

CRS Report for Congress

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Procedural Distinctions between the House and the Committee of the Whole

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The Committee of the Whole House on the State of the Union, generally referred to as the Committee of the Whole, is a parliamentary device provided for under House rules to allow the House to operate as a committee on which every Member of the House serves. Through this practice, dating to colonial and English antecedents, the House is able to realize a procedural benefit from having established two somewhat different sets of rules to govern consideration of various types of measures. Measures placed on the Union Calendar must be considered in the Committee of the Whole before the House officially completes action on them, although the committee may also be used to consider other major bills as well.

Some of the chief distinctions between consideration in the House operating as the House and consideration in Committee of the Whole are shown in the table presented below. See [<http://www.crs.gov/products/guides/guidehome.shtml>] for more information on legislative process.

In most cases, the House resolves into the Committee of the Whole under authority granted to the Speaker in a special rule in accordance with House Rule XVIII, clause 2(b). Rule XVIII, clause 2 (a) also provides that for certain privileged measures, such as general appropriation bills, the majority floor manager may move that the House resolve into Committee of the Whole to consider the measure. The Committee of the Whole is used to facilitate consideration of legislation because its procedural differences may be used to permit more members to offer amendments and participate in the debate on a measure than is normally possible when a measure is considered in the House under the hour rule. When the Committee of the Whole finishes its consideration of a measure, it rises and reports back to the House, recommending that the bill be passed by the House with whatever amendments the committee has approved. For more on the Committee of the Whole, see CRS Report RS20147, *Committee of the Whole: An Introduction*.

Table 1. Procedural Distinctions between the House and Committee of the Whole

House	Committee of the Whole
Established by the Constitution	Established anew by the House for consideration of each specific measure
Mace raised	Mace lowered
Presided over by the Speaker of the House	Presided over by a chairman of the Committee of the Whole (appointed by the Speaker)
Operates under the one-hour rule with no separate procedure for consideration of amendments	Typically operates under the terms of a special rule with amendments considered under the five-minute rule
Quorum established under the Constitution as a majority of Members (218 with no vacancies)	Quorum established by House rules as 100 Members
1/5 of the Members present (44 with a minimum quorum) considered a sufficient second to trigger a recorded vote	25 Members considered a sufficient second to trigger a recorded vote
Motion for the previous question is in order	Motion for the previous question is not in order, although a motion to limit or end debate may be offered
Motion to recommit is in order	Motion to recommit is not in order
Motion to reconsider is in order	Motion to reconsider is not in order
Routine business of the House is in order	Routine business of the House is not in order