

Chamber, Rooms, and Galleries

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Research References

5 Hinds §§ 7270–7311
8 Cannon §§ 3632, 3636–3643
1 Deschler Ch 4
Manual §§ 918–922

§ 1. In General; Use of the Hall

The Hall of the House and unappropriated rooms in the House are under the general control of the Speaker. Rule I clause 3. *Manual* § 623. Control of the appropriated rooms in the House wing is exercised by the House itself. 5 Hinds §§ 7273–7279. Resolutions assigning a room to a committee have been considered as privileged. 5 Hinds § 7273.

By House rule (*Manual* § 918), the Hall may be used only for the legislative business of the House, caucus meetings of its Members, and ceremonies in which the House votes to participate. 5 Hinds § 7270. In rare instances, the House has permitted the Hall to be used for ceremonial or special occasions. See 8 Cannon § 3682; Deschler Ch 4 §§ 3.1, 3.4. Members may not entertain guests in the Hall. Deschler Ch 4 § 3.2. Admission to the Hall, see § 2, *infra*.

Disorderly or disruptive acts in the Capitol are unlawful, and unauthorized demonstrations are prohibited by law. 40 USC § 193f(b)(4). And the unauthorized presence of persons on the floor of either House or in the gallery of either House is prohibited. 40 USC § 193f(b)(1), (2). Admission to the galleries, see § 4, *infra*. Disorder in the House, see CONSIDERATION AND DEBATE.

§ 2. Admission to the Floor

Generally

The House rules (Rule XXXII) enumerate those persons entitled to be admitted to the floor or rooms leading thereto. *Manual* §§ 919–921b. Among those who may be admitted to the Hall are the President and Vice President,

Judges of the Supreme Court, Members-elect, governors of states, and other named officials. *Manual* § 919.

The rule is strictly enforced during regular meetings, less so on ceremonial occasions (Deschler Ch 4 § 4) or when the House is in recess during a joint meeting with the Senate (91–2, Feb. 24, 1970, p 4546). The Speaker sometimes announces guidelines for enforcement during a recess. During a regular meeting, a point of order will lie to object to the presence of any unauthorized persons (92–2, June 21, 1972, p 21704). Motions or unanimous-consent requests to suspend the rule may not be entertained by the Speaker (Rule XXXII clause 1; 92–2, June 8, 1972, p 20318) or by the Chairman of the Committee of the Whole (5 Hinds § 7285).

The rule governing admissions to the floor permits the presence of heads of departments and foreign ministers. *Manual* § 919. “Heads of departments” has been interpreted to mean members of the President’s Cabinet, and “foreign ministers” is construed to mean the representatives of foreign governments duly accredited to the United States. 5 Hinds § 7283.

Persons who have been held entitled to admission to the floor include Senators, although not for the purpose of addressing the House (Deschler Ch 4 § 4.8), and challengers in election contests, even though they were not candidates in the election in which the sitting Members were elected (Deschler Ch 4 § 4.5). Floor privileges may be claimed for one attorney for a Member-respondent during consideration of a disciplinary resolution reported from the Committee on Standards of Official Conduct. *Manual* § 919.

The Speaker has the authority to exclude an individual who abuses the privileges of the floor. 5 Hinds § 7288. An alleged abuse of the privilege of the floor may be made the subject of an inquiry by a special committee. 5 Hinds § 7287.

Staff; Committee Clerks

By House rule, a Member with an amendment under consideration may be joined on the floor by one person from his staff. This rule also permits the presence of clerks of committees when business from their committee is under consideration. Rule XXXII clause 1. *Manual* § 919.

This rule has been interpreted by the Speaker to allow the presence on the floor of four professional staff members and one clerk from a committee during consideration of that committee’s business (92–2, June 8, 1972, p 20318) and to require that such individuals remain unobtrusively by the committee tables (97–2, Aug. 18, 1982, p 21934). The privileges of the floor do not extend to departmental employees assisting committees in the preparation of bills. 6 Cannon § 579. Where several committees are involved in a pending measure, the rule permits authorized majority and minority staff

(up to five persons) from each committee. 97–1, June 26, 1981, p 14574. Floor clerks other than those employed by a committee involved in the bill under consideration are not entitled to the floor. Deschler Ch 4 § 4. The Speaker has announced his intention to strictly enforce the rule to prevent a proliferation of committee staff on the floor. 93–2, Aug. 22, 1974, p 30027; 97–1, Jan. 19, 1981, p 402; 98–1, Jan. 25, 1983, p 224.

Staff permitted on the floor under the rule are not permitted to pass out literature or otherwise attempt to influence Members in their votes. (101–2, Aug. 1, 1990, p ____), nor to applaud during debate (104–1, June 15, 1995, p ____).

Effect of Personal or Pecuniary Interest in Pending Legislation

Although former Members, officers, and certain former employees have access to the floor under the rule (*Manual* § 919), such an individual is not entitled to the privileges of the floor if he (1) has a direct personal or pecuniary interest in legislation under consideration in the House or reported by any committee, or (2) represents any party or organization for the purpose of influencing the disposition of legislation pending before the House or reported by a committee or under consideration in a committee. *Manual* § 921a. See also 95–2, June 7, 1978, p 16625. For regulations issued by the Speaker under this rule, see 95–1, Jan. 6, 1977, p 321; announcement of Speaker Foley, 103–2, June 9, 1994, p ____; announcement of Speaker Gingrich, 104–1, May 24, 1995, p ____.

