



House Legislative Procedures: Published Sources of Information

Betsy Palmer

Analyst on the Congress and Legislative Process

December 8, 2006

Congressional Research Service

7-5700

www.crs.gov

98-309

The House of Representatives has published information about its current procedures in three primary sources: a House manual, a book on House procedure written for everyday use, and a set of House precedents. The predecessors to these compilations also remain valuable for some purposes. These documents can enable Members and staff to study the House's rules and precedents and to gauge how they are likely to apply in various circumstances. See <http://www.crs.gov/products/guides/guidehome.shtml> for more information on legislative process.

During the first session of every Congress, the House publishes the *House Rules and Manual*, formally entitled *Constitution, Jefferson's Manual, and Rules of the House of Representatives*. Each clause of the rules is followed by notes, prepared by the House parliamentarian, that summarize the most important precedents and interpretations relating to that clause. The *Rules and Manual* also contains a summary of recent changes in the House's rules and provisions of law that establish expedited procedures by which the House can act on certain kinds of measures. The volume begins with the annotated text of the Constitution and excerpts from Thomas Jefferson's *Manual of Parliamentary Practice*. It is distributed to Members when published.

In 1997 and again in 2003, the House published *House Practice: A Guide to the Rules, Precedents and Procedures of the House*, by Wm. Holmes Brown, and Charles W. Johnson, both former parliamentarians of the House. In more than 900 pages, this book explains all aspects of the House's procedures in considerable detail. The book is organized alphabetically by topic, beginning with "Adjournment" and ending with "Withdrawal." *House Practice* is the successor to *Procedure in the House of Representatives*, published in 1982 and with *Supplements* published in 1985 and 1987, and to *Cannon's Procedure in the House of Representatives*, last published in 1963.

The precedents established by the House and its presiding officers since the mid-1930s are in the process of being published. To date, 16 volumes have been released. The first nine are entitled *Deschler's Precedents of the United States House of Representatives*; the seven latest volumes are called *Deschler-Brown Precedents*, in recognition of the contributions made to the House by Mr. Brown and his predecessor, Lewis Deschler. Additional volumes in this series will be published as they are completed.

This collection includes an exhaustive compilation of procedural rulings and interpretations, accompanied by summaries of the events producing them. They often also include relevant excerpts from the *Congressional Record* and its predecessors. Precedents from earlier periods are found in the 11-volume set of *Hinds' and Cannon's Precedents of the House of Representatives*, published in part in 1907 and in part in 1936. Both collections of precedents are organized topically, beginning with the first meeting of the House at the beginning of a new Congress and continuing through the various stages of the legislative process.

Hinds', Cannon's, Deschler's, and Deschler-Brown's precedents are available at the Legislative Resource Center and at the La Follette Congressional Reading Room (202 Madison Building, Library of Congress).

For most purposes, the most effective research strategy likely is to begin with an examination of *House Practice*, followed by the *House Rules and Manual*, and then *Deschler's* and *Deschler-Brown Precedents*. The parliamentarian and his assistants welcome direct inquiries (at 225-7373) from Members and staff.

Several other published sources of information also can prove useful:

- The rules adopted by the House's committees are compiled and published for each Congress in *Rules Adopted by the Committees of the House of Representatives*, a committee print of the House Rules Committee.
- *The Rules of the Republican Conference* and the *Preamble and Rules of the Democratic Caucus*, adopted at the beginning of each Congress, include some party rules that are relevant to the House's legislative proceedings. They are available from the respective parties.

For additional information on all these documents, see CRS Report RL30787, *Parliamentary Reference Sources: House of Representatives*.

Author Contact Information

Betsy Palmer
Analyst on the Congress and Legislative Process
bpalmer@crs.loc.gov, 7-0381