 1 of House Rule XV, and provides an analysis of measures considered under this procedure during the 116<sup>th</sup> Congress. Figures and one table display statistics on the use of the procedure, including the prevalence and form of suspension measures, sponsorship of measures by party, committee consideration, length of debate, voting, resolution of differences between the chambers, and the final status of legislation. In addition, an **Appendix** illustrates trends in the use of the suspension procedure from the 110<sup>th</sup> through the 116<sup>th</sup> Congresses (2007-2020).

## Contents

Introduction .....	1
House Rule XV (Clause 1) .....	2
Prevalence and Form of Suspension Measures, 116 <sup>th</sup> Congress.....	3
Sponsors of Suspension Measures.....	4
Committee Consideration.....	5
Committee Referral.....	5
Committee Markup and Reporting.....	7
Floor Consideration.....	8
Raising Measures (Day of Week).....	8
Majority and Minority Floor Managers .....	9
Debate and Length of Consideration .....	10
Voting and Passage in the House.....	11
Voice Votes.....	11
Record Votes .....	12
Final Disposition of Measures Considered Under Suspension of the Rules .....	13
Passed by the Senate .....	13
Presidential Action .....	13

## Figures

Figure 1. Suspension Measures Compared to Total Number of Measures Considered on House Floor.....	3
Figure 2. Forms of Measures Considered Under Suspension Procedure .....	4
Figure 3. Suspension Measures by Party of Sponsor .....	5
Figure 4. Suspension Measures by Committee of Primary Jurisdiction.....	6
Figure 5. Total Number of Measures Considered on House Floor, Grouped by Committee of Primary Jurisdiction .....	7
Figure 6. Days of the Week Suspension Measures Were Considered .....	9
Figure 7. Length of Debate Periods for Suspension Measures.....	11
Figure 8. Adoption of Suspension Motions in the House.....	12
Figure A-1. Measures Considered Under Suspension Compared to Measures Considered Under Other Procedures on the House Floor .....	15

## Tables

Table 1. Final Status of Legislation Initially Brought Up Under Suspension .....	13
--	----

## Appendixes

Appendix. Use of Suspension Motions, 110 <sup>th</sup> -116 <sup>th</sup> Congresses .....	15
--	----

## **Contacts**

Author Information..... 15

## Introduction

The House of Representatives has well-established standing rules that govern how bills and resolutions are to be taken up and considered on the floor. However, to expedite legislation receiving floor action, the House may temporarily set aside these rules for measures that are not otherwise privileged for consideration.<sup>1</sup> This can be done by agreeing to a special order of business resolution (special rule) or by adopting a motion to suspend the rules and pass the underlying measure.<sup>2</sup> In general, special rules enable the consideration of complex or contentious legislation, such as major appropriations or reauthorizations, while the suspension of the rules procedure is usually applied to measures that are perceived to have broad bipartisan support and can be approved without floor amendments or extensive debate in the chamber.<sup>3</sup>

Most bills and resolutions that receive floor action in the House are called up and considered under suspension of the rules.<sup>4</sup> The suspension procedure allows non-privileged measures to be raised without a special rule, waives points of order, limits debate, and prohibits floor amendments. Motions to suspend the rules and pass the measure require a two-thirds vote, so the procedure is typically reserved for bills and resolutions that can meet a supermajority threshold.<sup>5</sup>

Decisions to schedule bills for consideration under suspension are generally based on how widely supported the measures are, how long Members wish to debate them, and whether they want to propose floor amendments. These decisions are not necessarily related to the subject matter of the measure. Accordingly, measures brought up under suspension cover a wide range of policy areas but most often address government operations, such as the designation of federal facilities.

This report describes the suspension procedure, which is defined in clause 1 of House Rule XV, and provides an analysis of measures considered under suspension during the 116<sup>th</sup> Congress (2019-2020). **Figures 1-8** display statistical data, including the prevalence and form of suspension measures, sponsors of measures, committee consideration, length of floor debate, voting, and resolution of differences between the chambers.<sup>6</sup> **Table 1** summarizes the final legislative status of measures initially considered in the House under the suspension of the rules.

---

<sup>1</sup> Privileged business has precedence over the regular order of business. Measures and motions that are privileged include general appropriation bills, conference reports, order of business resolutions (special rules), resolutions providing for adjournment, questions of the privileges of the House, and bills returned following a veto by the President. Charles W. Johnson, John V. Sullivan, and Thomas J. Wickham Jr., *House Practice: A Guide to the Rules, Precedents, and Procedures of the House* (Washington: GPO, 2017; hereinafter *House Practice*), ch. 36, pp. 675-676.

<sup>2</sup> The House may also take up and consider non-privileged legislation by unanimous consent or under procedures associated with clause 2 of Rule XV, the House discharge rule. In the 116<sup>th</sup> Congress, the House initially considered 66% of all measures receiving floor action under the suspension of the rules procedure, 12% of all measures receiving floor action were privileged under House rules and precedents, 10% were raised by special rules reported by the Committee on Rules and adopted by the House, 12% were raised by unanimous consent, and no measures were considered under the discharge procedure.

<sup>3</sup> *House Practice*, ch. 53, §2.

<sup>4</sup> The statistics for use of suspension procedures in the 116<sup>th</sup> Congress do not differ in significant ways from those in the 114<sup>th</sup> Congress or 115<sup>th</sup> Congress. See CRS Report R45545, *Suspension of the Rules: House Practice in the 114th Congress (2015-2016)*; and CRS Report R46364, *Suspension of the Rules: House Practice in the 115th Congress (2017-2018)*, by Jane A. Hudiburg.

<sup>5</sup> For additional information on the suspension of the rules procedure, see *House Practice*, ch. 53, pp. 897-905; and CRS Report 98-314, *Suspension of the Rules in the House: Principal Features*, by Elizabeth Rybicki.

<sup>6</sup> Data used in this report were collected from the Congress.gov database, which provided the legislative status of all measures initially considered on the House floor under the suspension of the rules procedure during the 116<sup>th</sup> Congress.

Finally, the **Appendix** depicts the use of the suspension procedure from the 110<sup>th</sup> through the 116<sup>th</sup> Congresses (2007-2020).

