

Commemorations in Congress: Options for Honoring Individuals, Groups, and Events

Updated June 17, 2025

Congressional Research Service

<https://crsreports.congress.gov>

R43539



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Since its inception, Congress has used commemorative legislation to express public gratitude for distinguished contributions; dramatize the virtues of individuals, groups, and causes; and perpetuate the remembrance of significant events. Commemoratives have become an integral part of the American political tradition. Congress has used them to authorize the minting of commemorative coins and Congressional Gold Medals; fund monuments and memorials; create federal holidays; establish commissions to celebrate important anniversaries; and name public works, scholarships, endowments, fellowships, and historic sites.

Current congressional practice for commemoratives includes a House Rule (Rule XII, clause 5, initially adopted during the 104th Congress [1995-1996]) that precludes the introduction or consideration of legislation that commemorates a “remembrance, celebration, or recognition for any purpose through the designation of a specified period of time.” Such a rule does not exist in the Senate. This House Rule, together with the passage of more restrictive laws, rules, and procedures governing the enactment of several other types of commemoratives, has substantially reduced the time Congress spends considering and adopting such measures.

This report summarizes the evolution of commemorative legislation as well as the laws, rules, and procedures that have been adopted to control the types of commemoratives considered and enacted. Included in the discussion of commemorative options for Congress are those that require legislation, such as

- naming federal buildings, including post offices and other federal structures;
- postage stamps;
- commemorative coins;
- Congressional Gold Medals;
- monuments and memorials, both in the District of Columbia and elsewhere;
- commemorative commissions;
- commemorative observances;
- federal holidays; and
- requesting presidential proclamations.

Also included are commemorative options that do not require legislation. These include

- certificates of recognition;
- floor speeches; and
- flags flown over the U.S. Capitol.

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June 17, 2025

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Introduction

Since its inception, Congress has used commemoratives to express public gratitude for distinguished contributions; dramatize the virtues of individuals, groups, and causes; and perpetuate the remembrance of significant events. The first commemoratives were primarily in the form of individually struck medals. During the 19th century, Congress gradually broadened the scope of commemoratives by recommending special days for national observance; funding monuments and memorials; creating federal holidays; authorizing the minting of commemorative coins; and establishing commissions to celebrate important anniversaries. In the 20th century, it became increasingly commonplace for Congress to use commemorative legislation to name buildings and other public works, scholarships, endowments, fellowships, and historic sites.

This report provides a discussion of commemorative options available to Congress.¹ These commemorative options are divided into those that require legislation and those that do not. Types of commemoratives requiring legislative action include naming federal buildings, including post offices; creating postage stamps; minting commemorative coins; awarding of Congressional Gold Medals; authorizing monuments and memorials, both in the District of Columbia and on federal land in other parts of the United States; establishing commemorative commissions; authorizing commemorative observances and federal holidays; and requesting presidential proclamations. Nonlegislative options include sending certificates of recognition, making floor speeches, and sending flags flown over the Capitol Building to constituents.

Efforts to Curb Commemoratives

Beginning in the 1960s, Congress undertook several initiatives to reduce the number of commemoratives proposed through legislation. These initiatives were in response to concern that the legislative time spent on commemorative measures was excessive.² Efforts to curb commemoratives can be divided into two categories: creating an advisory commission to recommend appropriate commemorations and amending congressional rules on the introduction and consideration of commemorative legislation.

Advisory Commission

Between the 89th Congress (1965-1966) and the 104th Congress (1995-1996), several proposals were introduced to shift the responsibility of recommending commemorative celebrations to a presidential commission. First introduced in 1966, the proposed Commission on National Observances and Holidays would have reviewed proposals for national observances and “report to the President with respect to any proposal for a national observance which, in the opinion of

¹ For analysis of commemorative trends between the 93rd Congress (1973-1974) and the 115th Congress (2017-2018), see CRS Report R46644, *Commemorative Legislation in Congress: Trends and Observations, 93rd Through 115th Congresses*, by Jacob R. Straus and Jared C. Nagel.

² Roger H. Davidson, “The New Centralization on Capitol Hill,” *The Review of Politics*, vol. 50, no. 3 (Summer 2008), p. 353; and Craig Volden and Alan E. Wiseman, “Breaking Gridlock: The Determinants of Health Policy Change in Congress,” *Journal of Health Politics, Policy and Law*, vol. 36, no. 2 (2011), p. 236.

the Commission, is of national significance.”³ In both the 89th Congress and the 90th Congress (1967-1968),⁴ the House passed measures, but the Senate took no further action.⁵

House Ban on Commemorative Legislation

In the 104th Congress (1995-1996), the House adopted a new rule to reduce the number of commemorative bills and resolutions introduced and considered by the chamber. House Rule XII, clause 5, prohibits the introduction and consideration of date-specific commemorative legislation.⁶

House Rule XII, Clause 5

As part of the rules adopted by the 104th Congress,⁷ House Rule XII was amended to preclude the introduction or consideration of any bill, resolution, or amendment that “establishes or expresses a commemoration.” The rule, which is still in effect, defines a commemoration as any “remembrance, celebration, or recognition for any purpose through the designation of a specified period of time.” Further, in the House Rules Committee’s section-by-section analysis of the House Rules resolution (H.Res. 6, 104th Congress), the following explanation was provided of the rule’s intent:

The new ban on date-specific commemorative measures or amendments applies to both the introduction and consideration of any measure containing such a commemorative. This is intended to include measures in which such a commemorative may only be incidental to the overall purpose of the measure. Such measures will be returned to the sponsor if they are dropped in the legislative hopper. The prohibition against consideration also extends to any measures received from the Senate which contain date-specific commemorative [sic]. While it does not block their receipt from the other body, it is intended that such measures would not be referred to the appropriate committee of the House or be considered by the House. Instead, they would simply be held at the desk without further action. Should such a commemorative be included in a conference report or Senate amendment to a House bill, the entire conference report or Senate amendment would be subject to a point of order.

While the ban does not apply to commemorative [sic] which do not set aside a specified period of time, and instead simply call for some form of national recognition, it is not the intent of the rule that such alternative forms should become a new outlet for the consideration of such measures. Thus, while they could be referred to an appropriate committee, it is not expected that such committees should feel obligated or pressured to establish special rules for their release to the House floor. Nor should it be expected that the Rule [sic] Committee should become the new avenue for regular waivers of the rule

³ “Commission on National Observances and Holidays,” *Congressional Record*, vol. 112, part 18 (October 3, 1966), p. 24828. The commission would not have been allowed to make recommendations calling for a national observance for any fraternal, political, or religious organization, or a commercial enterprise or product.

⁴ “Commission on National Observances and Holidays,” *Congressional Record*, vol. 113, part 6 (March 20, 1967), pp. 7258-7263.

⁵ The proposed commission was introduced in six succeeding Congresses beginning in the 98th Congress (1983-1984). These proposals were each called the National Commemorative Events Advisory Act and were introduced as H.R. 4571 (98th Congress); H.R. 692 (99th Congress); H.R. 998 (100th Congress); H.R. 539 (101st Congress); S. 1112, H.R. 68, and H.R. 1882 (102nd Congress); H.R. 624 (103rd Congress); and S. 1236 (104th Congress). None of these proposals was reported out of committee.

⁶ U.S. Congress, House, “Rule XII, clause 5” in *Rules of the House of Representatives One Hundred Nineteenth Congress*, p. 26, <https://rules.house.gov/sites/evo-subsites/rules.house.gov/files/documents/houserules119thupdated.pdf#page=28>.

⁷ “Ban on Commemoratives,” *Congressional Record*, daily edition, vol. 141 (January 4, 1995), pp. H29-H30.

against date specific commemorative [sic]. Such exceptions should be limited to those rare situations warranting special national recognition as determined by the Leadership.⁸

The Republican Party holds the majority of House seats in the 119th Congress and therefore is responsible for scheduling floor action.⁹ Consideration of commemorative legislation is therefore also effectively governed by a House Republican Conference rule. Conference Rule 29(a)(6) generally prohibits the Republican leader from scheduling certain commemorative bills and resolutions for floor consideration under suspension of the rules. It states:

Rule 29—Guidelines on Suspension of House Rules

(a) The Republican Leader shall not schedule, or request to have scheduled, any bill or resolution for consideration under suspension of the Rules which—

...

