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# EXPLAINER

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## **A Look at Suspension Bills in the 117th Congress: Second Session**

**Last updated February 3, 2023**

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### **Introduction**

The [House of Representatives' rules](#) govern the chamber's daily operations, from what members can wear on the House floor to how they consider bills.<sup>1</sup> Members frequently use the “motion to suspend the rules” to fast-track legislation that has broad support and little need for prolonged debate. When the House considers a bill under suspension of the rules, the House suspends its normal rules and procedures controlling legislative debate and votes, allowing the bill to pass quickly. The suspension process' parameters mean that broadly bipartisan legislation is typically best suited for it. However, other factors may make a bill more likely to move via suspension.<sup>2</sup> In 2022, House leaders chose to bring most bills to the floor using the suspension process; accordingly, most bills passed in the House did so under suspension. Three hundred-one of the 350 bills and resolutions that passed the House last year used the expedited “suspension bill” process, making it attractive to lawmakers seeking to advance their legislation.

This explainer discusses various trends around suspension bills that received a recorded vote<sup>3</sup> during the 117th Congress' second session, covering calendar year 2022. Understanding these trends regarding the bills' sponsors and topics may help stakeholders better anticipate the types of bills likely to advance in the House, and which members may have the most success in passing bills via this fast-track process. Additional information regarding methodology follows this report's conclusion. For details regarding suspension bills during the 117th Congress' first session (2021), see [A Look at Suspension Bills in the 117th Congress](#).

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<sup>1</sup> To learn about recent changes to the House's rules for the 118th Congress, see [“Navigating New Rules in a New Congress,”](#) an explainer from the Congressional Progressive Caucus Center, Demand Progress, and Public Citizen.

<sup>2</sup> While suspension bills are inherently bipartisan as they require two-thirds of voting members' support, majority party members sponsor most suspension bills.

<sup>3</sup> A recorded vote is a vote that a member casts and that is recorded for posterity. This is different from a “voice vote,” in which members in attendance vote on a measure aloud by saying “aye” or “nay” and, unless a member requests a recorded vote, there is no public record of how individual members voted. Some suspension bills pass via voice vote, but recorded votes were much more common during the 117th Congress as some members used them to slow floor proceedings.

## How the Suspension Process Works

House Rule XV, Clause 1 establishes the [motion to suspend the rules](#), which allows a bill to advance to a floor vote without lawmakers adopting a rule<sup>4</sup> to govern the bill's consideration and stipulate matters like debate time or amendments. However, there are some constraints when using the suspension process.

First, members can only use the motion to suspend the rules on Mondays, Tuesdays, and Wednesdays, as well as during the last six days of a session of Congress. The Speaker of the House can also recognize this motion on other days by unanimous consent<sup>5</sup> or by special order of business. Second, the motion to suspend the rules is debatable for 40 minutes, equally divided between the majority and the minority party. In contrast, floor debate for a bill considered under a rule lasts one hour. Third, lawmakers cannot amend the bill considered under suspension. However, the member moving to suspend the rules can offer amendments as part of their motion.

Lastly, the suspension procedure requires at least two-thirds of the members voting to approve the bill, meaning that bills considered under suspension are usually noncontroversial and broadly bipartisan, such as bills to rename a post office. If the suspension bill fails to get a two-thirds vote, the House can consider the bill again at a later date under suspension of the rules or under a rule. Regardless of whether a bill passes the House under suspension or under a rule, it must pass the Senate and the President must sign it for it to become law.

## Rates of Passage for Suspension Bills

Suspension bills make up most of the bills the House votes on and almost always pass. According to [our analysis](#), during the 117th Congress' second session, 356 bills and resolutions received a recorded vote in the House. Suspension bills accounted for 306, or around 86 percent, of those recorded votes. These examples represent an increase from the 117th Congress' [first session](#) when suspension bills represented about 71 percent of all recorded votes. Of the suspension bills considered in 2022, 98.4 percent (301 bills) passed the House. Only five suspension bills failed to garner the two-thirds support required to pass. Forty-six percent (141 bills) of suspension bills were signed into law by President Biden.

While the suspension process is unique to the House, it can be used to advance bills that originated and passed in the Senate. Of the 306 suspension bills voted on during the 117th Congress' second session, 75 (nearly 25 percent) originated in the Senate and 231 formed in the House. Almost all 75 Senate-originated suspension bills passed and became law, except for [S. 4003, the Law Enforcement De-Escalation Training Act of 2022](#). While the Senate-approved bill did not earn sufficient votes to pass under

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<sup>4</sup> In the House, the Rules Committee acts as a traffic cop, determining which legislation will receive a vote and setting the parameters for debate on that legislation (e.g., how long debate will last). The resolution that sets those parameters is referred to as "the rule." The rule governing debate for a specific piece of legislation must be voted on before that legislation can receive a vote.