## House Rule XV (Clause 1)

The suspension of the rules procedure is established by clause 1 of House Rule XV. Bills, resolutions, House amendments to Senate bills, amendments to the Constitution, conference reports, and other types of business may be considered under suspension, even those “that would otherwise be subject to a point of order ... [or have] not been reported or referred to any calendar or previously introduced.”<sup>7</sup>

In the 116<sup>th</sup> Congress, suspension motions were in order on designated days. Rule XV stated, “The Speaker may not entertain a motion that the House suspend the rules except on Mondays, Tuesdays, and Wednesdays and during the last six days of a session of Congress.”<sup>8</sup> Suspension measures, however, could be considered on other days by unanimous consent or under the terms of a special order of business (special rule) reported by the Committee on Rules and agreed to by the House.<sup>9</sup>

A motion to suspend the rules is a compound motion to suspend the House rules and pass a bill or agree to a resolution. When considering such a motion, the House is voting on the two questions simultaneously. Once recognized, the Member making the motion will say, “Mr. [or Madam] Speaker, I move to suspend the rules and pass \_\_\_\_.”<sup>10</sup> The House rules that are suspended under this procedure include those that “would impede an immediate vote on passage of a measure ... such as ordering the previous question, third reading, recommittal, or division of the question.”<sup>11</sup>

A measure considered under the suspension procedure is not subject to floor amendment. The motion to suspend and pass the measure, though, may provide for passage of the measure in an amended form. That is, the text to be approved may be presented in a form altered by committee amendments or by informal negotiations. Suspension measures that are passed with changes incorporated into the text are passed “as amended.” There are no separate votes on the floor approving such amendments.<sup>12</sup>

Suspension motions are “debatable for 40 minutes, one-half in favor of the motion and one-half in opposition thereto.” However, in most instances, a true opponent never claims half the time, and most speakers come to the floor to express support for the measure. Debate time is controlled by two floor managers, one from each party, who sit on a committee of jurisdiction. The managers make opening statements and may yield increments of the 20 minutes they control to other Members to debate the measure. Although rare, the time for debate on a motion to suspend the rules may be extended by unanimous consent or by resolution.

---

<sup>7</sup> *House Practice*, ch. 53, §2.

<sup>8</sup> U.S. Congress, House, *Constitution, Jefferson’s Manual and the Rules of the House* (hereinafter *House Manual*), 116<sup>th</sup> Cong., 2<sup>nd</sup> sess., 116-177 (Washington: GPO, 2021), §885. In the 117<sup>th</sup> Congress, the House, pursuant to H.Res. 1230, amended its standing rules by striking the language from clause 1(a) of Rule XV that had restricted motions to suspend the rules “except on Mondays, Tuesdays, and Wednesdays and during the last six days of a session of Congress.”

<sup>9</sup> *House Manual*, §887.

<sup>10</sup> *House Manual*, §886a.

<sup>11</sup> *House Practice*, ch. 53, §2.

<sup>12</sup> If the measure considered under the suspension procedure contains different text than the introduced version, the question is on “the motion to suspend the rules and pass the bill [resolution], as amended.”

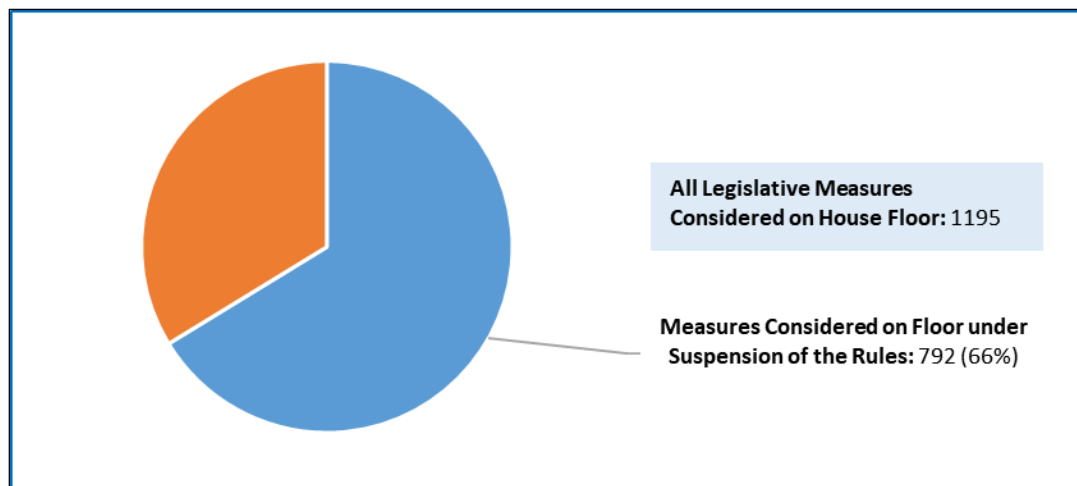
Once debate has concluded, a single vote is held on the motion to suspend the rules and pass the measure. The motion requires approval by “two-thirds of the Members voting, a quorum being present.”<sup>13</sup> Should the vote fall short of the two-thirds required for passage (290, if all Members vote), the measure is not permanently rejected. Before the end of the Congress, the House may consider the measure again under suspension, or the Committee on Rules may report a special rule that provides for floor consideration of the measure.<sup>14</sup>

## Prevalence and Form of Suspension Measures, 116<sup>th</sup> Congress

As illustrated in **Figure 1**, the majority of measures considered on the House floor during the 116<sup>th</sup> Congress were initially called up under the suspension of the rules procedure. Sixty-six percent of all measures that received floor action were initially considered under suspension (792 out of the 1,195), compared to those under the terms of a special rule (10%), unanimous consent (12%), or privileged business (12%).

**Figure 2** displays the form of suspension measures. Most of the measures considered under suspension during the 116<sup>th</sup> Congress (92%) were bills. House bills made up 81% of the suspension total, Senate bills 11%. The remaining measures were House resolutions, House concurrent resolutions, and House joint resolutions. There were no Senate concurrent or joint resolutions considered under suspension of the rules in the 116<sup>th</sup> Congress.

**Figure 1. Suspension Measures Compared to Total Number of Measures Considered on House Floor**  
116<sup>th</sup> Congress (2019-2020)



