

Learning about Legislation #57 - The Motion to Commit, revisited

This week, we highlighted the vote taken by the House immediately before the final vote on the George Floyd Justice in Policing Act, where the Republicans wanted to amend the bill by replacing the entire text of the bill introduced in the House with the text of the Senate GOP's loophole-ridden offering. This action is called a "motion to recommit," which literally means to send something back to a committee. This is the last step that a dissenting party can take before the final vote is taken on legislation.

In a 2016 [white paper](#) on the Motion to Recommit process, the Congressional Research Service explains:

The motion to recommit is often referred to as 'the minority's motion,' because preference in recognition for offering a motion to recommit is given to a member of the minority party who is opposed to the bill. The stated purpose of giving the minority party this right was to allow them to 'have a vote upon its position upon great public questions.' House rules protect this minority right...

Motions to recommit are of two types: 'straight' motions and motions that include instructions. A Member offering a 'straight' motion to recommit seeks to send the measure to committee with no requirement for further consideration by the House. A Member offering a motion to recommit with instructions seeks to immediately amend the underlying bill on the House floor.

A motion to recommit may have various procedural effects, including amending an underlying measure, sending it to one or more committees, providing additional time for its consideration, or potentially disposing of the legislation. Due to its inclusion of policy language, the motion to recommit might also have political effects, such as allowing Members to go on record as supporting or opposing a specific policy and creating a comprehensive public record to emphasize the minority party's differences from the platform of the majority.

So, a motion to recommit is a vote taken where a legislator has the opportunity to express his or her adherence to a principle or to the will of his or her party. Such motions are rarely, if ever, reported on in the press, so our local legislators usually make their votes on motions to recommit straight party line affairs.