

Resolutions of Inquiry in the House

March 31, 2025

A resolution of inquiry is a simple House resolution (H.Res.) making a direct request or demand of the President and/or the head of an executive department to provide to the House specific factual information in the Administration's possession.

Under [clause 7 of House Rule XIII](#), such resolutions, if properly drafted, are given a special parliamentary status. If the committee to which such a resolution is referred has not reported the measure back to the House within 14 legislative days after its introduction, a privileged and non-debatable motion to discharge the committee of further consideration of the resolution becomes available. If the House agrees to the privileged motion to discharge, the resolution of inquiry would be taken out of committee and become available for floor consideration.

If the committee of referral reports a resolution of inquiry within the 14-legislative-day time frame, however—regardless of whether the report is favorable, adverse, or without recommendation—the privileged resolution can be called up on the floor only by a Member who has been authorized by the reporting committee to do so. In other words, by reporting a resolution of inquiry, a committee can preclude the privileged motion to discharge and preserve to itself the decision of whether to call up the resolution on the floor. As such, in recent practice, a House committee will virtually always mark up and report a resolution of inquiry that has been referred to it—even one it opposes—in order to retain control of the measure and prevent supporters from triggering floor votes on questions related to considering it.

While resolutions of inquiry have been used since the earliest Congresses to seek information from the executive branch, the basic form of the present House rule was adopted in 1879. The rule was [last amended](#) in 1983 to lengthen the time period for a committee to report from one week to 14 legislative days. In the recent past, when the House had expected to hold *pro forma* sessions for extended periods of time (for example, during the traditional August recess), it adopted an order dictating that those *pro forma* days [would not count](#) against the 14-day period the committee has to report a resolution of inquiry. A similar order was in place for most of the 117th Congress (2021-2022) in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. A provision pausing the 14-day count during “district work periods” declared by the Speaker was made part of the [standing rules](#) of the House in the 119th Congress (2025-2026).

In order to be privileged, a House resolution of inquiry

- must be directed to the President or the head of a Cabinet-level executive department (not to a subordinate official such as the Internal Revenue Service commissioner or the director of the Central Intelligence Agency),

Congressional Research Service

<https://crsreports.congress.gov>

IN12539

- must not have a preamble,
- must request facts in the possession of the official, and
- may not require the official to express an opinion or undertake an investigation.

The House Parliamentarian has summarized [relevant chamber rules and precedents](#) related to resolutions of inquiry and provided citations to additional reading on the subject.

Should a committee mark up a resolution of inquiry, it would employ the same procedures as are used in the markup of any other measure. Resolutions of inquiry are subject to debate and germane amendment under the five-minute rule. All committee members have the right to include their views in the committee report accompanying the resolution, if timely requested.

Unlike subpoenas or statutes, resolutions of inquiry do not have legal force, nor is there any direct enforcement mechanism. Any executive branch response to such a request is voluntary. [Available data examined by CRS](#) suggest that over recent decades, at least 30% of the time, a resolution of inquiry has resulted in the production of some of the requested information to the House. In the majority of cases, however, it is simply unknown, unclear, or in dispute whether the resolution of inquiry produced any information.

Between 1947 and the present, over 300 resolutions of inquiry have been introduced in the House. The information most commonly sought has related to defense, foreign relations, and intelligence. Two periods—1971-1975 and 2003-2006—saw the highest levels of activity during the post-World War II period. Although Representatives of both political parties have used resolutions of inquiry, in recent Congresses, such resolutions have overwhelmingly been submitted by minority party Representatives seeking information from a President of the opposite political party. Such a party division exists in the 119th Congress, a fact that could result in an increase in the number of resolutions of inquiry introduced.

[Some have charged](#) that minority party Members have in recent Congresses used the privileged status such resolutions enjoy as a way to “force” committees to act on a given subject or get Members to record votes on politically controversial policy questions. Those holding this view argue that resolutions of inquiry, in essence, enable the minority party to “schedule” a committee markup on a subject of its choosing. [Others have](#) argued that resolutions of inquiry have increased in frequency over specific recent Congresses because the executive branch has often responded to information requests from Congress grudgingly, if at all. Those holding this view have argued that this has forced minority party Members to repeatedly turn to one of the few oversight tools at their disposal.

Since 1947, most of the resolutions of inquiry reported by the House committee to which they were referred were reported adversely, indicating that the committee opposed floor consideration on the resolution. The stated reasons for this opposition have included that the resolution had been made moot by the executive branch complying in whole or in part with the request or because such a request would, in the view of the committee, compromise an ongoing investigation, endanger sensitive information, or seek readily available facts. Less than one-quarter of the resolutions of inquiry introduced since 1947 reached the House floor, the last one [in 1995](#).

Author Information

Christopher M. Davis
Analyst on Congress and the Legislative Process

Disclaimer

This document was prepared by the Congressional Research Service (CRS). CRS serves as nonpartisan shared staff to congressional committees and Members of Congress. It operates solely at the behest of and under the direction of Congress. Information in a CRS Report should not be relied upon for purposes other than public understanding of information that has been provided by CRS to Members of Congress in connection with CRS's institutional role. CRS Reports, as a work of the United States Government, are not subject to copyright protection in the United States. Any CRS Report may be reproduced and distributed in its entirety without permission from CRS. However, as a CRS Report may include copyrighted images or material from a third party, you may need to obtain the permission of the copyright holder if you wish to copy or otherwise use copyrighted material.