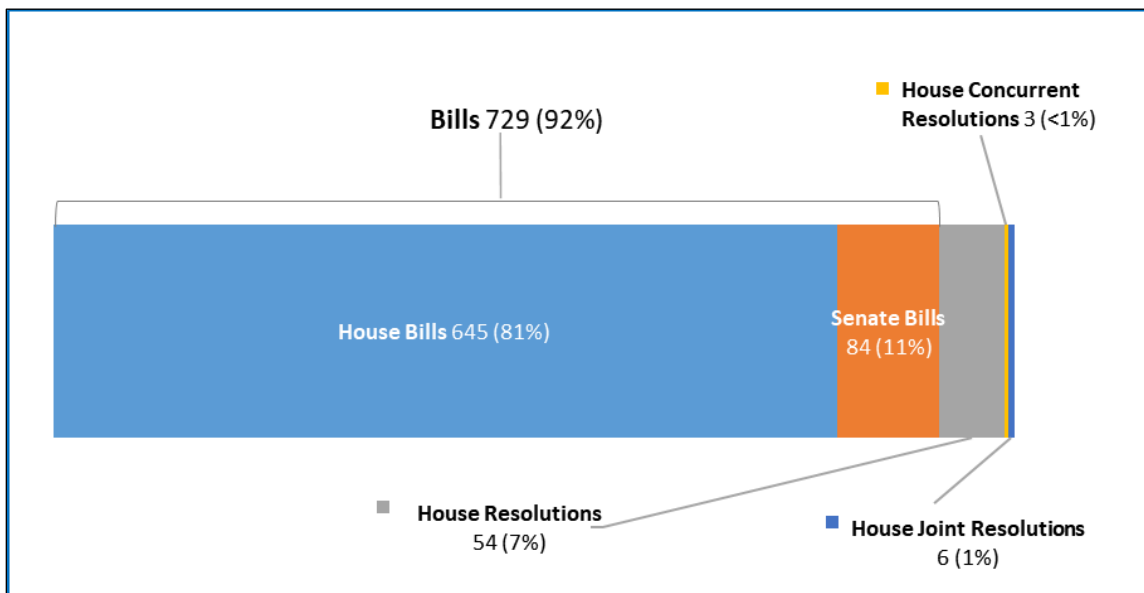
**Source:** CRS analysis of data from Congress.gov.

**Note:** Chart reflects initial consideration of House and Senate bills and resolutions.

<sup>13</sup> *House Manual*, §885.

<sup>14</sup> *House Practice*, ch. 53, §1.

**Figure 2. Forms of Measures Considered Under Suspension Procedure**  
116<sup>th</sup> Congress (2019-2020)



**Source:** CRS analysis of data from Congress.gov.

**Note:** Chart reflects initial consideration of House and Senate bills and resolutions.

## Sponsors of Suspension Measures

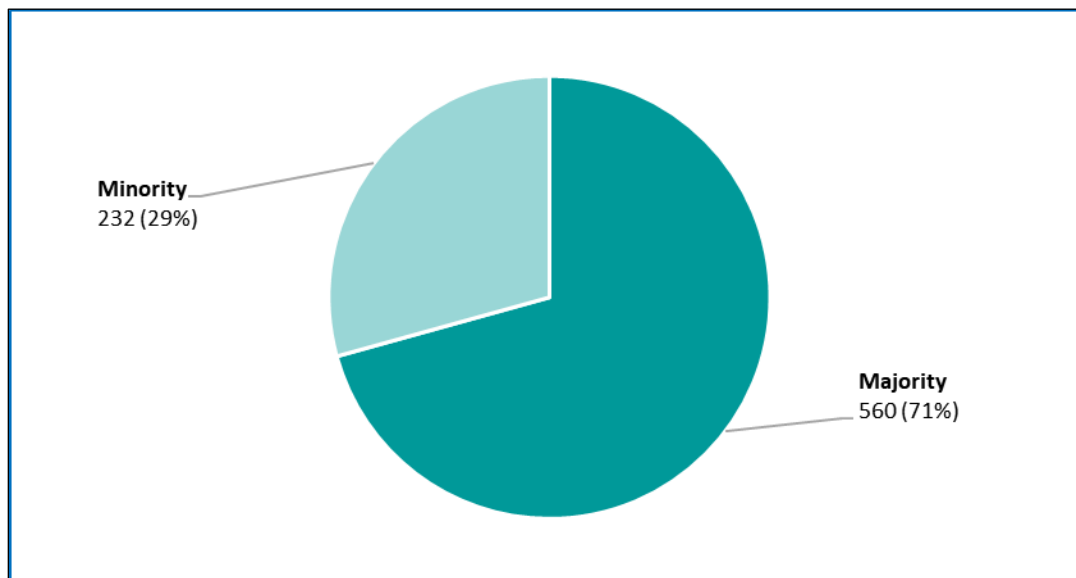
As represented in **Figure 3**, most suspension measures were sponsored by Members of the majority party during the 116<sup>th</sup> Congress. House or Senate majority-party Members sponsored 71% of all bills and resolutions initially considered in the House under suspension, while House majority-party Members sponsored 515 (73%) of the 708 House-originated measures (designated with an H.R., H.Res., H.Con.Res. or H.J.Res. prefix).

However, by a wide margin, suspension is the most common procedure used to consider minority-sponsored legislation in the House. In the 116<sup>th</sup> Congress, 78% of the minority-sponsored measures that were considered on the House floor were raised under the suspension procedure. Members of the House or Senate minority parties sponsored 29% of all suspension measures originating in either chamber, and minority-party House Members sponsored 193 (27%) of the 708 House measures considered under suspension.<sup>15</sup> In contrast, minority-party Members sponsored 16% of legislation originating in either chamber that was subject to different procedures, including privileged business (19 measures) and unanimous consent (32 measures), and 7 measures (1 House bill and 6 Senate joint resolutions) that were considered under the terms of special rules.

<sup>15</sup> In the 116<sup>th</sup> Congress, Democrats were the majority in the House, and Republicans were the majority in the Senate. Thus, the Senate minority-party sponsors belonged to the same party as the House majority, which may have affected the number of minority-sponsored, Senate-originated bills considered in the House. Senate Democrats sponsored 46% (39 bills) of the total number of Senate bills (84) raised and considered under the suspension of the rules procedure.



