

## Learning about Legislation #21: The Magic Minute

On Feb. 7, 2018, House Minority Leader Nancy Pelosi (D-CA) took the floor of the House for more than eight hours to give a speech about the plight of the Dreamers (you can read more about the contents of the speech in this [New York Times article](#)). The length of this speech broke a record from 1909. Pelosi's speech also marked one of the first times in the modern era that a Minority Leader has invoked an obscure privilege sometimes referred to as "a magic minute."

Many days of the week, the House schedule starts with a series of one-minute speeches. These are mostly coordinated by the parties, but any member can sign up to give a one-minute speech. Some representatives use these speeches as a centerpiece in their communications strategy, sharing the C-SPAN recordings of their presentations on social media. The "magic minute" is the ability of the Speaker of the House, the House Majority Leader and the House Minority Leader to be granted time in the one-minute speech portion of the morning, but then to go on, uninterrupted, for as much time as they wish.

Strangely, this ability to extend a minute indefinitely is governed not by rule, but by custom. A Congressional Research Service [white paper](#) titled *One-Minute Speeches: Current House Practices*, makes no mention of the "magic minute" or any granting of extraordinary time-related privileges to the ranking members of the House. However, a 1999 document in the House of Representatives archives titled *Floor Procedure In The U.S. House Of Representatives* notes, "Members designated by the leaders may speak...on any subject of their choice (except for the Majority and Minority leaders and Minority Whip who may speak for longer blocks of time)."

While taking an enormous amount of time on the floor of the House cannot obstruct legislative proceedings, as a filibuster can in the Senate, is still a useful if little-used tool for focusing the attention of the chamber on an issue of merit.