(6) expresses appreciation, commends, congratulates, celebrates, recognizes the accomplishments of, or celebrates the anniversary of, an entity, event, group, individual, institution, team or government program; or acknowledges or recognizes a period of time for such purposes.¹⁰

While party rules are not enforceable by points of order on the House floor, the rule arguably reflects a reluctance on the part of the majority party to schedule legislation with commemorative intent. To provide further guidance to the majority leader for the implementation of party rules, the Republican Conference has instituted leadership protocols. Among other policies, for the 119th Congress, the majority leader's protocols state that

Commemorative Resolutions

Purpose:

This protocol provides further guidance for the adherence of Rule 29 of the Rules of the House Republican Conference which provides that: The Republican Leader shall not schedule, or request to have scheduled, any bill or resolution for consideration under suspension of the Rules which...expresses appreciation, commends, congratulates, celebrates, recognizes the accomplishments of, or celebrates the anniversary of, an entity, event, group, individual, institution, team or government program; or acknowledges or recognizes a period of time for such purposes...

Protocol:

A resolution of bereavement, or condemnation, or which calls on others (such as a foreign government) to take a particular action, but which does not otherwise violate the provisions of Rule 29 is eligible to be scheduled under suspension of the Rules.¹¹

In previous Congresses, under both Republican and Democratic majorities, similar protocols have been adopted. For example, in the 117th Congress, when the Democratic Party held a majority of seats in the House,¹² the majority leader's protocols stated

⁸ "Rules of the House," *Congressional Record*, vol. 141, part 1 (January 4, 1995), p. 476.

⁹ The Republican Party also held a majority of seats in the House between the 104th Congress (1995-1996) and 109th Congress (2005-2006), in the 112th Congress (2011-2012), in the 115th Congress (2017-2018), and in the 118th Congress (2023-2024).

¹⁰ U.S. Congress, House, Republican Conference, "Conference Rules of the 119th Congress," https://www.gop.gov/uploadedfiles/conference_rules_of_the_119th_congress.pdf#page=21. Another portion of the rule allows a waiver to be granted by a majority of the party's elected leadership.

¹¹ U.S. Congress, House, Majority Leader Steve Scalise, "119th Congress Floor Protocols," <https://www.majorityleader.gov/schedule/floor-protocols.htm>.

¹² The Democratic Party also held a majority of seats in the House between the 110th Congress (2007-2008) and the 111th Congress (2009-2010) and between the 116th Congress (2019-2020) and the 117th Congress (2021-2022).

the Majority Leader shall not schedule any bill or resolution for consideration that expresses appreciation, commends, congratulates, celebrates, recognizes the accomplishments of, or celebrates the anniversary of, an entity, event, group, individual, institution, team or government program; or acknowledges or recognizes a period of time.¹³

Committee Rules

Since the 114th Congress, the House Committee on Oversight and Government Reform (and its predecessors), which has jurisdiction over holidays and celebrations, has included in its committee rules provisions related to commemorative measures. For the 119th Congress, Rule 13 covers three types of commemoratives: stamps, postal naming, and resolutions. It states,

(a) Commemorative Stamps. The determination of the subject matter of commemorative stamps and new semi-postal issues is properly for consideration by the Postmaster General, and the Committee will not give consideration to legislative proposals specifying the subject matter of commemorative stamps and new semi-postal issues. It is suggested that recommendations for the subject matter of stamps be submitted to the Postmaster General.

(b) Postal Naming Bills. The consideration of bills designating facilities of the United States Postal Service shall be conducted so as to minimize the time spent on such matters by the Committee and the House.

(c) Resolutions. The Chair of the Committee shall not request to have scheduled any resolution for consideration under suspension of the Rules, which expresses appreciation, commends, congratulates, celebrates, recognizes the accomplishments of, or celebrates the anniversary of, an entity, event, group, individual, institution, team or government program; or acknowledges or recognizes a period of time for such purposes.¹⁴

In some past Congresses, the committee has also issued additional guidance on the potential committee consideration of commemorative measures. For example, in the 119th Congress, the Committee on Oversight and Government Reform adopted guidance prohibiting the consideration of certain commemorative measures.¹⁵

¹³ U.S. Congress, House, Majority Leader Steny Hoyer, “117th Congress Legislative Protocols,” <https://leaderarchive-hoyer.house.gov/content/117th-congress-legislative-protocols>. The 117th Congress protocols also stated that “A resolution of bereavement, or condemnation, or which calls on others to take a particular action, is eligible to be scheduled for consideration.”

¹⁴ U.S. Congress, House Committee on Oversight and Government Reform, “Rule 13—Consideration of Certain Bills and Resolutions” in “Committee on Oversight and Government Reform 119th Congress,” 119th Cong., 1st sess., pp. 7-8, <https://oversight.house.gov/wp-content/uploads/2025/01/119th-Committee-Rules.pdf#page=7> (hereinafter House Committee on Oversight and Government Reform, “Rule 13”).

¹⁵ U.S. Congress, House Committee on Oversight and Government Reform, “Protocols on Commemorative Resolutions, Postal Naming Bills, ZIP Code Designation Bills, and Semipostal and Commemorative Stamp Bills for the 119th Congress,” April 29, 2025, <https://e-dearcolleague.house.gov/Home/Preview?DCID=446897>. Similar guidance also existed since at least the 115th Congress. For similar guidance in past Congresses, see **118th Congress:** U.S. Congress, House Committee on Oversight and Accountability, “Commemorative Resolutions and Postal Naming Bills,” Dear Colleague Letter, June 30, 2023, <https://e-dearcolleague.house.gov/Home/Preview?DCID=397333>; **117th Congress:** U.S. Congress, House Committee on Oversight and Reform, “Committee on Oversight and Reform; Procedures for Certain Bills,” Dear Colleague Letter, April 29, 2021, <https://e-dearcolleague.house.gov/Home/Preview?DCID=332170>; **116th Congress:** U.S. Congress, House Committee on Oversight and Reform, “Policies of the Committee on Commemorative Resolutions, Postal Facility Naming Bills, Semi-Postal Measures, and Bills Creating Commemorative Stamps,” Dear Colleague Letter, May 15, 2019, <https://e-dearcolleague.house.gov/Home/Preview?DCID=262120>; and **115th Congress:** U.S. Congress, House Committee on Oversight and Government Reform, “Commemorative Resolutions, Postal Facility Naming Bills, and Semi-Postal and Commemorative Stamp Bills: Procedures in the 115th Congress,” Dear Colleague Letter, September 5, 2017, <https://e-dearcolleague.house.gov/Home/Preview?DCID=217782>.

Past Waiver of House Rule XII

Since House Rule XII, clause 5, was adopted in the 104th Congress, it has been waived by unanimous consent on at least one occasion. Specifically, the “House by unanimous consent waived the prohibition against introduction of a certain joint resolution specified by sponsor and title proposing a commemoration,”¹⁶ to allow for the consideration of H.J.Res. 71 (107th Congress, 2001-2002), legislation establishing Patriot Day as a day of remembrance for September 11, 2001.¹⁷

Overview of Options Discussed

Congress’s commemorative options fall into two general categories: legislative options and nonlegislative options. All legislative options require passage of a bill or resolution by the House, the Senate, or both chambers. Nonlegislative options can often be accomplished by individual offices without legislative approval. Legislative options include naming federal buildings, designing postage stamps, minting commemorative coins, awarding a Congressional Gold Medal, creating monuments and memorials, designating commemorative observances, establishing federal holidays, and requesting presidential proclamations. Nonlegislative options include creating individual office awards, giving floor speeches, sending official letters, and ordering flags.

Legislative Options

Several legislative options exist to honor individuals, groups, and historic events. For each of these commemoratives, action requires passage of a bill or resolution by the House, the Senate, or both chambers. In some cases, House and Senate committees, or the majority party, have specific rules or guidance associated with commemoratives. These include requiring a minimum number of cosponsors before the bill can be considered by the relevant committee, prohibitions against commemorating sitting Members of Congress, and some restrictions on commemorating living persons.

For a detailed discussion on commemorative measures, including the frequency and categorization of legislative commemorations, see CRS Report R46644, *Commemorative Legislation in Congress: Trends and Observations, 93rd Through 115th Congresses*, by Jacob R. Straus.

Naming Federal 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. To name a post office or other federal building after an individual an

¹⁶ U.S. Congress, House, “Rule XII, Clause 5: Prohibitions on Commemorations,” *Constitution, Jefferson’s Manual, and Rules of the House of Representatives of the United States, One Hundred Eighteenth Congress*, prepared by Jason A. Smith, parliamentarian, 118th Cong., 2nd sess., H.Doc. 117-161, §823, pp. 654-655, <https://www.govinfo.gov/content/pkg/HMAN-118/pdf/HMAN-118.pdf#page=667>.

