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Trends in Commemorative Legislation, 93rd Through 115th Congresses

Since the Continental Congress, commemorative legislation has been used to express public gratitude for distinguished contributions to American history and society; extol the virtues of individuals, groups, and causes; and perpetuate the remembrance of significant events. Today, commemorative legislation continues to serve as a formal mechanism to record recognition for posterity and a way for Members of Congress to connect with constituent groups.

Congress generally uses one of six types of legislation to commemorate individuals, groups, and events. As shown in **Figure 1**, these types are postage stamps; commemorative coins; congressional Gold Medals; commemorative observances, including federal holidays; memorials; and building naming, including post offices.

Figure 1. Types of Commemorative Legislation



Source: U.S. Mint, “Doolittle Tokyo Raiders,” at <https://www.usmint.gov/coins/coin-medal-programs/medals/doolittle-tokyo-raiders>; and U.S. Mint, “American Veterans Disabled for Life Silver Dollar,” at <https://www.usmint.gov/coins/coin-medal-programs/commemorative-coins/american-veterans-disabled-for-life>.

Introduction and Consideration

Each Congress, hundreds of commemorative measures are introduced in the House and Senate. **Table 1** shows the number of commemorative measures introduced and, depending on the form of legislation, either enacted or agreed to in each Congress from the 93rd Congress (1973-1974) through the 115th Congress (2017-2018).

Table 1. Commemorative Legislation, 93rd-115th Congresses

Congress	Total	Enacted/Agreed to
93	633	44
94	759	49
95	852	57
96	540	97
97	650	148
98	808	224
99	938	296
100	928	281
101	799	243
102	711	203
103	616	154
104	232	86
105	335	95
106	482	197
107	657	215
108	843	337
109	966	455
110	1,302	684
111	1,331	689
112	768	319
113	798	313
114	893	341
115	1,178	426
Total	18,019	5,953

Source: Bush School of Government & Public Service and CRS data analysis of Congress.gov data on commemorative legislation.

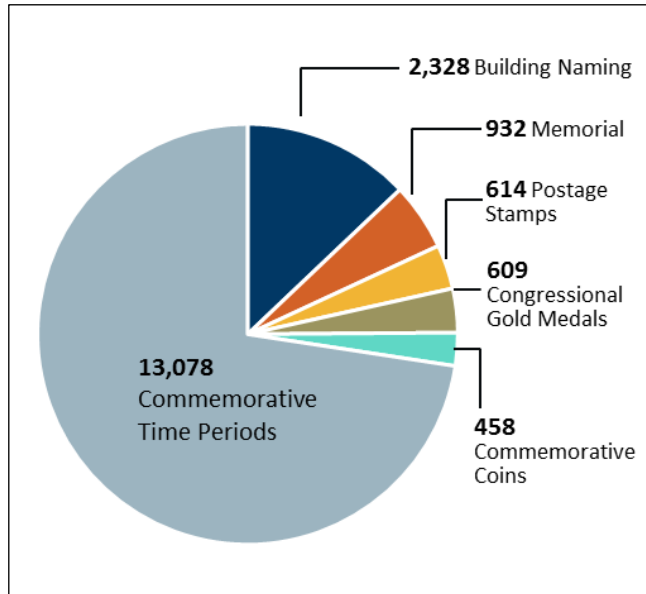
As shown in **Table 1**, the 111th Congress had the most commemorative measures introduced (1,331), followed by the 110th Congress (1,302). Conversely, the 104th Congress had the fewest (232), followed by the 105th Congress (335). For measures agreed to (simple and concurrent resolutions) or enacted (bills and joint resolutions), the 111th Congress (689) and the 110th Congress (684) had the most measures,

while the 93rd Congress (44) and the 94th Congress (49) had the fewest.

Volume of Commemorative Legislation

With more than 18,000 commemorative measures introduced since the 93rd Congress, some categories of commemorative legislation are more frequently introduced than others. **Figure 2** shows the breakdown in the total number of measures introduced for each type of commemorative legislation between the 93rd and 115th Congresses.

Figure 2. Commemorative Legislation Introduced by Type, 93rd-115th Congresses



Source: Bush School of Government & Public Service and CRS data analysis of Congress.gov data on commemorative legislation.

Naming Buildings

In each Congress, many bills are introduced to name a post office or other federal building in honor or in memory of locally esteemed individuals, deceased elected officials, fallen military personnel, and celebrities. An act of Congress is required to name a post office or other federal building after an individual. In total, more than 2,300 building naming bills have been introduced since the 93rd Congress. Of those, 1,346 were introduced to name post offices, 614 to name federal buildings, 283 to name courthouses, and 226 to name Veterans Affairs facilities.

Postage Stamps

Each year, the U.S. Postal Service (USPS) issues commemorative stamps to celebrate persons, anniversaries, and historical and cultural phenomena. For example, USPS has issued stamps for Lena Horne, President John F. Kennedy, the Chinese Lunar New Year, and Star Trek. The USPS issues these stamps at its own statutory discretion and operates the program with the intent of it being a profit-making enterprise. Legislation to direct USPS to issue a stamp to commemorate specific people and events is sometimes introduced, as well. In total, 614 measures have been introduced to request certain stamp designs since the 93rd Congress, but only 1% have been enacted or agreed to. These are generally to create a semi-postal stamp—a stamp

sold at a premium to raise money for a designated cause (e.g., the Save the Vanishing Species Semipostal; P.L. 111-241).

Commemorative Coins

Commemorative coins are produced by the U.S. Mint pursuant to an act of Congress. These coins celebrate and honor American people, events, and institutions. Since 1996, only two commemorative coins can be minted per year, although there is no statutory limit on the number that can be authorized in a particular Congress. Since the 93rd Congress, 458 commemorative coin bills have been introduced, and 36 (8%) have been enacted.

Congressional Gold Medals

Congressional Gold Medals are generally considered to be the most distinguished award that Congress bestows. As a result, numerous bills are introduced each Congress to honor individuals and groups in this way. Since the 93rd Congress, 609 Congressional Gold Medal bills have been introduced, with 48 (8%) enacted into law honoring individuals (e.g., Arnold Palmer) and groups (e.g., World War II members of the Civil Air Patrol).

Memorials and Commemorative Works

On many occasions, Congress has authorized the creation of monuments and memorials to commemorate historic figures, events, and movements. These include memorials both inside and outside the District of Columbia. Since the 93rd Congress, 932 memorial establishment or recognition bills have been introduced, with 43 enacted (5%).

Commemorative Observances

Recognizing a time period is a common use of commemorative legislation. These can include permanent recognitions, such as a federal holiday (e.g., Labor Day) or a patriotic or national observance (e.g., Flag Day), or a temporary recognition of a day, week, or month. Since the 93rd Congress, 13,078 measures have been introduced to recognize a time period, with 2,774 (21%) enacted or agreed to.

For more information on commemorative options for Congress, see CRS Report R43539, *Commemorations in Congress: Options for Honoring Individuals, Groups, and Events*. For more information on specific commemorations, see CRS Report RS20221, *Commemorative Postage Stamps: History, Selection Criteria, and Revenue Potential*; CRS In Focus IF10262, *Commemorative Coins: An Overview*; CRS Report R45101, *Congressional Gold Medals: Background, Legislative Process, and Issues for Congress*; CRS Report R41658, *Commemorative Works in the District of Columbia: Background and Practice*; CRS Report R45741, *Memorials and Commemorative Works Outside Washington, DC: Background, Federal Role, and Options for Congress*; and CRS Report R44431, *Commemorative Days, Weeks, and Months: Background and Current Practice*.

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