**Figure 3. Suspension Measures by Party of Sponsor**  
116<sup>th</sup> Congress (2019-2020)



**Source:** CRS analysis of data from Congress.gov.

**Note:** Chart reflects initial consideration of House and Senate bills and resolutions.

## Committee Consideration

### Committee Referral

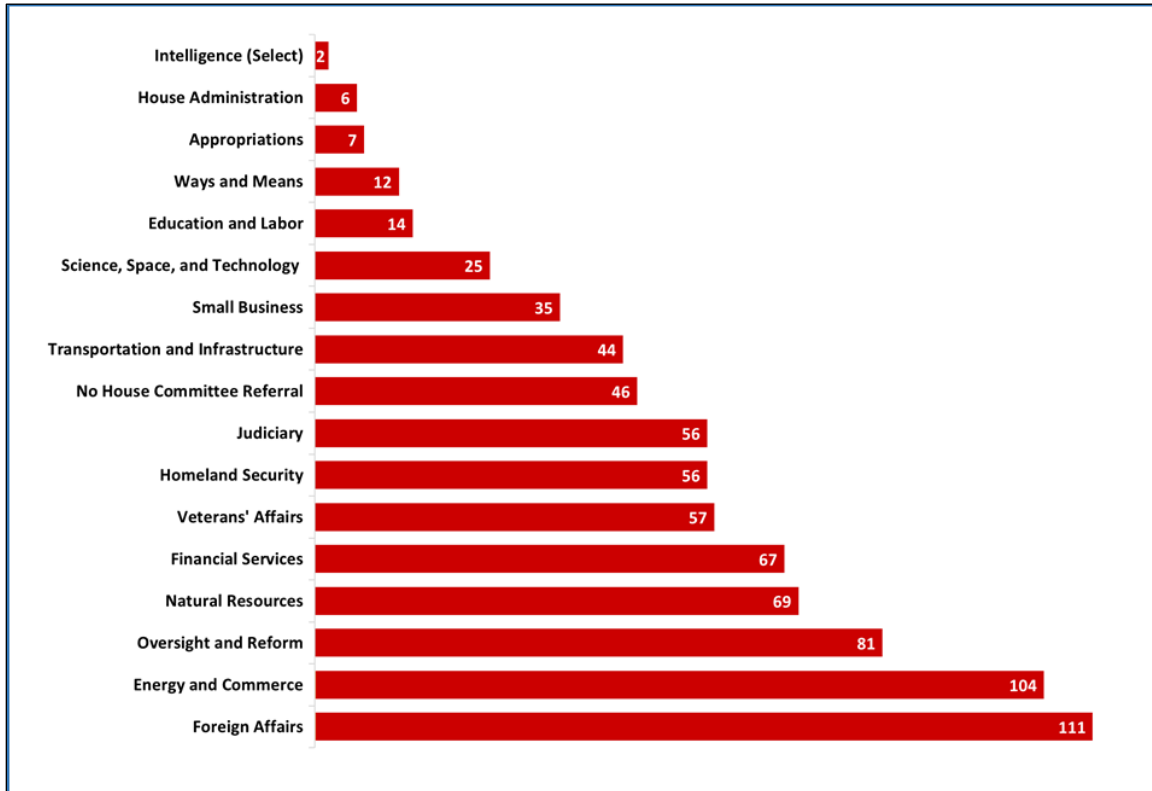
Most suspension measures are referred to at least one House committee before their consideration on the chamber floor. In the 116<sup>th</sup> Congress, 746 out of the 792 suspension measures considered (94%) were previously referred to House committees. The 46 measures that were not referred were Senate bills that were “held at the desk” prior to consideration.<sup>16</sup>

Measures may be referred to multiple House committees before receiving floor action. When a bill or resolution is referred to more than one House committee, the Speaker will designate one committee as primary, meaning it is the committee exercising jurisdiction over the largest part of the measure. Generally, the chair of the committee of primary jurisdiction works with majority party leadership to determine if and when a measure should be considered under suspension.

The House Committee on Foreign Affairs was the committee of primary jurisdiction for the plurality of measures considered under suspension in the 116<sup>th</sup> Congress: 111, or 14%, of the total number of suspension measures considered. **Figure 4** shows the number and percentage of measures brought up under suspension from each House committee of primary jurisdiction.

<sup>16</sup> When a Senate-passed bill is received in the House and “held at the desk,” it is not referred to a committee. The measure may remain at the desk or instead be called up on the floor by suspension of the rules or by unanimous consent.

**Figure 4. Suspension Measures by Committee of Primary Jurisdiction**  
116<sup>th</sup> Congress (2019-2020)



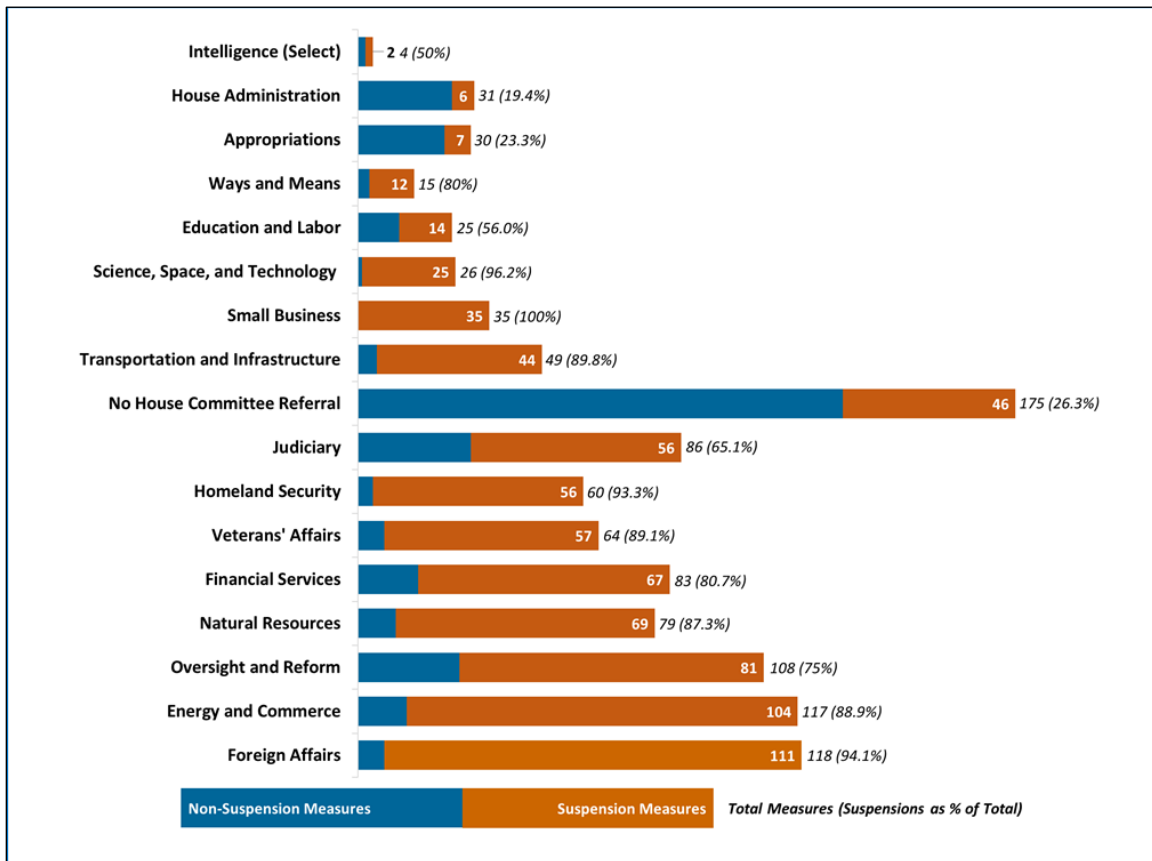
**Source:** CRS analysis of data from Congress.gov.

