



January 23, 2026

Commemorating the Anniversaries of Natural Disasters: Past Practices and Considerations for Congress

Each Congress, some Members typically introduce legislative measures to recognize, support, honor, or acknowledge specific dates and anniversaries. While many commemorative measures seek to recognize or celebrate a specific time period, some measures propose to commemorate the anniversary of a natural disaster and to recognize the impacted communities and first responders.

August 29th of this year will mark five years since the day Hurricane Katrina made landfall along the Gulf Coast. Tragically, 1,822 lives were lost in the states of Louisiana, Mississippi, Florida, Georgia, and Alabama.

... This resolution honors and remembers the lives lost on that fateful day. It also salutes the dedication of those who responded in our darkest hour and those who have stood by our sides during our recovering and rebuilding. We simply could not have done it without the thousands who answered the call and recognized our need.

—Rep. Anh “Joseph” Cao, *Congressional Record*, July 30, 2010, p. E1525.

Natural Disaster Resolution Data

For the purposes of this In Focus, natural disasters are defined as “any hurricane, tornado, storm, flood, high water, wind-driven water, tidal wave, tsunami, earthquake, volcanic eruption, landslide, mudslide, snowstorm, drought, fire, or other catastrophe in any part of the United States which causes, or which may cause, substantial damage or injury to civilian property or persons” (42 U.S.C. §5195(a)(2)).

CRS used these terms to search Congress.gov for measures that proposed to commemorate an anniversary of any natural disaster—domestic or foreign—between 1973, when Congress.gov begins full-text search capabilities, and 2025.

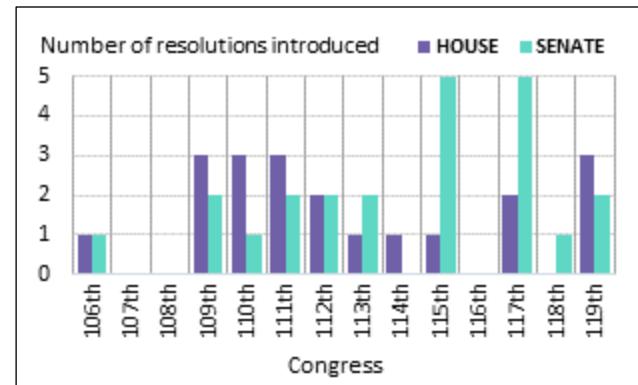
Overall, CRS evaluated more than 2,000 pieces of legislation introduced between the 94th Congress (1973–1974) and the first session of the 119th Congress (2025) containing the specified terms and identified 43 introduced measures that proposed to commemorate the anniversary of a natural disaster, of which 20 were agreed to by the House and/or Senate. CRS did not identify any legislation introduced to commemorate a natural disaster prior to the 106th Congress (1999–2000). Additionally, the analysis did

not include in the dataset commemorative resolutions that solely honored or recognized individuals or groups who may be associated with natural disasters, such as first responders, survivors, and victims.

Introduction of Measures

Since 1999, measures to commemorate the anniversary of a natural disaster have been introduced in 11 of 14 Congresses. **Figure 1** shows the total number of resolutions introduced each Congress between 1999 and 2025.

Figure 1. Introduced Natural Disaster Anniversary Commemorations, 1999–2025



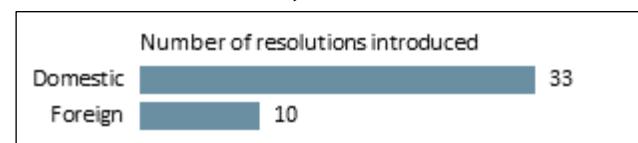
Source: CRS analysis of data on commemorative legislation from <https://www.congress.gov>.

Domestic v. Foreign Disaster

Natural disasters can affect any congressional district or state. Most commemorative measures introduced to recognize the anniversary of a natural disaster focus on domestic occurrences, including in the U.S. territories. About 23% of resolutions focus on the anniversary of a natural disaster that occurred outside of the United States.

Figure 2 shows the breakdown between resolutions that propose to commemorate the anniversary of natural disasters within the United States and those that occurred in a foreign country.

Figure 2. Natural Disaster Commemorations by Location of Occurrence, 1999–2025

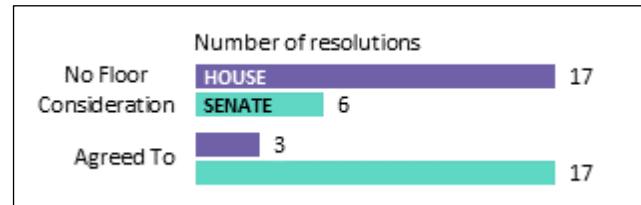


Source: CRS analysis of data on commemorative legislation from <https://www.congress.gov>.