<sup>5</sup> When a member asks for unanimous consent, they are asking for the body to allow them to do something. Their request will be granted unless another member objects.

suspension, the House later considered it under a rule. As a result, it passed and became law. Of the 231 suspension bills that originated in the House, 67 (29 percent) became law. The following sections examine the 231 suspension bills that originated in the House and their sponsors.

### Suspension Bill Analysis by their Sponsor’s Party

House leadership decides which bills to consider under suspension. Several factors inform those decisions, including issues in the news; members’ requests for their bills’ consideration; unexpected events, like natural disasters that require a federal response; and more. As Democrats controlled the House during the 117th Congress, most suspension bills considered and passed were sponsored by a Democratic lawmaker. Seventy-two percent (166 bills) of the 231 suspension bills that received a recorded vote and originated in the House were sponsored by Democrats, while Republicans led 28 percent. Moreover, Democrats sponsored 67 percent (45 bills) of the 67 House-originated bills signed into law. Republicans sponsored 33 percent (22 bills).

In 2022, Democrats were more successful than Republicans in having their bills considered under suspension and signed into law. Democrats also sponsored a greater share of suspension bills in 2022 (72 percent) than in 2021 (69 percent). However, Democratic-sponsored suspension bills were more likely to be signed into law in 2021 compared to 2022. Democrats sponsored 78 percent of enacted suspension bills in 2021 and just 67 percent in 2022. The table below (Table 1) compares the percentages of Democratic and Republican suspension bills considered on the floor and enacted in 2021 and 2022.

**Table 1**

<b>SUSPENSION BILLS CONSIDERED IN 2021 AND 2022, BY SPONSORS’ RACE/ETHNICITY</b>			
<b>Race/Ethnicity</b>	<b>Percentage of congressional representation</b>	<b>Percentage of all considered suspension bills (2022)</b>	<b>Percentage of all considered suspension bills (2021)</b>
White	72%	68%	66%
Black	13%	18%	20%
AAPI	4%	3%	6%
Latino	10%	12%	9%
MENA	2%	1%	2%
Native American	1%	0.4%	1%

Passing bills is an important responsibility for all lawmakers, but it is especially critical for vulnerable incumbents and freshman lawmakers seeking to demonstrate their legislative successes to their districts. For example, the Democratic freshman class for the 117th Congress consisted of 19 lawmakers, or almost 9 percent of their caucus, and accounted for around 10 percent of the Democratic-sponsored suspension bills—roughly proportional to their share of the caucus. In contrast, the 32 Democratic members holding what the Democratic Congressional Campaign Committee deems [the most competitive seats](#) made up 14 percent of their caucus but accounted for 30 percent of the Democratic-sponsored suspension bills. It is possible that House Democratic leadership prioritized bills that members in competitive districts sponsored for the suspension process to afford them legislative wins to promote in their districts. Those members' successes demonstrate that a bill's sponsor, their party, and their individual characteristics—in this case, their seat's competitiveness—can correlate strongly with their bills' prospects using the suspension process. We further discuss the relationship between members' characteristics and their bills' movement under suspension.

### **Suspension Bill Analysis by their Sponsor's Race and Ethnicity**

While Congress is an overwhelmingly white institution, lawmakers from diverse backgrounds have successfully passed bills under suspension. Overall, the share of the House that various racial and ethnic groups represent is roughly proportional to the number of suspension bills lawmakers within those groups passed in 2022, with some exceptions.<sup>6</sup>

White lawmakers made up about 72 percent of House members in 2022 and sponsored 68 percent of the suspension bills that originated in the House and received a recorded vote—an increase of two percentage points from 2021. Meanwhile, Black lawmakers made up around 13 percent of House members but sponsored around 18 percent of suspension bills—a larger share than their representation in the House but two percentage points less than in 2021. Lawmakers from Asian American and Pacific Islander (AAPI) communities made up around 4 percent of House members and sponsored around 3 percent of 2022's suspension bills, three percentage points less than in 2021. Native American lawmakers made up 1 percent of House members and sponsored less than half a percent of the suspension bills passed in 2022. Latino lawmakers made up 10 percent of House members and sponsored 12 percent of suspension bills, three more percentage points than the previous year. Finally, lawmakers from Middle Eastern and North African (MENA) communities made up 2 percent of House members and sponsored around 1 percent of 2022's suspension bills, a decrease of one percentage point from 2021.