**Notes:** Chart reflects initial consideration of House and Senate bills and resolutions.

For most House committees, the majority of their referred measures that reached the floor were raised under the suspension procedure. In the 116<sup>th</sup> Congress, the exceptions included the Committee on House Administration, which had most of its measures considered by unanimous consent, and the Committees on Budget and Appropriations, which had all or most of their measures considered pursuant to special rules, respectively. The Select Intelligence Committee had two bills considered pursuant to special rules and two considered via the suspension procedure. Armed Services was the primary committee for six bills considered by the House; three were considered by unanimous consent and three were considered under the terms of special rules. For the other committees, suspension measures ranged from 56% to 100% of the total number of the committee's measures receiving House floor action (**Figure 5**).

As suspension motions require a two-thirds majority for passage, House committees that handle less contentious subjects tend to have more of their measures considered under the suspension procedure in comparison to other committees. In the 116<sup>th</sup> Congress, high-suspension committees included Small Business (100% of measures receiving floor action); Science, Space, and Technology (96.2%); Foreign Affairs (94%); and Homeland Security (93%).

**Figure 5. Total Number of Measures Considered on House Floor, Grouped by Committee of Primary Jurisdiction**  
116<sup>th</sup> Congress (2019-2020)



**Source:** CRS analysis of data from Congress.gov.

**Note:** Chart displays House and Senate bills and resolutions that were initially considered on the House floor under the suspension procedure as sorted by the committee of primary jurisdiction.

## Committee Markup and Reporting

While suspension measures are not subject to floor amendments, committees may recommend amendments to legislative texts during markup meetings or through informal negotiations. The motion to suspend the rules can include these proposed changes when a Member moves to suspend the rules and pass the measure “as amended.” In the 116<sup>th</sup> Congress, 468 suspension measures (59% of the total) were considered “as amended,” meaning that the text considered pursuant to the suspension motion differed from the measure’s introduced text.

Clause 2 of House Rule XIII requires that a measure reported by a House committee must be accompanied by a written report. Otherwise, it is not placed on a calendar of measures eligible for floor consideration.<sup>17</sup> However, the written report requirement is among those rules suspended under the suspension procedure. Thus, a measure may be called up on the floor under suspension of the rules even if a committee never ordered it to be reported or wrote an accompanying

<sup>17</sup> *House Practice*, ch. 11, §28.

committee report.<sup>18</sup> Instead, the motion to suspend the rules discharges the committee and brings the legislation directly to the House floor.

In the 116<sup>th</sup> Congress, 509 (64%) suspension measures were ordered to be reported by House committees. Of this number, 302 were reported with accompanying House committee reports. Eighty-seven measures that did not have House reports did have Senate reports (of these, 22 were Senate bills that did not receive House committee referral), and 403 measures had no written reports from either chamber (51% of the total number of suspension measures).

## Floor Consideration

### Raising Measures (Day of Week)

In the 116<sup>th</sup> Congress, motions to suspend the rules were regularly in order on Mondays, Tuesdays, and Wednesdays or on the last six days of a session of Congress pursuant to Rule XV. However, suspension motions could be considered on other days by unanimous consent or under the terms of a special rule reported by the Committee on Rules and agreed to by the House.<sup>19</sup> Such special rules included a provision stating, “It shall be in order at any time on the legislative day of \_\_\_ for the Speaker to entertain motions that the House suspend the rules as though under clause 1 of rule XV.”

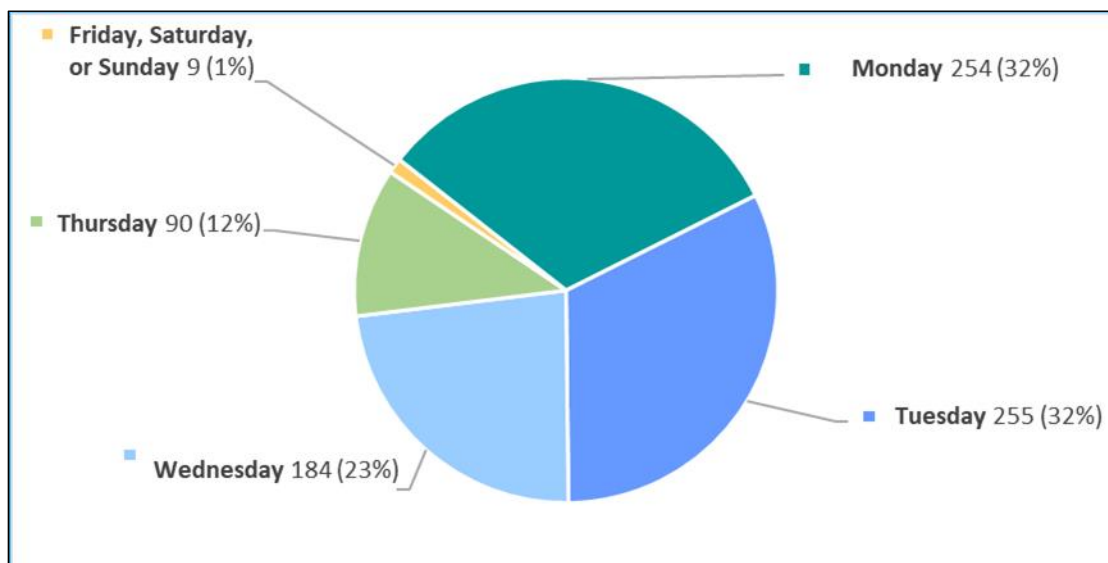
As displayed in **Figure 6**, in the 116<sup>th</sup> Congress, most suspension measures were considered on Mondays (254 measures) or Tuesdays (255 measures), followed by Wednesdays (184) and Thursdays (90). In addition, seven suspension measures were considered on Fridays, while a Saturday and a Sunday each featured one suspension measure. The two weekend measures responded to arguably time-sensitive issues: emergency coronavirus supplemental funding (H.R. 6201) and a potential lapse in government funding (H.J.Res. 110).

---

<sup>18</sup> In regular practice, a House committee will vote to order a measure reported (almost always favorably), then the committee will often prepare a written report and file it on the floor. However, a motion to suspend the rules and pass a measure may occur without a measure being ordered reported or after the measure is ordered reported but without the filing of an accompanying committee report. The motion to suspend the rules, if adopted, discharges the committee from the further consideration of the measure and places it directly on the floor. *House Practice*, ch. 53, §2.