¹⁷ “Authorizing Introduction of Joint Resolution Designating September 11 as United We Stand Remembrance Day,” *Congressional Record*, daily edition, vol. 147 (October 24, 2001), p. H7300; and “Making in Order on Thursday, October 25, 2001, Consideration of Joint Resolution Designating September 11 as United We Stand Remembrance Day,” *Congressional Record*, daily edition, vol. 147 (October 24, 2001), p. H7300.

act of Congress is required. This section details congressional involvement in the naming of post offices and other federal buildings.

Post Offices

Legislation naming post offices for persons has become a very common practice. Legislation has named post offices for a variety of persons, including locally esteemed individuals (e.g., Sister Ann Keefe),¹⁸ deceased elected officials (e.g., President Ronald Reagan),¹⁹ fallen Armed Forces personnel (e.g., Army Specialist Matthew Troy Morris),²⁰ and celebrities (e.g., Bob Hope).²¹ A post office may also be dedicated in honor of multiple individuals (e.g., District of Columbia Servicemembers and Veterans).²²

Post office naming statutes commonly identify the address of the postal facility and provide for naming (“designating”) the facility.²³ Renaming a post office through legislation, however, does not result in the new name being etched or painted on the facade of the building or signs. Further, for operational and logistical reasons, a post office that has been dedicated or renamed will keep its original name and geographical designation within USPS’s addressing system. Instead, to commemorate the designation, a small plaque noting the designee and designation is installed within the post office.

Over the years, both the House and Senate have adopted policies and practices for considering and enacting post office naming bills. These policies and practices have varied from Congress to Congress.²⁴ Currently, the House Oversight and Government Reform Committee Rule 13 states that the consideration of post office naming bills “shall be conducted so as to minimize the time spent on such matters by the Committee and the House.”²⁵ For the 119th Congress, the House committee issued a Dear Colleague letter stating its policies on the consideration of post office naming bills and other postal legislation. It stated the following, which includes a new mechanism by which a Member may meet the sponsorship requirement for a post office naming bill to be considered by the committee:

How does the Committee handle postal facility naming bills? The Committee will not consider legislation designating post office buildings for:

- Living persons or any person who is not a United States’ citizen, except bills naming postal facilities after military servicemembers and veterans.
- A person for whom Congress has already named a post office building.

In addition, Members of Congress may only name a Post Office in their current congressional district.

¹⁸ P.L. 114-15, 129 Stat. 199 (2015).

¹⁹ Several post offices have been named after President Ronald Reagan. They include Dixon, IL (P.L. 111-235, 124 Stat. 249 [2010]); Billings, MT (P.L. 108-143, 117 Stat. 1877 [2003]); and West Melbourne, FL (P.L. 107-7, 1159 Stat. 9 [2001]).

²⁰ P.L. 112-107, 126 Stat. 328 (2012).

²¹ P.L. 108-120, 117 Stat. 1334 (2003).

²² P.L. 117-328, Division EE, §120, 136 Stat. 5626 (2022).

²³ Post office naming statutes also include a “references” provision. The practical effect of this provision is that it informs agencies that they need not amend or replace existing documentation that refers to the designated post office by another name. Thus, for example, the U.S. Postal Service would not need to change its internal documents to reflect the post office’s renaming.

²⁴ House Committee on Oversight and Government Reform, “Rule 13,” pp. 7-8.

²⁵ House Committee on Oversight and Government Reform, “Rule 13.”

The Committee will consider a postal naming bill that meets either of the following protocols:

- Before a postal facility naming bill is eligible to be considered by the Committee, it must be co-sponsored by the entire state delegation where the post office is located. The Speaker of the House, the House Majority Leader, and the House Minority Leader are exempt from this requirement and are not required to co-sponsor postal facility naming bills in their respective states; or
- Before a postal facility naming bill is eligible to be considered by the Committee, it must have ten cosponsors, five from each political party. These cosponsors may be from any state. Members are limited to one postal naming bill per Congress using this protocol.

Additional Information. Members sponsoring postal facility naming bills must provide the Committee documentation summarizing the designee's biographical information and background. Offices may request biographical information on a designee from the Congressional Research Service. Offices must also provide documentation that the designee's family supports the bill, in most cases, and that the USPS has determined the facility is eligible to be named.

Postal facility naming bills will be considered by the Committee only after the required criteria set forth above are met in full.²⁶

Similarly, under its current rules, the Senate Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs Committee (HSGAC)

[will] not consider any legislation that would name a postal facility for a living person with the exception of bills naming facilities after former Presidents and Vice Presidents of the United States, former Members of Congress over 70 years of age, former State or local elected officials over 70 years of age, former judges over 70 years of age, or wounded veterans. The Committee will not consider legislation that would name a postal facility unless it has the support of both Senators in the delegation of the state in which the facility is located.²⁷

Once post office naming legislation is reported by the House and Senate committees, the legislation, if considered on the floor, tends to pass the House under suspension of the rules²⁸ and the Senate via unanimous consent.²⁹

For more information on naming post offices, including sample legislation and dedication plaque, see CRS In Focus IF12656, *Postal Primer: Post Office Naming*, by Michelle D. Christensen; and CRS Report RS21562, *Naming Post Offices Through Legislation*, by Michelle D. Christensen.

²⁶ U.S. Congress, House Committee on Oversight and Government Reform, "Protocols on Commemorative Resolutions, Postal Naming Bills, ZIP Code Designation Bills, and Semipostal and Commemorative Stamp Bills for the 119th Congress," Dear Colleague Letter, April 29, 2025, <https://e-dearcolleague.house.gov/Home/Preview?DCID=446897>. Similar Dear Colleague letters were issued by the committee in the 118th, 117th, 116th, 115th, 114th, and 112th Congresses. For example, see U.S. Congress, House Committee on Oversight and Accountability, "Commemorative Resolutions and Postal Naming Bills," Dear Colleague Letter, June 30, 2023, <https://e-dearcolleague.house.gov/Home/Preview?DCID=397333>.

²⁷ U.S. Congress, Senate Committee on Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs, "Rules of Procedure of the Committee on Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs," 119th Cong., 1st Sess., S.Prt. 119-11 (March 2025), pp. 9-10, <https://www.hsgac.senate.gov/wp-content/uploads/Rules-of-Procedure-HSGAC-119.pdf#page=15>.

²⁸ For more information on suspension of the rules procedures, see CRS Report 98-314, *Suspension of the Rules in the House: Principal Features*, by Elizabeth Rybicki.

²⁹ For example, see P.L. 112-107, 126 Stat. 328 (2012), which designated a post office in Cedar Park, TX, as the "Army Specialist Matthew Troy Morris Post Office Building."

Other Federal Buildings

Bills to name other federal buildings or facilities may be considered and reported in any committee, typically in relation to the agencies under each committee's jurisdiction. Legislation naming a veterans' medical facility, for example, would normally originate in the Veterans' Affairs (VA) committees in the House and the Senate. Legislation naming courthouses—which are constructed and maintained by the General Services Administration (GSA)—is considered by the committees with jurisdiction over GSA, the House Transportation and Infrastructure Committee (T&I), and the Senate Environment and Public Works Committee (EPW).

Historically, the large majority of nonpostal facilities are named through legislation originating in these four committees: VA and T&I in the House, and VA and EPW in the Senate. Occasionally, legislation is introduced to name buildings held by other agencies, such as National Aeronautical and Space Administration (NASA) training facilities. NASA is under the jurisdiction of the Science, Space and Technology Committee in the House (SST) and the Commerce, Science, and Transportation Committee in the Senate (CST), so naming legislation for NASA facilities is considered by these committees.

The military services (e.g., Army, Navy, Air Force) name Department of Defense (DOD) buildings. Each service has its own naming criteria and approval process, and these naming decisions do not typically go through Congress.³⁰

Committees vary as to whether they have specific rules regarding the introduction of naming legislation. Some have written naming rules. In the 119th Congress, for example, the Senate Veterans' Affairs Committee has adopted language in its committee rules that establishes specific criteria for naming legislation.³¹ These rules prohibit naming a VA facility after an individual unless the individual is deceased and is

- a veteran who (i) was instrumental in the construction of the facility to be named, or (ii) was a recipient of the Medal of Honor, or, as determined by the chairman and ranking minority member, otherwise performed military service of an extraordinarily distinguished character;
- a Member of the United States House of Representatives or Senate who had a direct association with such facility;
- an Administrator of Veterans Affairs, a Secretary of Veterans Affairs, a Secretary of Defense or of a service branch, or a military or other federal civilian official of comparable or higher rank; or
- an individual who, as determined by the chairman and ranking minority member, performed outstanding service for veterans.

