

insights

TYPES NOT MAPPED YET June 03, 2020 | TTR not mapped yet | Christopher T. Murray

Vote-a-rama

Vote-a-rama: A Senate floor practice during which amendments to a bill are voted on in immediate succession.

I'm Still Standing

The prestige of the U.S. Senate derives, in part, from its long-held traditions. Even today, the Senate is still governed by arcane, complicated [rules](#) regarding [quorum and voting](#) procedures. The Senate typically considers legislation using unanimous consent, a procedure that expedites the legislative process but still requires extensive negotiation.

The Senate has another practice that both speeds up deliberation and establishes a more fulsome legislative record: [vote-a-rama](#). A vote-a-rama is when senators vote on 15 or more amendments back-to-back, marathon style. Once a vote-a-rama begins, a single proponent and opponent is allotted a limited amount of time to speak for and against each amendment before the vote on that amendment is held. Senators then have only 10 minutes to get to the floor to vote (as opposed to the usual 15).

Runnin' Down A Dream

Vote-a-rama is a practice, not a formal procedure. In order for a vote-a-rama to take place, the Senate majority and minority leaders must establish a unanimous consent agreement that specifies the number and order of amendments, the deadline for offering amendments, and a time limit for debate. Amendments during a vote-a-rama frequently fail. But each party uses the amendments to force colleagues to vote on difficult policy issues, thus creating a more detailed voting record. Those votes can often be used against senators in the next election cycle.

Vote-a-ramas have been used [informally](#) since 1977, when senators voted on 18 amendments in succession on the National Gas Policy Act. As of 2017, there have been 58 vote-a-ramas. The most votes taken during a vote-a-rama occurred in 2008, when senators voted on 44 amendments to a budget resolution.

It's Not Over 'til it's Over

One of the most memorable vote-a-ramas occurred in July 2017, when senators spent hours voting on legislation that would have repealed the Affordable Care Act. Then-Senator McCain (R-AZ) dramatically killed the so-called "skinny repeal" with his infamous [thumbs-down](#) vote.

Three years later, congressional procedures are necessarily, if reluctantly, changing due to the challenges brought by COVID-19. For instance, the House and Senate are spending less time in session, and the House recently agreed to a [resolution](#) to allow [proxy voting](#) on the House floor for 45 days to limit travel by members and encourage social distancing. The pressure to adapt could prime vote-a-ramas as a way to move Senate legislative business more quickly this year.

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