<sup>19</sup> In the 117<sup>th</sup> Congress, the House, pursuant to H.Res. 1230, amended its standing rules to eliminate the language of clause 1(a) of Rule XV that stated, “The Speaker may not entertain a motion that the House suspend the rules except on Mondays, Tuesdays, and Wednesdays and during the last six days of a session of Congress.” This rule change enables measures to be raised and considered under the suspension of the rules procedure on any day in which the House is in session during the 117<sup>th</sup> Congress, provided that the presiding officer recognizes a Member to make the motion to suspend the rules.

**Figure 6. Days of the Week Suspension Measures Were Considered**  
116<sup>th</sup> Congress (2019-2020)



**Source:** CRS analysis of data from Congress.gov.

**Notes:** Chart reflects initial consideration of House and Senate bills and resolutions.

## Majority and Minority Floor Managers

Pursuant to Rule XV, suspension measures are “debatable for 40 minutes, one-half in favor of the motion and one-half in opposition thereto.”<sup>20</sup> In practice, there is rarely a true opponent to a motion to suspend the rules, and the time is divided between two floor managers, usually one from each party, who both favor the motion.<sup>21</sup> The floor managers each control 20 minutes of debate. The managers may be their parties’ sole representatives for or against the motion, or they may yield increments of the 20-minute allotment to other Members.

Typically, the relevant committee chairs and ranking members select the majority and minority floor managers for particular bills and resolutions. These managers may be the measure’s sponsor, the chair or ranking member of the measure’s committee of primary jurisdiction, or another committee member.

In the 116<sup>th</sup> Congress, the measure’s sponsor served as the majority manager on 135 (17%) of the suspension measures receiving floor action. The committee chairs managed 308 (39%) of the measures.

The majority floor manager makes the motion to suspend the rules by stating, “Mr. [or Madam] Speaker, I move to suspend the rules and pass the bill [or resolution] \_\_\_\_.” The Speaker (or Speaker pro tempore) responds, “Pursuant to the rule, the gentleman [woman] from [state] and the gentleman [woman] from [state] each will control twenty minutes.” The majority and

<sup>20</sup> Rule XV, clause 1(c), *House Manual*, §891, p. 690.

<sup>21</sup> In the event that a true opponent claims the time in opposition, the time is often divided among three managers with the opponent controlling 20 minutes and the majority and minority proponents controlling 10 minutes. However, in the 116<sup>th</sup> Congress, during debate on H.R. 3702, the true opponent yielded 10 minutes to the minority manager, and the majority manager controlled 20 minutes.

minority managers then, in turn, make opening statements regarding the measure using the 20 minutes each controls.

If the majority and minority managers have secured additional speakers, the speakers generally alternate between the parties within the 40-minute limit. Occasionally, floor managers controlling time on a motion to suspend the rules cede their control to other Members during debate. By unanimous request, the other Member then controls the remaining amount of time allotted.

At the start of the debate period, the majority manager may request “unanimous consent that all Members may have five legislative days in which to revise and extend their remarks and add extraneous materials on this bill [resolution].” This request enables “general leave” statements to be inserted into the *Congressional Record*.

## **Debate and Length of Consideration**

Suspension measures are limited to 40 minutes of debate under Rule XV. However, if there are time gaps between speakers or procedural interruptions, such as a vote on a motion to adjourn, the period between the start of the first speaker’s remarks and the conclusion of debate may exceed 40 minutes.<sup>22</sup> The statistics displayed in **Figure 7** show the length of consideration of suspension measures as documented in Congress.gov, not the accumulated length of statements, as kept by official timekeepers in the chamber.<sup>23</sup>

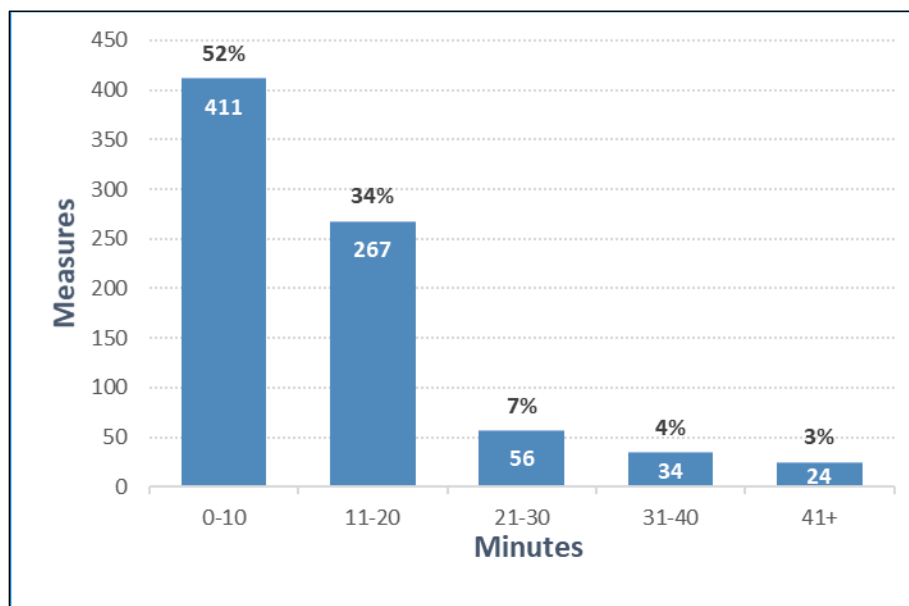
In the 116<sup>th</sup> Congress, the average length of consideration on a motion to suspend the rules was 13½ minutes, and more than half of the measures considered had debate periods of 10 minutes or less. Thus, while overall debate is limited to 40 minutes under the rule, on most suspension measures, a fraction of that time was actually expended during consideration. Twenty-four measures, however, had consideration periods that exceeded 40 minutes as a result of unanimous consent requests for additional time to debate or due to unspecified procedural delays.

---

<sup>22</sup> “Pending a motion to suspend the rules, only one motion to adjourn is in order, unless the failure of a quorum is demonstrated.” *House Practice*, ch. 53, §5.

<sup>23</sup> For the purposes of this report, the length of consideration is the difference in the time between a measure being called up under suspension and the conclusion of debate, as noted in Congress.gov.

**Figure 7. Length of Debate Periods for Suspension Measures**  
116<sup>th</sup> Congress (2019-2020)



**Source:** CRS analysis of data from Congress.gov.

**Notes:** Chart reflects initial consideration of House and Senate bills and resolutions.

## Voting and Passage in the House

House leaders generally choose measures for suspension that are likely to achieve the two-thirds majority threshold for passage. Thus, almost all suspension measures were passed or adopted by the House in the 116<sup>th</sup> Congress.