In addition, each Member of the congressional delegation representing the state in which the designated facility is located must indicate, in writing, his or her support of the bill. Finally, the pertinent state department or chapter of each congressionally chartered veterans' organization with a national membership of at least 500,000 must indicate, in writing, its support of the bill.

The committees with jurisdiction over courthouse naming in the 119th Congress—T&I in the House and EPW in the Senate—do not have identical written rules. Currently, T&I does not have

³⁰ For more information on Department of Defense naming policies, see section "Naming Policy by Military Service" in CRS Insight IN10756, *Confederate Names and Military Installations*, by Barbara Salazar Torreon.

³¹ U.S. Congress, Senate Committee on Veterans' Affairs, "Rule VIII. Naming of Department of Veterans Affairs Facilities" in "Committee on Veterans' Affairs Rules of Procedure, 119th Congress," <https://www.veterans.senate.gov/committee-rules>.

a formal rule pertaining to naming legislation, although it did have written policies regarding naming legislation in previous Congresses.³² While no longer part of the committee's written rules, some or all of these requirements may still be in place—albeit informally—and enforced. Contacting the committee is the only way to determine what informal rules and practices are in place, if any.

EPW, on the other hand, has its requirements in committee rules.³³ According to Rule 7(d) the committee may not name a building for any living person, except

- a former President or Vice President of the United States;
- a former Member of Congress over 70 years of age;
- a former Supreme Court Justice over 70 years of age;
- a federal judge who is fully retired and over 75 years of age; or
- a federal judge who has taken senior status and is over 75 years of age.³⁴

As with T&I, neither SST in the House, nor CST in the Senate, has written rules pertaining to naming legislation.

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 Women's Soccer, President John F. Kennedy, the Chinese Lunar New Year, and Japanese American Soldiers of WWII.³⁵ The USPS issues these stamps at its own statutory discretion and operates the program as a profit-making enterprise.³⁶

USPS may also issue semipostal stamps, which are first-class stamps sold at a premium in order to raise money to provide funding for a specified charitable cause determined to be in the national interest. USPS currently offers two semipostals that were created by statute—the Breast Cancer Research Stamp³⁷ and the Save the Vanishing Species Stamp.³⁸ In addition, USPS has issued two

³² U.S. Congress, House Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure, Subcommittee on Public Buildings and Economic Development, *The Naming of Public Buildings*, internal committee memorandum dated July 16, 1995. This memorandum identified criteria for the subcommittee to consider in naming a public building. These criteria were that the building must be under the control of the General Services Administration (GSA) or the Architect of the Capitol (leased buildings are normally not named unless the building is under a lease purchase authority); the building must not currently be named for an individual; subcommittee consideration does not occur unless the Member in whose district the building is located sponsors the legislation or otherwise consents to the naming; age requirements are not applicable; priority is not given to any particular class or occupation of individuals; the subcommittee generally does not name buildings for sitting Members of Congress; and the person for whom the building is named must have a "good reputation."

³³ U.S. Congress, Senate Committee on Environment and Public Works, "Rules of Procedure," <https://www.epw.senate.gov/public/index.cfm/rules>.

³⁴ U.S. Congress, Senate Committee on Environment and Public Works, "Rules of Procedure."

³⁵ U.S. Postal Service, "Postal Store: Commemoratives," https://store.usps.com/store/results/stamps/commemorative/_/N-9y93lvZ1edrpld.

³⁶ 39 U.S.C. §404(a) (4-5); and CRS Report RS20221, *Commemorative Postage Stamps: History, Selection Criteria, and Revenue Potential*, by Michelle D. Christensen. USPS profits when commemorative stamp buyers save, rather than use, the stamps.

³⁷ 39 U.S.C. §414. The Breast Cancer Research Stamp was created in 1997 by the Stamp Out Breast Cancer Act, P.L. 105-41. Its authorization was extended until 2027 by the National Defense Authorization Act for FY2020, P.L. 116-92.

³⁸ P.L. 111-241, 124 Stat. 2605 (2010), as reauthorized by the Multinational Species Conservation Funds Semipostal Stamp Reauthorization Act of 2013 (P.L. 113-165; 128 Stat. 1878 (2014)). On December 31, 2018, USPS withdrew the (continued...)

semipostals under its discretionary authority—the Healing PTSD Stamp and the Alzheimer’s Stamp.³⁹

Legislation to direct USPS to issue a stamp to commemorate persons, historical occurrences, and groups is occasionally introduced. CRS has been able to identify one instance when a special series commemorative stamp was issued pursuant to legislation. In 1947, Congress directed the Postmaster General to issue a special series of commemorative stamps in honor of Gold Star Mothers.⁴⁰

The House Committee on Oversight and Government Reform has a committee rule against the consideration of legislation that proposes the issuance of commemorative stamps. Committee Rule 13 states, in part, “[t]he determination of the subject matter of commemorative stamps and new semi-postal issues is properly for consideration by the Postmaster General.”⁴¹

In the 119th Congress, the committee issued a Dear Colleague letter that states

Pursuant to Committee rules, a bill proposing the issuance of a new semi-postal or commemorative stamp will not be considered. Committee Rule 13, clause (a) states: “The determination of the subject matter of commemorative stamps and new semi-postal issues is properly for consideration by the Postmaster General, and the Committee will not give consideration to legislative proposals specifying the subject matter of commemorative stamps and new semi-postal issues.”⁴²

The Dear Colleague letter also stated that recommendations for new commemorative stamps should be submitted to the USPS Citizens’ Stamp Advisory Committee.⁴³

Save the Vanishing Species Semipostal Stamp from sale, due to the expiration of its statutory authority, but retained its unsold stock (U.S. Postal Service, “Save Vanishing Species Semipostal Stamps Withdrawn From Sale—Statutory Authority Expired December 31, 2018,” https://about.usps.com/postal-bulletin/2019/pb22519/html/info_007.htm). The Financial Services and General Government Appropriations Act, 2021 (Division E of P.L. 116-260; 134 Stat. 1423) states that USPS “may not destroy, and shall continue to offer for sale, any copies of the Multinational Species Conservation Funds Semipostal Stamp.” The Postal Service resumed sale of the Save Vanishing Species stamp on January 16, 2020, and language similar to that from FY2021 has been included in subsequent appropriations acts.

³⁹ P.L. 106-253; 39 C.F.R. §551.5(b). See U.S. Postal Service, “Alzheimer’s Semipostal Fundraising Stamp Dedicated Today,” press release, November 30, 2017, http://about.usps.com/news/national-releases/2017/pr17_076.htm. The Alzheimer’s Stamp, which originally had an issue run of two years, was withdrawn from sale on January 30, 2019. However, under revised rules issued by USPS in September 2020, the Alzheimer’s semipostal resumed sale on October 5, 2020.

⁴⁰ P.L. 80-259; 61 Stat 518 (1947). *Gold Star Mothers* are the “mothers of servicemen who made the supreme sacrifice while fighting for our country.” U.S. Congress, House Committee on Post Office and Civil Service, *Authorizing the Issuance of a Special Series of Commemorative Stamps in Honor of Gold Star Mothers*, 80th Cong., 1st sess., July 17, 1947, H.Rept. 80-985, p. 1.

⁴¹ House Committee on Oversight and Government Reform, “Rule 13,” pp. 7-8. By law, semipostal stamps (e.g., the Breast Cancer Research stamp and the Save Vanishing Species stamp) are “issued and sold by the Postal Service, at a premium, in order to help provide funding for a cause.” 39 U.S.C. §416(a)(1). For more information on semipostal stamps, see U.S. Postal Service, “Fundraising Stamps (Semipostal Stamp Program),” <https://about.usps.com/corporate-social-responsibility/semipostals.htm>.

⁴² U.S. Congress, House Committee on Oversight and Government Reform, “Protocols on Commemorative Resolutions, Postal Naming Bills, ZIP Code Designation Bills, and Semipostal and Commemorative Stamp Bills for the 119th Congress,” Dear Colleague Letter, April 29, 2025, <https://e-dearcolleague.house.gov/Home/Preview?DCID=446897>.

⁴³ U.S. Congress, House Committee on Oversight and Government Reform, “Protocols on Commemorative Resolutions, Postal Naming Bills, ZIP Code Designation Bills, and Semipostal and Commemorative Stamp Bills for the 119th Congress,” Dear Colleague Letter, April 29, 2025, <https://e-dearcolleague.house.gov/Home/Preview?DCID=446897>.

