



CRS Report for Congress

Sponsorship and Cosponsorship of Senate Bills

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A Senator who introduces a bill or other measure in the Senate is called its *sponsor*. Several Senators may submit a bill, but the first-named Senator is the chief sponsor, the others are considered *cosponsors*. For more information on legislative process, see [<http://www.crs.gov/products/guides/guidehome.shtml>].¹

Sponsorship of a Bill

Senators introduce bills in the Senate chamber by handing them to a clerk at the table below the dais. The chief sponsor's signature must appear on the measure when it is introduced.

Senators typically sponsor bills they support. Cosponsors almost always add their names to a bill to indicate their support. A Senator may introduce a bill as a courtesy, such as legislation proposed by the President. Such bills may be designated as introduced "by request," and this is indicated when the introduction of the bill is noted in the *Congressional Record*.

Once a bill has been handed to the clerk, it becomes the property of the Senate and cannot be withdrawn. If a Senator desires that no action be taken on the bill, the Senator may by unanimous consent request that action on the bill be indefinitely postponed.

As noted above, only one Senator can be the sponsor of a bill. Sometimes, a bill may become popularly known by the names of more than one Senator, for example, the 1995 Kassebaum-Kennedy health care bill. Only the first named Senator is the chief sponsor, in this case, Senator Kassebaum. Others identified, even though they may be seen both in Congress and by the general public as equally responsible for the bill, are, according to formal Senate procedure, cosponsors. The strategy of associating legislation with the names of more than one Senator is often useful in gaining support across partisan or ideological ranks.

A Senate committee may report legislation it has drafted itself as an *original bill*. In such a case, there is no sponsor and there are no cosponsors. When the legislation is

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reported and a final draft printed, a Senator brings the draft to the clerk on the chamber floor, the draft is assigned a bill number, and the name of the Senator who brought the legislation forward is indicated on the bill. That Senator typically is the committee chairman, but he is not, under Senate procedure, the sponsor. For example, the Senate Committee on Foreign Relations reported an original bill in September 1997, on the issue of administration of national *au pair* programs. The legislative language was drafted, marked up, and reported by the committee. Because the chairman of the Foreign Relations Committee presented the legislation to the bill clerk, the bill indicated, “Mr. Helms, from the Committee on Foreign Relations, reported the following original bill....” But, under Senate procedure, Senator Helms was not the sponsor of the bill.

Cosponsorship of a Bill

When a Senator introduces a bill, he or she commonly attaches to the bill a form with the names of cosponsors. Before a bill is formally introduced, a Senator becomes a cosponsor by contacting the office of the chief sponsor and requesting that his or her name be added. Initial cosponsors can be added until the bill is presented to the clerk. There is no limit to the number of cosponsors that can be added to a bill.

After a bill is introduced, if a Senator wishes to cosponsor a measure, he or she may request unanimous consent on the Senate floor to be added as a cosponsor. A Senator may also contact the chief sponsor’s office and ask to be included, or may add his or her name by calling the party cloakroom. However, a Senator’s name can only be formally added to a bill by unanimous consent on the chamber floor.

The names of additional cosponsors are added to the printed version of the bill if there is a subsequent printing of it. However, under the regulations of the Joint Committee on Printing, a bill cannot be reprinted solely for the purpose of adding cosponsors. Additional cosponsors also are listed in the *Congressional Record* and in Congress’ online Legislative Information System. Unless agreed to by unanimous consent, a bill, upon introduction, may be held at the desk for a day, but no longer, for the purpose of adding one or more cosponsors.

The number of cosponsors that a bill attracts is usually seen as a measure of support, and Senators and aides use a variety of techniques to encourage colleagues to sign on. One of the most common is the “Dear Colleague” letter, a mailing to some or all Senators soliciting support for a bill. The letter is so named because it nearly always begins with the greeting “Dear Colleague.”

No Senate rules or any formal procedures govern “Dear Colleague” letters. They are, in effect, advertisements for the sponsoring Senator’s (or Senators’) legislation. Typically, the letters briefly state the issue the legislation addresses, the major components of the measure, the likely impact of the legislation, and an appeal to join as a cosponsor. Almost always, the letters carry the name and phone number of a staff aide to contact to become a cosponsor of the measure (see CRS Report RL 34636, ‘*Dear Colleague*’ Letters: Current Practices, by Jacob R. Straus).