The House passed, via motions to suspend the rules, 643 of the 645 House bills that were initially considered under suspension. Two House bills did not receive the requisite supermajority. One bill was later considered and approved under the terms of a special rule. The other bill did not return to the floor and therefore did not pass the House.<sup>24</sup>

The House agreed to all but one of the House resolutions (54) and concurrent resolutions (3) that were considered under suspension.<sup>25</sup> The House approved five out of the six House joint resolutions. The House joint resolution that did not receive the requisite supermajority was H.J.Res. 27, the Further Additional Continuing Appropriations Act, 2019. The House approved each of the 84 Senate bills initially considered under the suspension procedure.

## Voice Votes

Most suspension motions are agreed to in the House by voice vote, which is the chamber's default method of voting on most questions. In 2019 and 2020, this method of voting led to the final approval of 77% (608) of the motions to suspend the rules and pass the measures (see **Figure 8**).

<sup>24</sup> H.R. 6782 (116<sup>th</sup> Congress) failed under suspension and was not reconsidered. H.R. 549 (116<sup>th</sup> Congress) subsequently passed in the House under a special rule.

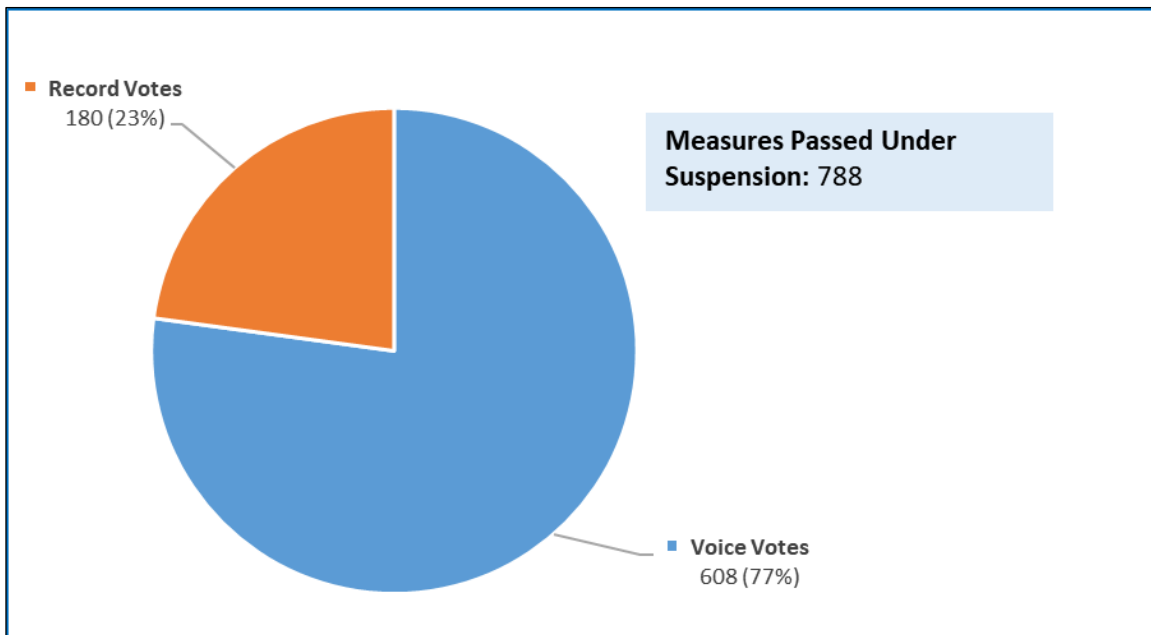
<sup>25</sup> H.Res. 79 (116<sup>th</sup> Congress) failed under suspension and was not reconsidered.

## Record Votes

After the initial voice vote, Members triggered an eventual record vote (often called a roll call vote) on 184 (23%) of the suspension measures considered in the 116<sup>th</sup> Congress. This was done by demanding the “yeas and nays,” objecting to the vote “on the grounds that a quorum is not present,” or, in two cases, demanding a recorded vote.<sup>26</sup> In all but four instances, the chair elected to postpone the vote to a later period within two additional legislative days pursuant to clause 8 of House Rule XX.<sup>27</sup>

In the 116<sup>th</sup> Congress, 180 suspension motions were adopted by record vote, and four motions to suspend the rules were defeated by record votes. The defeat of a motion to suspend the rules, however, does not necessarily kill the legislation. The Speaker may choose to recognize a Member at a later time to make another motion to suspend the rules and pass the bill, or the House may consider the measure pursuant to a special rule reported by the Committee on Rules. Accordingly, one of the initially unsuccessful measures was later called up and passed under the terms of a special rule. The other three measures did not receive further House consideration after their initial rejection under the suspension of the rules procedure.

**Figure 8. Adoption of Suspension Motions in the House**  
116<sup>th</sup> Congress, 2019-2020



**Source:** CRS analysis of data from Congress.gov.

<sup>26</sup> Voice votes ascertain the approval or disapproval on a question, while record votes also list the names of Members and how they voted. Record votes are often referred to as roll call votes. There are three types of record votes: (1) those that are triggered by a sustained point of order alleging that a quorum is not present, in which case the yeas and nays are automatically ordered without the need for a sufficient second; (2) those that are triggered by a demand for the yeas and nays with the concurrence of one-fifth present; and (3) those that are triggered by a demand for a recorded vote with the concurrence of one-fifth of a quorum—44 Members. See CRS Report 95-563, *The Legislative Process on the House Floor: An Introduction*, by Christopher M. Davis; CRS Report 98-228, *House Voting Procedures: Forms and Requirements*, by Jane A. Hudiburg; and CRS Report 98-988, *Voting and Quorum Procedures in the House of Representatives*, coordinated by Elizabeth Rybicki.

<sup>27</sup> *House Manual*, Rule XX, clause 8(a), §1030.



**Note:** Chart reflects initial consideration of House and Senate bills and resolutions.

## Final Disposition of Measures Considered Under Suspension of the Rules

### Passed by the Senate

Although suspension measures generally receive broad support, measures that receive the requisite two-thirds majority in the House are not guaranteed passage in the Senate. As noted in **Table 1**, in the 116<sup>th</sup> Congress, the Senate agreed to three of the six House joint resolutions and two of the three House concurrent resolutions considered under suspension of the rules. The Senate passed 178 of the 645 House bills initially considered under suspension (28%).