In 2017, the Postmaster General used her discretionary authority to create a semipostal stamp to help raise funds to fight Alzheimer's disease.⁴⁴

For more information on commemorative postage stamps, see CRS Report RS22611, *Common Questions About Postage and Stamps*, by Michelle D. Christensen.

Commemorative Coins

The U.S. Mint produces commemorative coins pursuant to an act of Congress. These coins celebrate and honor American people, events, and institutions.⁴⁵ The first commemorative coin was authorized in 1892 for the Columbia Exposition in Chicago.⁴⁶ In 1996, the Commemorative Coin Reform Act (CCRA) was enacted to (1) limit the maximum number of different coin programs minted per year;⁴⁷ (2) limit the maximum number of coins minted per commemorative coin program;⁴⁸ and (3) clarify the law with respect to the recovery of Mint expenses before surcharges are disbursed and to conditions of payment of surcharges to recipient groups.⁴⁹ The CCRA restrictions took effect in 1998.

In at least one past Congress, the House Committee on Financial Services adopted a committee rule to prohibit (1) the scheduling of a subcommittee hearing on commemorative coin legislation unless it was "cosponsored by at least two-thirds of the Members of the House," or (2) reporting a "bill or measure authorizing commemorative coins which does not conform with the minting regulations under 31 U.S.C. §5112."⁵⁰ This rule was not adopted as part of the committee rules for the 119th Congress. The House majority leader's floor protocols, however, address commemorative coins. The protocols state, in part

The Majority Leader shall only consider commemorative coin bills that receive at least 290 cosponsors and are submitted to the Committee on Financial Services to be scheduled for the Floor.⁵¹

⁴⁴ 39 C.F.R. §551.5(b). See U.S. Postal Service, "Alzheimer's Semipostal Fundraising Stamp Dedicated Today," press release, November 30, 2017, http://about.usps.com/news/national-releases/2017/pr17_076.htm. The Alzheimer's Stamp, which originally had an issue run of two years, was withdrawn from sale on January 30, 2019. However, under revised rules issued by USPS in September 2020, the Alzheimer's semipostal resumed sale on October 5, 2020.

⁴⁵ U.S. Department of the Treasury, United State Mint, "Commemorative Coin Programs," <https://www.usmint.gov/learn/coin-and-medal-programs/commemorative-coins>.

⁴⁶ 27 Stat. 389, chap. 381, August 5, 1892. For a list of historic commemorative coins, see U.S. Department of the Treasury, United State Mint, "Commemoratives from 1892-1954," <https://www.usmint.gov/learn/coins-and-medals/commemorative-coins/commemorative-coins-1892-1954>; and CRS Report R44623, *Commemorative Coins: Background, Legislative Process, and Issues for Congress*, by Jacob R. Straus.

⁴⁷ A commemorative coin program is the subject matter statutorily authorized to be depicted on a commemorative coin. Within each commemorative coin program, multiple denominations of coins might be authorized. For example, P.L. 112-201 (§3, 126 Stat. 1480 (2012)) authorized a commemorative coin program for Mark Twain. The statute authorized the minting of both \$5 gold coins and \$1 silver coins.

⁴⁸ For example, the Mark Twain commemorative coin program limited the number of coins that might be minted. P.L. 112-201, §3, required that the U.S. Mint issue "not more than 100,000 \$5 coins ... and not more than 350,000 \$1 coins."

⁴⁹ P.L. 104-208, §529, 110 Stat. 3009-349 (1996); 31 U.S.C. §5112(m)(1).

⁵⁰ U.S. Congress, House Committee on Financial Services, Rules for the Committee on Financial Services, 113th Cong., 1st sess. (GPO, 2013), p. 6.

⁵¹ U.S. Congress, House, Majority Leader Steve Scalise, "Commemorative Coins" in "119th Congress Floor Protocols," <https://www.majorityleader.gov/schedule/floor-protocols.htm>. Additionally, the protocols state that "(A) the individual, event, or institution being honored must be American; (B) the individual, event, or institution must have had a lasting impact on American history and culture that is likely to be recognized as a major influence long after the individual, (continued...)"

In the Senate for the 119th Congress, the Senate Banking, Housing, and Urban Affairs Committee rules require that a commemorative coin bill or resolution have at least 67 Senators as cosponsors before being considered by the committee.⁵²

For more information on commemorative coins, see CRS In Focus IF10262, *Commemorative Coins: An Overview*, by Jacob R. Straus, and CRS Report R44623, *Commemorative Coins: Background, Legislative Process, and Issues for Congress*, by Jacob R. Straus.

Congressional Gold Medals

Although Congress has approved legislation stipulating requirements for numerous other awards and decorations,⁵³ there are no permanent statutory provisions specifically relating to the creation of Congressional Gold Medals. When a Congressional Gold Medal has been deemed appropriate, Congress has, by legislative action, provided for the creation of a medal on an *ad hoc* basis.

When the Republican Party has held a majority of seats in the House in recent decades (104th to the 109th Congresses, 112th to the 115th Congresses, and 118th to 119th Congresses) the consideration of gold medal legislation has been effectively governed by a rule of the House Republican Conference that provides guidelines to the majority leader on scheduling legislation under the House procedure Suspension of the Rules.⁵⁴ In the 119th Congress, Conference Rule 29(a)(7) generally prohibits the majority leader from scheduling for floor consideration under suspension of the rules any legislation directing the Secretary of the Treasury to strike Congressional Gold Medals except under specific circumstances.⁵⁵ While party rules are not enforceable via points of order on the House floor, the rule arguably reflects a reluctance on the part of the majority party during this period to schedule certain gold medals bills.

When the Democratic Party held the majority of seats in the House (110th to the 111th Congresses and the 116th to the 117th Congresses), it issued similar protocols for the scheduling of Congressional Gold Medal bills. In the 117th Congress, the majority leader's protocols addressed the number of gold medal bills that might be scheduled for floor consideration in the House. The protocols stated

event, or institution's time; (C) a substantially similar individual, event, or institution has not received a coin previously; (D) the recipient being honored can't be an individual who is living; (E) and the bill comports with 31 U.S.C. 5112(m), which provides that no more than two commemorative coin programs may be authorized for a particular calendar year.”

⁵² “Senate Committee on Banking, Housing, and Urban Affairs Rules of Procedure,” *Congressional Record*, daily edition, vol. 171 (January 23, 2025), pp. S330-332.

⁵³ See “Decorations, Medals, and Badges,” in the general index of the *United States Code: 2018 Edition* (GPO, 2018).

⁵⁴ U.S. Congress, House Republican Conference, “Rule 29—Guidelines on Suspension of House Rules” in *Conference Rules of the 119th Congress*, https://www.gop.gov/uploadedfiles/conference_rules_of_the_119th_congress.pdf. Another portion of the rule allows a waiver to be granted by a majority of the party's elected leadership (see Republican Conference Rule 29(8)(b) and Rule 2).

⁵⁵ In order for Congressional Gold Medal legislation to be scheduled under suspension of the rules, the following conditions must be met: “(A) the recipient is a natural person; (B) the recipient has performed an achievement that has an impact on American history and culture that is likely to be recognized as a major achievement in the recipient's field long after the achievement; (C) the recipient has not received a medal previously for the same or substantially the same achievement; (D) the recipient is living or, if deceased, has not been deceased for less than five years or more than twenty-five years; (E) the achievements were performed in the recipient's field of endeavor, and represent either a lifetime of continuous superior achievements or a single achievement so significant that the recipient is recognized and acclaimed by others in the same field, as evidenced by the recipient having received the highest honors in the field; and (F) adoption of such measure does not cause the total number of measures authorizing the striking of such medals in that congress to substantially exceed the average number of such measures enacted in prior congresses.”

the Majority Leader shall consider the first three Gold Medal bills in a Congress that receive 290 cosponsors and are submitted to the Committee on Financial Services to be scheduled for the Floor.⁵⁶

In the Senate, the Banking, Housing, and Urban Affairs Committee in the 119th Congress requires that at least 67 Senators must cosponsor any Congressional Gold Medal bill before it will be considered by the committee.⁵⁷

For more information on Congressional Gold Medals, see CRS Report R45101, *Congressional Gold Medals: Background, Legislative Process, and Issues for Congress*, by Jacob R. Straus.

Monuments and Memorials

On many occasions, Congress has authorized the creation of monuments and memorials to commemorate historic figures, events, and movements. Whether the monument or memorial is intended to be built in the District of Columbia determines the process for placement, design, and approval of the commemorative work.

