

An hourglass graphic with a globe in the top bulb and another globe in the bottom bulb. The hourglass is light blue and the globes are a darker blue. The top bulb is partially filled with a dark blue liquid, which is dripping into the narrow neck. The bottom bulb is also partially filled with a dark blue liquid, which is dripping into the neck. The hourglass is centered on the page.

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Report 98-827

Debate and Motions on the House Floor: Allocation of Time

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March 20, 2007

Abstract. One of the most defining aspects of consideration of measures in the House and Committee of the Whole is that time is always controlled. There is virtually no circumstance under which a Member speaks on the floor without first knowing in advance how long has been allocated. Ranging from one minute or less to 60 minutes, debate limitations exist on all aspects of floor consideration. This report addresses time limitations associated with selected House floor procedures.

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Summary

One of the most defining aspects of consideration of measures in the House and Committee of the Whole is that time is always controlled. There is virtually no circumstance under which a Member speaks on the floor without first knowing in advance how long has been allocated. Ranging from one minute or less to 60 minutes, debate limitations exist on all aspects of floor consideration.

This report, one of a series on legislative process, addresses time limitations associated with selected House floor procedures. Actions that are not debatable, such as the motion to adjourn and the motion to rise, are not included.

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Table I. Debate Limitations in the House and Committee of the Whole

| Parliamentary Situation | Time Allocated | Comments |
|---|---|--|
| Suspension of the rules | 40 minutes maximum, equally divided between majority and minority Members | If ranking committee Member supports the measure, another Member who opposes it can claim control of half time |
| Special rule | 60 minutes maximum, unless previous question not ordered | 30 minutes customarily yielded to minority floor manager for debate only |
| Motion to discharge a measure | 20 minutes, equally divided between proponent and opponent | |
| Conference report | 60 minutes, equally divided between proponent and opponent | If minority floor manager supports the report, another Member may claim time, dividing it 20 minutes each for those two and the majority floor manager |
| Motion to instruct conferees | 60 minutes, equally divided between proponent and opponent | Prerogative of minority party Member; if committee chair and ranking member support the motion, another Member may control one-third of time |
| Motion to recommit | 10 minutes, unless majority floor manager asks that time be extended to one hour | Time equally divided between proponent and opponent |
| Amendments offered in Committee of the Whole (including pro forma amendments) | 5 minutes, unless special rule allocates differently | Time cannot be reserved |
| Questions of personal privilege | 60 minutes | |
| Questions of privileges of the House | 60 minutes, equally divided between proponent and opponent | |
| Special orders | 5 minutes until midnight; 60 minutes until midnight on Tuesday, or midnight (whichever comes first) on other days | Total time limited to 2 hours for majority and minority |
| Morning Hour debate | 30 minutes per side; each Member reserves up to 5 minutes | |
| Point of order/Parliamentary inquiry | Members may be heard at discretion of, and time controlled by, presiding officer | May be made in House or Committee of the Whole |

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