Of the 267 suspension measures that passed the House and Senate, 43 entered a “resolution of differences” stage between the chambers. Twenty-seven House bills and 16 Senate bills were subject to an amendment exchange process. (No measure initially considered under suspension of the rules had bicameral differences resolved in a conference committee.) Three of these measures—H.R. 925, H.R. 550, and H.R. 2486—did not have their differences resolved because the House and Senate did not agree on the final text as amended by both chambers. Five bills, initially passed in the House under suspension, did not enter the “resolving differences” stage, and were not enacted into law, because either the House or the Senate did not take up the opposite chamber’s amendments.<sup>28</sup>

### Presidential Action

Of the measures initially considered under suspension during the 116<sup>th</sup> Congress, 172 House bills, 82 Senate bills, and 3 House joint resolutions were presented to President Trump for signature or veto. The President signed 256 of these measures, vetoing one Senate bill, so a total of 253 bills and 3 joint resolutions were enacted into law (see **Table 1**).<sup>29</sup>

**Table 1. Final Status of Legislation Initially Brought Up Under Suspension**  
116<sup>th</sup> Congress, 2019-2020

Form of Measure	Number of Measures	Passed House	Passed Both Chambers	Presented to President	Vetoed	Achieved Final Passage/ Became Law
House Bill	645	644 <sup>a</sup>	178	172	0	172
Senate Bill	84	84	84	82	1	81
House Joint Resolution	6	5	3	3	0	3
House Concurrent Resolution	3	3	2	N/A	N/A	2

<sup>28</sup> These bills were S. 178, S. 1811, H.R. 1044, H.R. 2610, and H.R. 4764.

<sup>29</sup> President Trump vetoed S. 906, Driftnet Modernization and Bycatch Reduction Act. The House and Senate did not attempt to override the veto, so the bill was not enacted into law.

---

<b>Form of Measure</b>	<b>Number of Measures</b>	<b>Passed House</b>	<b>Passed Both Chambers</b>	<b>Presented to President</b>	<b>Vetoed</b>	<b>Achieved Final Passage/ Became Law</b>
Senate Concurrent Resolution	0	0	0	N/A	N/A	0
House Resolution	54	53	N/A	N/A	N/A	53
<b>Total</b>	<b>792</b>	<b>789</b>	<b>267</b>	<b>257</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>311</b>

---

**Source:** CRS analysis of data from Congress.gov.

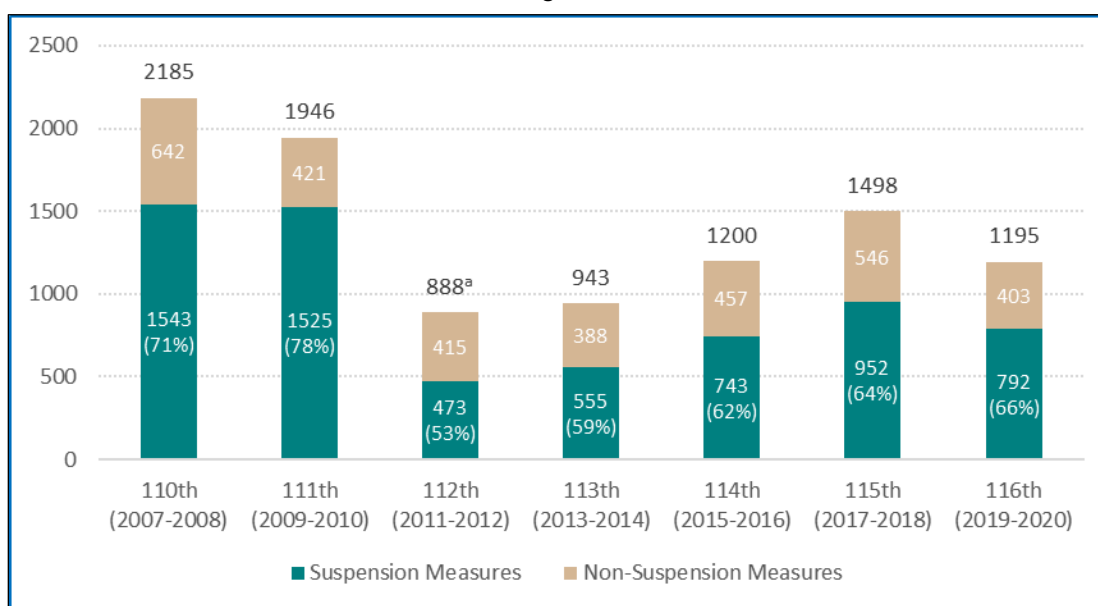
**Note:**

- a. Of the 792 measures initially considered under suspension of the rules, the House passed 643 House bills under the suspension procedure and 1 under the terms of a special rule.

## Appendix. Use of Suspension Motions, 110<sup>th</sup>-116<sup>th</sup> Congresses

**Figure A-1. Measures Considered Under Suspension Compared to Measures Considered Under Other Procedures on the House Floor**

110<sup>th</sup>-116<sup>th</sup> Congresses, 2007-2020



**Sources:** Congress.gov and the following reports by Christopher M. Davis: CRS Report R40829, *How Legislation Is Brought to the House Floor: A Snapshot of Recent Parliamentary Practice in the 111th Congress (2009-2010)*; CRS Report R43039, *How Legislation Is Brought to the House Floor: A Snapshot of Parliamentary Practice in the 112th Congress (2011-2012)*; CRS Report R43912, *How Legislation Is Brought to the House Floor: A Snapshot of Parliamentary Practice in the 113th Congress (2013-2014)*; and CRS Report R44734, *How Legislation Is Brought to the House Floor: A Snapshot of Parliamentary Practice in the 114th Congress (2015-2016)*.

**Notes:** Chart reflects initial consideration of House and Senate bills and resolutions. At the start of the 112<sup>th</sup> Congress (2011-2012), the House Republican Conference amended its conference rules to generally prohibit the Republican leader from scheduling for consideration under suspension of the rules any bills or resolutions that recognize individuals, groups, institutions, anniversaries of events, or periods of time. This action likely reduced the number of measures considered under the suspension procedure as well as the total number of measures considered on the House floor during this and subsequent Congresses. See CRS Report R43539, *Commemorations in Congress: Options for Honoring Individuals, Groups, and Events*, coordinated by Jacob R. Straus.

### Author Information

Jane A. Hudiburg  
Analyst on Congress and the Legislative Process

---

## **Disclaimer**

This document was prepared by the Congressional Research Service (CRS). CRS serves as nonpartisan shared staff to congressional committees and Members of Congress. It operates solely at the behest of and under the direction of Congress. Information in a CRS Report should not be relied upon for purposes other than public understanding of information that has been provided by CRS to Members of Congress in connection with CRS's institutional role. CRS Reports, as a work of the United States Government, are not subject to copyright protection in the United States. Any CRS Report may be reproduced and distributed in its entirety without permission from CRS. However, as a CRS Report may include copyrighted images or material from a third party, you may need to obtain the permission of the copyright holder if you wish to copy or otherwise use copyrighted material.