District of Columbia

In 1986, the Commemorative Works Act (CWA) was enacted to provide standards for the consideration and placement of monuments and memorials in areas administered by the National Park Service (NPS) and the General Services Administration (GSA) in the District of Columbia.⁵⁸ The CWA provides that no “commemorative work may be established in the District of Columbia unless specifically authorized by Congress.”⁵⁹

Legislation proposing a new commemorative work in the District of Columbia generally consists of three main sections: a short title, definitions, and authorization for establishing the memorial. First, most authorizing legislation has a short title. This is the name of the authorizing legislation, which often includes the name of the memorial. Second, the definitions section contains terms used in further sections of the legislation. These can include “memorial,” “association,” “foundation,” or other relevant terms. Finally, the authorization generally consists of four parts:

⁵⁶ U.S. Congress, House, Majority Leader Steny Hoyer, “117th Congress Legislative Protocols,” <https://leaderarchive-hoyer.house.gov/content/117th-congress-legislative-protocols>. Additionally, the protocols stated “(A) the recipient must be a natural person; (B) the recipient must have performed an achievement that has an impact on American history and culture that is likely to be recognized as a major achievement in the recipient’s field long after the achievement; (C) the recipient must not have received a medal previously for the same or substantially the same achievement; (D) the recipient must be living or, if deceased, has not have been deceased for less than five years or more than twenty-five years; (E) and the achievements were performed in the recipient’s field of endeavor, and represent either a lifetime of continuous superior achievements or a single achievement so significant that the recipient is recognized and acclaimed by others in the same field, as evidenced by the recipient having received the highest honors in the field.”

⁵⁷ “Senate Committee on Banking, Housing, and Urban Affairs Rules of Procedure,” *Congressional Record*, daily edition, 171 (January 23, 2025), pp. S330-332.

⁵⁸ 40 U.S.C. §§8901-8909.

⁵⁹ 40 U.S.C. §8902(a)(2). “The term ‘the District of Columbia and its environs’ means those lands and properties administered by the National Park Service and the General Services Administration located in the Reserve, Area I, and Area II as depicted on the map entitled ‘Commemorative Areas Washington, DC and Environs,’ numbered 869/86501 B, and dated June 24, 2003.” For a map of the commemorative areas of Washington, DC, and environs, see CRS Report R41658, *Commemorative Works in the District of Columbia: Background and Practice*, by Jacob R. Straus. Memorials to be located on land under the Jurisdiction of the District of Columbia are governed by D.C. Law 13-275, the Commemorative Works on Public Space Amendment Act of 2000.

1. Authorization to establish a commemorative work. This designates a specific third-party entity as the “sponsor group,” which is the party responsible for the establishment of the new monument or memorial.
2. Compliance with the Commemorative Works Act. This applies the CWA to the monument or memorial or exempts the monument and memorial from the CWA or certain CWA provisions.
3. Prohibition of Federal Funds. This section generally prohibits the designated sponsor group from using federal funds on the monument or memorial.
4. Deposit of excess funds. This provision specifies the use of funds raised by the sponsor group in excess of those necessary for the design, construction, and dedication of the monument or memorial.

Following introduction, CWA-related legislation is generally referred to the House Committee on Natural Resources and the Subcommittee on National Parks, Forests, and Public Lands, and the Senate Committee on Energy and Natural Resources. Either one or both of the committees (or subcommittees) will hold hearings on the proposal, inviting testimony from representatives of the National Park Service and the organization seeking approval for the monument or memorial. Important considerations will include historical importance of the commemorative work, estimated cost, and how private funds needed for construction are to be raised. Additionally, the National Capital Memorial Advisory Commission (NCMAC) will often provide advice to the committees on the proposed memorial.⁶⁰

For more information on the process after a commemorative work is authorized by Congress, see CRS Report R41658, *Commemorative Works in the District of Columbia: Background and Practice*, by Jacob R. Straus. For a list of commemorative works authorized since the enactment of the CWA in 1986, see CRS Report R43743, *Monuments and Memorials Authorized and Completed Under the Commemorative Works Act in the District of Columbia*, by Jacob R. Straus; and CRS Report R43744, *Monuments and Memorials Authorized Under the Commemorative Works Act in the District of Columbia: Current Development of In-Progress and Lapsed Works*, by Jacob R. Straus. For a discussion of memorial themes, see CRS In Focus IF11833, *Commemorative Works in the District of Columbia: Categorization of Proposed and Enacted Memorials, 1973-2020*, by Jacob R. Straus and Jared C. Nagel.

Non-District of Columbia

Congressional involvement in monuments and memorials outside of the District of Columbia is not governed by the Commemorative Works Act. Instead, the process for creating the monument or memorial is determined based on whether the work will be placed on existing federal land or will receive federal funding. Recently, Congress has handled the creation of monuments and memorials outside the District of Columbia in two ways: by directly authorizing a new commemorative or by making an existing work a “national” monument or memorial.⁶¹

⁶⁰ 40 U.S.C. §8904.

⁶¹ Pursuant to the Antiquities Act of 1909 (16 U.S.C. §§431-433), the President may establish national monuments on federal lands. National monuments generally contain “historic landmarks, historic and prehistoric structures, and other objects of historic or scientific interest.” (16 U.S.C. §3213). For more information on national monuments and the Antiquities Act of 1909, see CRS Report R41330, *National Monuments and the Antiquities Act*, by Carol Hardy Vincent.

New Commemorative. Periodically, Congress authorizes a new memorial outside of the District of Columbia. On these occasions, legislation is required to statutorily authorize a group—either federal or nonfederal—to design, construct, and maintain the memorial.

For example, during the 107th Congress (2001-2002), legislation was enacted to authorize “a national memorial to commemorate the passengers and crew of Flight 93 who, on September 11, 2001, courageously gave their lives thereby thwarting a planned attack on our Nation’s Capital,”⁶² at the crash site in Shanksville, PA.⁶³ During debate on the bill (H.R. 3917, 107th Congress), Representative William Shuster summarized the importance of Congress creating a national memorial and making it part of the National Park Service.

As we debate this measure, in this most revered of halls, I cannot help but contemplate the possibility that Flight 93 was headed to a target here in the Nation’s Capitol—quite possibly right here to the Capitol itself. We will, however, never know for sure where that doomed flight was headed. We will never know, because men and women, put love of country ahead of self preservation. These were not super heros [sic], but individuals just like you and me. Individuals with families and loved ones anxiously awaiting their return, who put aside their own desires [sic] and stood up to combat terrorism and save countless lives....

The legislation before us today lays out a fair and balanced approach for construction of a memorial for these brave individuals. The legislation calls for the creation of the Flight 93 Advisory Commission which would be composed of representatives from the families of victims, the local community, the state of Pennsylvania and the United States Government. The Commission would then submit their recommendations to the Secretary of the Interior.⁶⁴

In authorizing the Flight 93 Memorial, Congress also created an advisory committee to make recommendations to the Secretary of the Interior and Congress on the design, construction, and management of the memorial.⁶⁵ Creation of such a commission is not uncommon and can aid government agencies with the planning and execution of commemorations.

Official Recognition of Existing Commemoratives. Instead of authorizing the creation of a completely new memorial, Congress has also considered legislation to recognize existing works as national monuments or memorials. Enacting legislation to provide national recognition of a monument or memorial, but maintaining local operation and maintenance, generally requires no federal oversight or funds. For example, P.L. 113-132 designated a memorial in Riverside, CA, as the “Distinguished Flying Cross National Memorial.”⁶⁶ The memorial honors military aviators who have received the “Distinguished Flying Cross [which] is the oldest military award for aviation” with a national memorial, which does not already exist.⁶⁷

⁶² U.S. Congress, House Committee on Resources, *Flight 93 National Memorial Act*, report to accompany H.R. 3917, 107th Cong., 2nd session, July 22, 2002, H.Rept. 107-597 (GPO, 2002).

⁶³ P.L. 107-226, 116 Stat. 1345 (2002); 16 U.S.C. §431 note.

⁶⁴ Rep. William Shuster, “Flight 93 National Memorial Act,” remarks in the House, *Congressional Record*, daily edition, vol. 148 (July 22, 2002), p. H5005.

⁶⁵ P.L. 107-226, §4.

⁶⁶ P.L. 113-132, 128 Stat. 1727 (2014).

⁶⁷ Rep. Raúl Grijalva, “Distinguished Flying Cross National Memorial Act,” remarks in the House, *Congressional Record*, daily edition, vol. 159 (October 29, 2013), p. H6853. See also, U.S. Congress, House Committee on Natural Resources, *Distinguished Flying Cross National Memorial Act*, report to accompany H.R. 330, 113th Cong., 1st sess., May 17, 2013, H.Rept. 113-79 (GPO, 2013), p. 1.

