

Resolution

The official expression of the opinion or will of a legislative body.

The practice of submitting and voting on resolutions is a typical part of business in Congress, state legislatures, and other public assemblies. These bodies use resolutions for two purposes. First, resolutions express their consensus on matters of public policy: lawmakers routinely deliver criticism or support on a broad range of social issues, legal rights, court opinions, and even decisions by the [Executive Branch](#). Second, they pass resolutions for internal, administrative purposes. Resolutions are not laws; they differ fundamentally in their purpose. However, under certain circumstances resolutions can have the effect of law.

In all legislative bodies, the process leading to a resolution begins with a lawmaker making a formal proposal called a *motion*. The rules of the legislative body determine how much support must be given to the motion before it can be put to a general vote. The rules also specify what number of votes the resolution must attract to be passed. If successful it becomes the official position of the legislative body.

As a spontaneous expression of opinion, a resolution is intended to be timely and to have a temporary effect. Typically resolutions are used when passage of a law is unnecessary or unfeasible. In many cases relevant laws already exist. The resolution merely asserts an opinion that lawmakers want to emphasize. Thus, for example, state and federal laws already criminalize illicit drugs, but lawmakers have frequently passed resolutions decrying illegal drug use. Political frustration sometimes leads lawmakers to declare their opposition to laws that they cannot change. Additionally, resolutions are common in times of emergency. War commonly brings resolutions in support of the nation's armed forces and the president (who, at other times, can be the subject of critical resolutions).

When resolutions are mere expressions of opinion, they differ fundamentally from laws. In essence, laws are intended to permanently direct and control matters applying to persons or issues in general; moreover, they are enforceable. By contrast, resolutions expressing the views of lawmakers are limited to a specific issue or event. They are neither intended to be permanent nor to be enforceable. Nor do they carry the weight of court opinions. In a certain respect, they resemble the opinions expressed by a newspaper on its editorial page, but they are nonetheless indicative of the ideas and values of elected representatives and, as such, commonly mirror the outlook of voters.