



## Committee on Rules of the House of Representatives

### 1. WHAT IS THE COMMITTEE ON RULES?

The Committee on Rules controls how legislation comes to the floor of the House of Representatives. Because the House of Representatives does not have unlimited debate, a bill may not be considered in the House unless the Rules Committee has first written the "rule" laying out the specifics of how that bill will be debated on the floor. (Legislation may also be brought up under "Suspension of the Rules," but this is supposed to be for minor, non-controversial bills. Suspension limits debate to 40 minutes, does not allow amendments, and requires a two-thirds vote of those present for passage.)

### 2. WHY IS IT SO POWERFUL?

Whatever party is in the majority of the House will hold roughly two-thirds of the seats on the Rules Committee (currently split 9-4). This ensures there is little possibility of the majority party losing a committee vote. The Rules Committee is sometimes called "The Speaker's Committee" because it works in tandem with the majority leadership. The Chairman and other majority members of the committee are usually hand-picked by the Speaker for their loyalty to majority goals.

### 3. WHAT, EXACTLY, IS A RULE?

The rule governs the structure of the debate on the floor in several ways. First, it sets any limits on the number and types of allowed amendments. It divides the time allowed to speak on the bill and amendments and assigns that time to the majority and the minority. In some cases, the rule may also "deem" a vote for the rule to be a vote for some separate issue, such as authorizing the existence of a federal agency in an appropriations bill that normally only enacts spending levels.

### 4. WHAT ARE THE FOUR DIFFERENT KINDS OF RULES?

- *Open Rule* – allowing any Member to offer any amendment to the legislation.
- *Modified Open Rule* – allows any Member to offer amendments that meet a threshold, such as being printed in the Congressional Record. It can also limit the time for debate of amendments.
- *Structured Rule* – Members submit draft amendments, and the Rules Committee chooses those amendments that may be offered on the floor. A structured rule will typically set the amount of time for debate on amendments and divide the time between the majority and the minority.
- *Closed Rule* – only allows debate on amendments the Rules Committee approves for debate.

### 5. WHY DOES IT MATTER WHO SERVES ON THE COMMITTEE?

The Committee on Rules sets the terms of debate for the House and acts as a gatekeeper, controlling what legislation is debated and how that legislation is debated. It is often used by Leadership to enforce party unity. A Rules Committee majority consisting of House Members not aligned with the Speaker has the potential to weaken the Speaker and House Leadership's power to control the debate terms.