Consideration of Measures

The House of Representatives and the Senate have different rules for the introduction and consideration of date-specific commemorative legislation. In the House, Rule XII, clause 5, prohibits the introduction and consideration of date-specific commemorative legislation. Further, the House Majority Leader's Legislative Protocols, which provide additional guidance to the majority leader when scheduling commemorative legislation, currently prohibit the majority leader from scheduling such legislation under "Suspension of the Rules" procedures. Unlike in the House, no Senate rules exist that would prohibit the introduction or consideration of commemorative measures. For a historical analysis of commemorative trends in Congress, including commemorative time period legislation, see CRS Report R46644, *Commemorative Legislation in Congress: Trends and Observations, 93rd Through 115th Congresses*.

Figure 3. Resolutions to Commemorate Disaster Anniversaries, 1999-2025



Source: CRS analysis of data on commemorative legislation from <https://www.congress.gov>.

Note: Status of 119th Congress legislation through 12/31/2025.

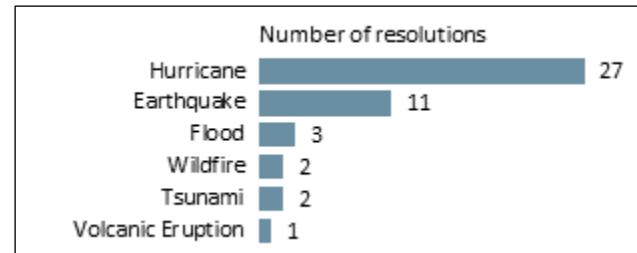
Figure 3 shows the disposition of resolutions that were agreed to in the House and Senate between 1999 and December 31, 2025. Since House Rule XII, clause 5 was adopted, the House has agreed to three disaster anniversary commemorative measures. Two of the resolutions were agreed to in the 110th Congress (2007-2008)—H.Res. 217, about the 50th anniversary of the flooding of Celilo Falls, OR; and H.Res. 1376, commemorating the 80th anniversary of the 1928 Okeechobee, FL, hurricane—and one (H.Res. 1583) was agreed to during the 111th Congress (2009-2010), to recognize the fifth anniversary of Hurricane Rita. Since the 111th Congress, the House has not taken up, or held a floor vote on, a resolution to commemorate a natural disaster anniversary. The Senate does not have a similar rule or limitation on the consideration of this type of commemorative legislation.

Types of Natural Disasters Commemorated

Of the 43 measures introduced, three proposed to commemorate two types of natural disasters. For example, S.Res. 107 (117th Cong.) commemorated the 10th anniversary of the 2011 earthquake and tsunami in Japan. These resolutions were counted twice, once for each disaster. Additionally, some natural disasters have been proposed for commemoration in multiple introduced measures. For example, over the years, Members have introduced at least five measures commemorating the anniversary of Hurricane Katrina (one-year anniversary, five-year anniversary, and three to commemorate the 20-year anniversary).

Figure 4 shows the types of natural disasters proposed to be commemorated and the number of times each was included in a measure from 1999 to 2025.

Figure 4. Types of Natural Disasters Proposed to be Commemorated, 1999-2025



Source: CRS analysis of data on commemorative legislation from <https://www.congress.gov>.

Domestic natural disasters proposed to be commemorated included

- hurricanes (Galveston, TX [1900]; Okeechobee, FL [1928]; Audrey [1957]; Hugo [1989]; Katrina [2005]; Rita [2005]; Harvey [2017]; Irma [2017]; and Maria [2017]);
- earthquake (Alaska; 1964);
- floods (Celilo Falls, OR [1957]; Souris River, Minot, ND [2011]);
- wildfires (Mann Gulch, MT [1949]; Rodeo-Chediski, AZ [2002]); and
- volcanic eruption (Mount St. Helens, WA [1980]).

Foreign natural disasters proposed to be commemorated include the 2005 earthquake in Pakistan; the 2010 earthquake in Haiti; the 2011 earthquake and tsunami in Japan; and Hurricane Matthew (2016) in Haiti.

Observations

Measures that propose to commemorate the anniversary of a natural disaster are generally not as common as other types of commemorative legislation. For example, hundreds of measures to recognize a specific time period are introduced each Congress. For more information about commemorative legislation, see CRS Report R48065, *Congressional Recognition of Commemorative Days, Weeks, and Months: Background and Current Practice*.

Measures that propose to commemorate the anniversary of a natural disaster can be introduced to provide House or Senate recognition of a natural disaster's impact, give Members the opportunity to recognize the impact on their constituent communities, and honor affected constituents. Member offices may also consider introducing resolutions honoring or recognizing individuals or groups who may be associated with natural disasters, such as first responders, survivors, victims, and others.

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