For more information on memorials and commemorative works outside Washington, DC, see CRS Report R45741, *Memorials and Commemorative Works Outside Washington, DC: Background, Federal Role, and Options for Congress*, by Jacob R. Straus and Laura B. Comay.

Commemorative Commissions

Commemorative commissions are entities established to oversee the commemoration of a person or event. These commissions typically coordinate celebrations, scholarly events, public gatherings, and other activities, often to coincide with a milestone anniversary. For example, the Christopher Columbus Quincentenary Jubilee Commission was created “to prepare a comprehensive program for commemorating the quincentennial of the voyages of discovery of Christopher Columbus, and to plan, encourage, coordinate, and conduct observances and activities commemorating the historic events associated with those voyages.”⁶⁸

A commemorative commission statute generally includes the commission’s mandate, provides a membership and appointment structure, outlines the commission’s duties and powers, and sets a termination date. A variety of options are available for each of these organizational choices, and legislators can tailor the composition, organization, and working arrangements of a commission, based on the particular goals of Congress. As a result, the organizational structure and powers of individual commissions are often unique.

In fulfilling their duties, most commemorative commissions have encouraged; worked closely with; and coordinated with private groups, state and local governments, and other federal government entities taking part in the general commemoration of the person or event. Because of these cooperative efforts, federally created commissions are often only a portion of planned celebratory events. Therefore, federal funds appropriated to a commemorative commission are generally only a portion of the total funding ultimately expended nationwide for commemorative activities and events.

Commemorative commissions have been funded in two ways: through appropriations or through solicitation of nonfederal money. At times, commissions are authorized both for appropriations and to fundraise or accept donations. In addition, some commemorative commissions are not provided with explicit authorization to solicit funds or accept donations. Commissions without the statutory authority to solicit funds or accept donations are generally prohibited from engaging in those activities.⁶⁹

For more information on commemorative commissions, see CRS Report R41425, *Commemorative Commissions: Overview, Structure, and Funding*, by Jacob R. Straus.

Commemorative Observances and Days

As discussed above in the section “House Ban on Commemorative Legislation,” House Rule XII, clause 5 prohibits the introduction or consideration of commemorative legislation that includes a “remembrance, celebration or recognition for any purpose through the designation of a specified period of time.”⁷⁰ Additionally, House Oversight and Government Reform Committee rules prohibit the committee chair from requesting that party leadership schedule such bills under

⁶⁸ P.L. 98-375, 98 Stat. 1257 (1984).

⁶⁹ U.S. Government Accountability Office, *Principles of Federal Appropriations Law: Third Edition, Volume II*, GAO-06-382SP, February 2006, pp. 6-162, <https://www.gao.gov/assets/gao-06-382sp.pdf>.

⁷⁰ U.S. Congress, House, “Rule XII, clause 5,” *Constitution, Jefferson’s Manual and Rules of the House of Representatives of the United States One Hundred Eighteenth Congress*, 117th Cong., 2nd sess., H.Doc. 117-161 (GPO, 2019), §823, pp. 654-655, <https://www.govinfo.gov/content/pkg/HMAN-118/pdf/HMAN-118.pdf#page=668>.

suspension of the rules in the House.⁷¹ Further, in the 119th Congress, the House majority leader's protocols prohibit the scheduling of commemorative resolutions.⁷² Consequently, the number of commemorative observances and days designated by bills, concurrent resolutions, joint resolutions, and House resolutions has been small. The House prohibition on commemorative observances and days, however, does not preclude the Senate from using Senate measures to honor individuals, groups, and events.

In the past, the Senate Judiciary Committee has had unpublished guidelines on the consideration of commemorative legislation. These guidelines were not officially part of the committee's rules and may not be currently applicable. Past guidance restricted consideration of commemorative legislation without a minimum number of bipartisan cosponsors and prohibited commemoration of specific categories.⁷³

For more information on commemorative observances and days, see CRS Report R48065, *Congressional Recognition of Commemorative Days, Weeks, and Months: Background and Current Practice*, by Jacob R. Straus.

Federal Holidays

The United States has established 12 permanent federal holidays. They are, in the order they appear in the calendar: New Year's Day, Martin Luther King Jr.'s Birthday, Inauguration Day (every four years following a presidential election), George Washington's Birthday, Memorial Day, Juneteenth National Independence Day, Independence Day, Labor Day, Columbus Day, Veterans Day, Thanksgiving Day, and Christmas Day.⁷⁴ Although frequently called public or national days, these celebrations are only legally applicable to federal employees and the District of Columbia, as the states individually decide their own legal holidays.

To create a new federal holiday, legislation is required. For example, in 2021, Juneteenth National Independence Day was established as a federal holiday.⁷⁵ The Juneteenth authorization legislation added the day to the list of holidays at 5 U.S.C. §6103.

For more information on federal holidays, see CRS Report R41990, *Federal Holidays: Evolution and Current Practices*, by Jacob R. Straus.

Presidential Proclamations

On many occasions, Congress has requested that the President issue a proclamation recognizing an event or individual. Usually associated with the creation of a patriotic and national observance (36 U.S.C. §§101-148), statutory language requests that the President issue a proclamation each year to commemorate an event or group. For example, the National Pearl Harbor Remembrance

⁷¹ House Committee on Oversight and Government Reform, "Rule 13," p. 8.

⁷² U.S. Congress, House, Majority Leader Steve Scalise, "119th Congress Floor Protocols," <https://www.majorityleader.gov/schedule/floor-protocols.htm>. The protocols also state that "a resolution of bereavement, or condemnation, or which calls on others (such as a foreign government) to take a particular action, ... is eligible to be scheduled under suspension of the Rules."

⁷³ U.S. Congress, Senate Committee on the Judiciary, "Committee Policy for the Consideration of Commemorative Measures: 106th Congress (unpublished)." Categories for which the committee has not considered requests for commemorations included a commercial enterprise, industry, or specific product, or a fraternal, political, business, labor, or sectarian organization; a particular state or any political subdivision of a state, city, town, county, school, or institution of higher learning; or a living person.

⁷⁴ 5 U.S.C. §6103(a).

⁷⁵ P.L. 117-17, 135 Stat. 287 (2021). For more information, see CRS Insight IN11697, *Juneteenth National Independence Day: A New Federal Holiday*, by Jacob R. Straus.

Day statute requests that the President issue a yearly proclamation “calling on ... the people of the United States to observe National Pearl Harbor Remembrance Day with appropriate ceremonies and activities.”⁷⁶

Commemorative proclamations can also be issued by Presidents without any congressional action, and have been regularly issued throughout American history. Since 1789, when President George Washington issued the first proclamation declaring November 26 of that year a National Day of Thanksgiving, there have been hundreds of such designations.

Nonlegislative Options

In addition to the legislative options for commemoration listed above, several nonlegislative options exist to commemorate individuals, groups, and events. These include certificates of recognition, floor speeches, and the purchasing of American flags.

Certificates of Recognition

Certificates of Recognition are “awards” given by individual Member offices to constituents or groups to acknowledge accomplishments. Members are generally free to create and distribute certificates of recognition to individuals or groups to constituents.

In the House, official funds can be used for the creation and distribution of certificates that recognize “a person who has achieved some public distinction”⁷⁷ provided that the certificates comply with Communication Standards Commission (formerly the Franking Commission) regulations and do not contain political or partisan references, solicit support of a Member’s position on an issue, or advertise or endorse benefits not available to all constituents.⁷⁸ Additionally, the House Ethics Manual reminds Members that all constituents are to be treated equally, regardless of “political support, party affiliation, or campaign contributions ...” when

⁷⁶ 36 U.S.C. §129(b). For example, President Barack Obama issued a National Pearl Harbor Remembrance Day Proclamation on December 5, 2013. For text of the proclamation, see The White House, “Presidential Proclamation—National Pearl Harbor Remembrance Day, 2013,” press release, December 5, 2013, <https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/the-press-office/2013/12/05/presidential-proclamation-national-pearl-harbor-remembrance-day-2013>.