The table below (Table 2) compares the percentage of congressional representation by race and ethnicity and the percentage of all suspension bills considered in 2021 and 2022.

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<sup>6</sup> Some lawmakers identify with more than one racial and ethnic group.

**Table 2**

<b>DEMOCRATIC AND REPUBLICAN SUSPENSION BILLS CONSIDERED AND ENACTED IN 2021 AND 2022</b>				
<b>Party</b>	<b>Percentage of all considered suspension bills (2022)</b>	<b>Percentage of enacted suspension bills (2022)</b>	<b>Percentage of all considered suspension bills (2021)</b>	<b>Percentage of all considered suspension bills (2021)</b>
Democratic	72%	67%	69%	78%
Republican	28%	33%	31%	22%

### **Suspension Bill Analysis by Sponsors' Caucuses**

#### ***Congressional Black Caucus, Congressional Hispanic Caucus, and Congressional Asian Pacific American Caucus***

Congress has hundreds of caucuses that focus on a variety of issues. Some of the largest and most active caucuses are the Congressional Black Caucus (CBC), the Congressional Hispanic Caucus (CHC), and the Congressional Asian Pacific American Caucus (CAPAC), all of which have Democratic members only.<sup>7</sup> The share of Democratic-led suspension bills that lawmakers in these caucuses sponsored was nearly proportional to their share of the Democratic Caucus in 2022.

More specifically, the CBC's 56 members made up a quarter of House Democrats in 2022 and sponsored nearly 25 percent of Democratic-led suspension bills, four percentage points less than in 2021. The CHC's 34 members represented around 15 percent of House Democrats and sponsored just under 14 percent of Democratic-led suspension bills, four percentage points more than in 2021. The 70 CAPAC members comprised close to 32 percent of House Democrats and sponsored around 29 percent of Democratic-led suspension bills. This represents a significant increase (22 percentage points) compared to 2021, when CAPAC members sponsored just 7 percent of Democratic-led suspension bills. Table 3 compares CBC, CHC, and CAPAC representation in the Democratic Caucus with their number of Democratic suspension bill sponsors in 2021 and 2022.

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<sup>7</sup> CAPAC membership extends beyond lawmakers from the AAPI community and includes lawmakers from different racial and ethnic backgrounds. Some lawmakers belong to more than one of the aforementioned organizations.

**Table 3**

<b>SUSPENSION BILLS SPONSORED BY CBC, CHC, AND CAPAC MEMBERS IN 2021 AND 2022</b>			
<b>Caucus</b>	<b>Percentage of representation in Democratic caucus</b>	<b>Percentage of Democratic-led suspension bills (2022)</b>	<b>Percentage of Democratic-led suspension bills (2021)</b>
CBC	25%	25%	29%
CHC	15%	14%	10%
CAPAC	32%	29%	7%

***Ideological Caucuses***

Ideological caucuses work to advance goals aligned with a shared political philosophy. In 2022, the Congressional Progressive Caucus (CPC) and the New Democrat Coalition (NDC) represented two of the most significant ideological caucuses in the majority party. [The CPC](#) consisted of 99 Democratic members (45 percent of House Democrats). According to their website, the CPC stands “for progressive policies that prioritize working Americans over corporate interests, fight economic and social inequality, and advance civil liberties.” [The NDC](#) also consists of 99 Democratic members (45 percent of House Democrats) and identifies as “forward-thinking Democrats who are committed to pro-economic growth, pro-innovation, and fiscally responsible policies.” Some members belong to both caucuses.

Despite CPC and NDC representing the same share of Democratic members, NDC saw slightly more success in advancing suspension bills in 2022. CPC members sponsored 40 percent of Democratic-led suspension bills, while NDC members sponsored 47 percent, a five percent decrease for CPC but a four percent increase for NDC compared to 2021. The table below (Table 4) compares the rates at which the House considered CPC and NDC bills under suspension in 2021 and 2022.