Secret Sessions

Before a secret session of the House commences, the Speaker may direct that the chamber be cleared of all persons except Members and those officers and employees specified by the Speaker whose attendance on the floor is essential to the functioning of the session. 96–1, June 20, 1979, p 15711. A point of order will not lie against the presence in the chamber of those persons whose attendance on the floor is permitted by the Speaker's directive. 96–1, July 17, 1979, p 19050. See also CONSIDERATION AND DEBATE.

§ 3. Electronic Devices; Signals, Bells, and Clocks

Various electronic devices and computer services are used by the House under the modern practice to expedite quorum calls, votes, and for other purposes. *Manual* § 765a. Resolutions relating thereto are within the jurisdiction of the Committee on House Oversight (formerly House Administration) and are called up as privileged. See 92–1, Nov. 9, 1971, p 40015.

The use of personal electronic office equipment (including cellular phones and computers) on the floor of the House is prohibited by rules adopted in 1995. Rule XIV clause 7.

A legislative bell and light system alerts Members to quorum calls, the taking of certain votes, and other occurrences on the floor. *Manual* § 765. Changes in the system are announced by the Speaker from time to time. The failure of the signal bells to announce a vote does not warrant repetition of the roll call (8 Cannon §§ 3153–3511), nor does such a failure permit a Member to be recorded following the conclusion of the call (75–3, June 9, 1938, p 8662).

Microphones have been placed on the floor of the House for the use of Members. A Member making an appropriate request should use one of the floor microphones so that all Members may hear it. 94–1, Oct. 28, 1975, p 34027. By the same token, the House rules (Rule I clause 2) direct the Speaker to preserve order and decorum in the House, and he is authorized to order the microphones turned off if being utilized by a Member who has not been properly recognized and who is disorderly. 100–2, Mar. 16, 1988, pp 4079 *et seq.*

Where there is a discrepancy in the time shown on the clocks in the House chamber, the Chair relies on the clock on the north wall in deciding when time has expired. 88–2, Feb. 10, 1964, p 2724.

§ 4. Galleries and Corridors

Control over the corridors leading to the House chamber is vested in the Speaker. *Manual* §§ 622, 623. The Speaker may order the corridors cleared during quorum calls and the taking of votes to ensure unimpeded access to the chamber. 96–1, Jan. 15, 1979, p 19. The Speaker preserves order and decorum in the galleries, and in the event of a disturbance, he may order the galleries cleared. *Manual* § 622. The Chairman of the Committee of the Whole may exercise similar power in preserving order in the galleries. *Manual* § 861a.

Guests in the House gallery must maintain order and refrain from manifestations of approval or disapproval of proceedings on the floor, and admonitions may be expressed either by the Speaker (89–2, July 25, 1966, p 16837; 92–2, Jan. 18, 1972, p 8) or by the Chairman of the Committee of the Whole (91–2, May 6, 1970, p 14449). It is also out of order under the rules of the House to refer to visitors in the galleries, even with permission to proceed out of order (Deschler Ch 4 § 5.4), and the Speaker, on his own initiative, may declare such remarks to be out of order (Deschler Ch 4 § 5.3).

§ 5. Photographs; Radio and Television Coverage

Photographs

Under the practice of the House, permission must be obtained before photographs may be taken inside the House chamber. Deschler Ch 4 § 3.5. Official photographs of the House while in session may be permitted by resolution. 88–2, Feb. 20, 1964, p 3224; 94–1, July 14, 1975, p 22575. Ground rules regarding the taking of such pictures may be enforced by the Speaker. 91–1, Jan. 6, 1969, p 145.

Media Coverage of Floor Proceedings

Prior to the 95th Congress, the rules and precedents of the House did not permit public radio and television broadcasts of House proceedings. In 1977, the House adopted a privileged resolution reported from the Committee on Rules to provide a system of closed-circuit viewing of House proceedings and for the orderly development of a broadcasting system. 95–1, Oct. 27, 1977, p 35425. The 96th Congress adopted a rule authorizing and directing audio and visual broadcasting and recording of the proceedings of the House. Rule I clause 9. Under this rule, broadcasts are made over closed-circuit television in House offices, and have been made available to the news media and to cable television systems. Broadcasts made available under the rule may not be used for political purposes, and the use thereof for commercial purposes is restricted. *Manual* § 934c.

In 1984, a question arose as to the authority of the Speaker to require wide-angle television coverage of the House chamber during special-order speeches. In this instance, the Speaker's directive that television cameras covering special-order speeches of the House at the completion of legislative business include periodic wide-angle coverage of the entire House chamber was held to be consistent with the authority conferred upon the Speaker under clause 9 of Rule I to devise and implement complete and unedited audio and visual coverage of the proceedings of the House. 98–2, May 10, 1984, p 11898. More recently, the Speaker has followed a policy under which television cameras would not “pan” the chamber during morning hour or special-order speeches. 103–2, Feb. 11, 1994, p ____; 104–1, Jan. 4, 1995, p ____.

Although clause 9(b)(1) of Rule I requires complete and unedited broadcast coverage of the proceedings of the House, it does not require in-House microphone amplification of disorderly conduct by a Member following expiration of his recognition for debate. 100–2, Mar. 16, 1988, pp 4079 *et seq.*