⁷⁷ U.S. Congress, Committee on House Administration, “Recognition of Public Service and Acts of Public Distinction,” *Members’ Congressional Handbook*, 118th Cong., 2nd sess., adopted April 30, 2024, p. 27, https://cha.house.gov/_cache/files/6/3/63b879df-678d-4a44-9637-aa88833a3b5e/412D4FA3B4C85396D1383D08FACC0453.2024-11-04-members-congressional-handbook.pdf#page=27 (hereinafter *Members’ Congressional Handbook*). The *Members’ Congressional Handbook* includes a list of “official recognized acts of public distinction for which the [Members’ Representational Allowance] MRA can be used.” These “include election or appointment to public office, publicly notable awards and honors, U.S. Citizenship, Eagle Scout/Gold Award, High School graduation, heroism, appointment to a U.S. military academy, Military Service (upon enlistment, promotion, honorable discharge, or to the family of a fallen soldier), Emergency Personnel (upon hiring, promotion, retirement, or to the family of a fallen first responder), Public Education professionals (upon hiring, promotion or retirement) and for the opening of or to be flown at government buildings.”

⁷⁸ U.S. Congress, House Commission on Congressional Mailing Standards, *The House of Representatives Communications Standards Manual*, effective May 2, 2024, https://cha.house.gov/_cache/files/2/8/28813611-bf6e-4edb-a9e6-b71aa2681b89/2A790B128F05A6F0EC5102CF12A5076D.2024-communications-standards-manual-may.pdf.

deciding to provide assistance to constituents.⁷⁹ This would likely extend to the sending of certificates of recognition as well.⁸⁰

In the Senate, two standing orders place restrictions on reimbursable expenses payable from a Senator's Official Office Account. S.Res. 294 (96th Congress) and S.Res. 176 (104th Congress) specifically prohibit the use of official funds for "expenses incurred for the purchase of holiday greeting cards, flowers, trophies, awards, and *certificates*" (emphasis added).⁸¹ Further, pursuant to 39 U.S.C. §3210(a)(3)(F), the Senate Ethics Manual provides guidance that "[m]ail expressing congratulations to a person who achieved some public distinction may be franked only when the occasion involves a public distinction, rather than a personal distinction."⁸²

Floor Speeches

Many Members have honored individuals and groups of constituents by giving a floor speech, and then sending copies of the *Congressional Record* to the individual or group that was honored. This activity can include a single Member or a group of Members that want to jointly honor constituent(s) either with a group of special order speeches or a series of individual—perhaps one minute—speeches.⁸³ To inquire about floor time for a commemorative speech, Members may contact their party's leadership.

United States Flags

In 1937, a Member of Congress made the first request to fly a U.S. flag over the U.S. Capitol building. Since that time, the Architect of the Capitol (AOC) has managed the flag program for the House and Senate.

Generally, U.S. flags flown over the Capitol can be purchased by a constituent through his or her Representative's or Senator's offices. In both the House and Senate, the Member office collects flag requests from constituents and facilitates the purchase of flags from the House or Senate office supply store and coordinates with the Architect of the Capitol for the flying of flags over the Capitol building.

⁷⁹ U.S. Congress, House Committee on Standards of Official Conduct, *House Ethics Manual*, 117th Cong., 2nd sess., December 2022 print, p. 308. See also, CRS In Focus IF10489, *Congressional Franked Mail: Overview*, by William T. Egar.

⁸⁰ *House Ethics Manual*, p. 170. The *House Ethics Manual* notes, however, that "while letters of congratulations for a public distinction are frankable, other letters of congratulation, such as for years of service at a business, or retirement, are not. Under House rules, a Member may use campaign funds and resources to create and send cards, letters, and certificates of these types to constituents. However, such materials may not be produced in or sent from any House office, and may not be produced or sent using any other House resource, including office equipment or staff while on official time."

⁸¹ U.S. Congress, Senate Committee on Rules and Administration, "Standing Orders of the Senate: Restrictions on Certain Expenses Payable or Reimbursable from a Senator's Official Office Expense Account," *Senate Manual*, 113th Cong., 1st sess., S.Doc. 113-1 (GPO, 2014), §107(2)(2), p. 193; and U.S. Congress, Senate Committee on Rules and Administration, *Senate Handbook* 111th Cong., 2nd sess. (October 2010), p. I-46; IV-11.

⁸² U.S. Congress, Senate Select Committee on Ethics, *Senate Ethics Manual*, 108th Cong., 1st sess., S. Pub. 108-1 (GPO, 2003), p. 164. Examples of public distinctions include recent naturalization as an American citizen; receipt of a high school diploma by a senior citizen through an adult education program; enlistment or re-enlistment in the Armed Forces; becoming an Eagle Scout or a VFW Commander or an American Legion State Commander; being elected to a public office; becoming director of a state museum; being commissioned upon graduation from one of the U.S. Service Academies; being the recipient of a Harry S. Truman Scholarship or a Robert Byrd honor scholarship; or receiving the "Employer of the Year" Award presented by the President's Committee on Employment of the Handicapped.

⁸³ For an example in 2015, an honorific speech was given to celebrate the 129th annual Groundhog Day in Punxsutawney, PA. See <http://www.gpo.gov/fdsys/pkg/CREC-2015-02-03/pdf/CREC-2015-02-03-pt1-PgH710-9.pdf>.

For more information on the Architect of the Capitol's flag program, see <http://www.aoc.gov/trades-and-areas-practice/capitol-flag-program>.

House of Representatives

Members may obtain flags from the Office Supply Service (OSS). According to the House of Representatives *Members' Congressional Handbook*,

offices can assist constituents in purchasing U.S. flags. The flags are ordered by the Member office and the cost of the flag and, if applicable, the additional flag flying fee, is initially charged to the [Members' Representational Allowance] MRA. Individuals can submit payment for the flag and flag flying fee via check or the pay.gov system. The MRA will be credited once payment is received.⁸⁴

Additionally, Members may use official funds to pay for a flag flown over the Capitol that will be used for an official gift.⁸⁵

In the 118th Congress, a "Dear Colleague" letter in the House announced the removal of a previous prohibition on using campaign funds to purchase flags flown over the Capitol. The new House guidance allows "campaigns to purchase flags in the same fashion as any constituent and outside organization consistent with House Rules and regulations" and further allows campaign funds "to be used to purchase flags for campaign/political purposes consistent with Federal Election Commission regulations."⁸⁶

For more information on the House of Representatives flag program (internal House webpage), see <https://housenet.house.gov/page/4440?SearchId=0>.

Senate

Senators may obtain flags from the Senate Stationary Room. Senators collect the cost of the flag, shipping fees, and flag flying and certification fees from the constituent, obtain the flag from the stationary room, and then work with the Packaging and Flags division of the Printing, Graphics, and Direct Mail (PG&DM) office to arrange for the flag to be flown over the Capitol.⁸⁷

Additionally, pursuant to S.Res. 294 (96th Congress), "Senate offices can use official funds to purchase flags. The legislation limits the groups to which a gift of a flag may be made to public organizations only, such as churches, schools, and patriotic service groups."⁸⁸

⁸⁴ *Members' Congressional Handbook*, "Flags," <https://cha.house.gov/members-congressional-handbook#95F1842D-C132-408E-B060-7D8DD3EC5CFB>.

⁸⁵ *Members' Congressional Handbook*, "Recognition of Public Service and Public Distinction," <https://cha.house.gov/members-congressional-handbook#4238EB7F-A022-4A59-BD67-46C9DD24962A>.

⁸⁶ U.S. Congress, Committee on House Administration, "Notifying Office of Change to Capitol Flag Flying Program," Dear Colleague Letter, October 11, 2023, <https://e-dearcolleague.house.gov/Home/Preview?DCID=405114>. House Ethics Committee guidance prohibits the use of campaign funds to purchase flags for official purposes. For more information, see U.S. Congress, House, Committee on Ethics, "Members' Representational Allowance," *House Ethics Manual*, pp. 331-334, <https://ethics.house.gov/wp-content/uploads/2023/12/Dec-2022-House-Ethics-Manual-website-version.pdf#page=345>.

⁸⁷ U.S. Congress, Senate, Committee on Rules and Administration, *Senate Handbook*, 111th Cong., 2nd sess., October 2010, pp. I-42-I-43.

⁸⁸ *Senate Handbook*, p. I-44. S.Res. 294 (96th Congress) was amended by S.Res. 176 (104th Congress). Further, "the legislative history of S.Res. 294 limits the groups to which a gift of a flag may be made to public organizations only, such as churches, schools, and patriotic service groups." For more information see, U.S. Congress, Senate, Select Committee on Ethics, *Senate Ethics Manual*. 108th Cong., 1st sess., S. Pub. 108-1 (2003), p. 173, https://www.ethics.senate.gov/public/_cache/files/f2eb14e3-1123-48eb-9334-8c4717102a6e/2003-senate-ethics-manual.pdf#page=184.

For more information on the Senate flag program (internal Senate webpage), see <http://webster.senate.gov/pdgm/flag-packaging-services>.

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