**Table 4**

<b>SUSPENSION BILLS SPONSORED BY CPC AND NDC MEMBERS IN 2021 AND 2022</b>			
<b>Caucus</b>	<b>Percentage of representation in Democratic caucus</b>	<b>Percentage of Democratic-led suspension bills (2022)</b>	<b>Percentage of Democratic-led suspension bills (2021)</b>
CPC	45%	40%	45%
NDC	44%	47%	43%

Again, House leadership uses the motion to suspend the rules at their discretion. As such, the discussion above regarding large ideological caucuses concerns the Democratic party only, as Democrats controlled the House in 2022. For the sake of comparison, it is instructive to examine suspensions in the 115th Congress, when Republicans last controlled the House. During the 115th Congress, the Freedom Caucus and the Tuesday Group, known more commonly now as the Republican Governance Group (RGG), were well-known and active Republican caucuses. The [Freedom Caucus](#), which advocates “for more conservative spending and policy ideals in the House,” made up 15 percent of House Republicans but accounted for just 7 percent of Republican-sponsored suspension bills, according to [our analysis](#). The RGG, which “advocates for common-sense legislation on issues including healthcare, energy, infrastructure, and workforce development,” made up around 21 percent of House Republicans but sponsored about 30 percent of Republican-led suspension bills, according to [our analysis](#). These disparities starkly contrast with the above discussion regarding Democratic ideological caucuses. Our [analysis shows](#) that Democratic leadership brought suspension bills from those caucuses’ members at a rate more similar—though not equal—to their party share. It remains to be seen whether these GOP disparities will persist in the new GOP-controlled House, given that Republican leadership has changed.

## **Suspension Bill Analysis by Committee Jurisdiction**

Some House committees had many more bills considered under suspension than others.<sup>8</sup> For example, the House Committee on Foreign Affairs accounted for 19 percent of all suspension bills in 2022. In comparison, the House Committee on Agriculture and the House Committee on Administration accounted for less than one percent.

Several committees’ share of suspension bills signed into law was considerably lower than their share of suspension bills that received a House vote. For example, the House Committee on Foreign Affairs had jurisdiction over 19 percent of all suspension bills but only seven percent of suspensions that became law. On the other hand, the House Committee on Oversight & Reform oversaw 16 percent of all suspension bills but 37 percent of suspensions that became law. The nature of legislation that tends to come from these committees likely explains these discrepancies. For example, the Foreign Affairs Committee often passes simple resolutions that express the House’s views on a foreign policy matter but do not change the law and do not advance to the Senate or White House. In contrast, the Oversight & Reform Committee is responsible for noncontroversial bills that rename post offices, and Congress tends to pass dozens of these bills through the suspension process. Table 5 outlines the percentage of suspension bills each House committee considered and enacted in 2022.

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<sup>8</sup> Thirty-three of the 232 suspension bills in 2022 were referred to more than one committee.



**Table 5**

## SUSPENSION BILLS CONSIDERED AND ENACTED IN 2022, BY HOUSE COMMITTEE

House Committee	Number of suspension bills	Percentage of all suspension bills	Percentage of enacted suspension bills
Foreign Affairs	43	19%	7%
Oversight & Reform	38	16%	37%
Veterans' Affairs	30	13%	21%
Energy & Commerce	23	10%	7%
Transportation & Infra.	22	10%	7%
Judiciary	21	9%	9%
Financial Services	18	8%	1%
Natural Resources	17	7%	3%
Homeland Security	12	5%	1%
Science, Space, & Tech.	12	5%	4%
Ways & Means	12	5%	6%
Education & Labor	10	4%	1%
Small Business	10	4%	4%
Budget	5	2%	3%
Rules	2	1%	3%
Intelligence	2	1%	1%
Armed Services	2	1%	1%
Agriculture	1	0.4%	0%
Administration	1	0.4%	0%

### Conclusion

This explainer found several trends regarding the types of bills and sponsors that successfully used the suspension process last year. For example, Democratic members holding what the Democratic Congressional Campaign Committee deems [the most competitive seats](#) passed a disproportionate number of bills under suspension. The correlations identified in this explainer do not necessarily imply causation. For instance, this data does not indicate whether Democratic members in competitive seats are more likely to sponsor bills that are broadly bipartisan and, therefore, well-suited for the suspension process or whether party leaders greenlight those members' bills for the suspension process *because* they are in competitive seats. Regardless, the findings in this explainer *do* indicate that certain members and committees have seen more success than others in advancing legislation through the suspension process. While there is no guarantee these trends will hold under a new majority, stakeholders may use these findings to predict which bills may be fast-tracked successfully—and which may not.



## Methodology

The data that informed this report can be found [here](#). The author obtained the data referenced in this explainer from the [House Clerk's website](#). Second, the author filtered all recorded votes during the 117th Congress' second session to collect bills considered under suspension. Third, the author used [Congress.gov](#) to obtain committee and sponsor information for those bills. Finally, demographic information was obtained from the [U.S. House of Representatives Press Gallery](#), and public reporting and caucus information were obtained from caucus websites.