



**Congressional
Research Service**

Informing the legislative debate since 1914

Commemorative Legislation in Congress: Trends and Observations, 93rd Through 115th Congresses

December 18, 2020

Congressional Research Service

<https://crsreports.congress.gov>

R46644



R46644

December 18, 2020

Jacob R. Straus
Specialist on the Congress

Jared C. Nagel
Senior Research Librarian

Commemorative Legislation in Congress: Trends and Observations, 93rd Through 115th Congresses

In 1783, the Continental Congress authorized the nation's first commemoration, an equestrian statue to George Washington. Since that time, Congress has used commemoratives to honor a myriad of people, groups, and events that it deemed important to American collective memory. Today, Members of Congress introduce, and the House and Senate consider, six primary types of commemorative legislation. These measures

- name federal facilities, including post offices, federal buildings, courthouses, and Veterans Affairs facilities and hospitals;
- direct the United States Postal Service (USPS) to issue commemorative and semipostal stamps;
- instruct the U.S. Mint to issue commemorative coins;
- award Congressional Gold Medals;
- authorize and recognize national memorials in the District of Columbia and around the country; and
- create permanent commemorative observances by authorizing federal holidays and patriotic and national observances, and create temporary observances through the adoption of House and Senate resolutions or concurrent resolutions.

Using research conducted by the Bush School of Government and Public Service at Texas A&M University's capstone class over the 2019-2020 academic year, this report presents data on these six types of commemoratives introduced and considered from the 93rd Congress (1973-1974) through the 115th Congress (2017-2018). The data show that the introduction of commemorative legislation has varied over time, with different types of commemoratives more popular at different times. Overall, the total number of commemorative measures introduced varied by Congress from the 93rd Congress until the adoption of a House rule in the 104th Congress (1995-1996) to limit the introduction or consideration of date-specific commemorative legislation (House Rule XII, clause 5). Following the rule change, the overall number of date-specific commemorative measures introduced and considered decreased, before returning to or exceeding the pre-rules change level. Patterns also exist for non-date-specific commemorative legislation, each subject to specific conditions that permitted or restricted the consideration of measures to honor individuals, groups, and events.

This report concludes with observations about commemorations in Congress since the 93rd Congress. Specifically, the data show that placing limits on the introduction and consideration of various types of commemorative legislation can be an effective means of reducing the time spent on commemorative measures, especially in the House of Representatives. Further, congressional endorsement of a commemoration can have lasting impact for individuals and groups and increase the prominence of recognized events.

Contents

Commemoration as Representation.....	1
Methodology.....	2
Commemorative Legislation Overview.....	3
Types of Commemorations.....	5
Naming Federal Buildings	5
Post Offices.....	7
Other Federal Buildings	8
Postage Stamps	9
Commemorative Coins.....	12
Congressional Gold Medals	15
Commemorative Works	17
Commemorative Works in the District of Columbia.....	17
Memorials Outside of DC.....	19
Commemorative Observances	20
Federal Holidays	20
Patriotic and National Observances	20
Other Commemorative Time Periods.....	21
Observations and Conclusions.....	24
Limits on Commemoratives	25
Committee Rules.....	26
Party Protocols.....	27
Congress and National Collective Memory.....	28

Figures

Figure 1. Congress.gov Search Terms for Commemorative Legislation.....	3
Figure 2. Commemorative Legislation Introduced and Enacted/Agreed To.....	4
Figure 3. Commemorative Legislation Introduced by Type.....	5
Figure 4. Examples of Named Federal Buildings.....	6
Figure 5. Building Naming Legislation Introduced and Enacted	7
Figure 6. Naming Federal Buildings by Type.....	9
Figure 7. Examples of Early and Commemorative Stamps.....	10
Figure 8. Postage Stamp Legislation Introduced and Enacted.....	11
Figure 9. Categorization of Introduced Postage Stamp Legislation	12
Figure 10. 2020 Commemorative Coins.....	13
Figure 11. Commemorative Coin Legislation.....	14
Figure 12. Commemorative Coin Legislation Themes.....	15
Figure 13. Examples of Congressional Gold Medals	16
Figure 14. Congressional Gold Medal Legislation Introduced and Considered.....	16
Figure 15. Examples of Memorials Established by Congress.....	17
Figure 16. Memorial Legislation in the District of Columbia.....	18
Figure 17. Memorial Legislation Outside the District of Columbia.....	19

Figure 18. Title 36 and Other Time Period Commemorations 22
Figure 19. Title 36 and Other Time Period Commemorations in the House..... 23
Figure 20. Title 36 and Other Time Period Commemorations in the Senate 24

Appendixes

Appendix. Detailed Methodology 30

Contacts

Author Information 31

Since its founding, the United States has debated how to recognize and memorialize historical actors and events. In the earliest known act of commemoration, in 1783, the Continental Congress authorized the new nation's first commemorative—an equestrian statue to George Washington.¹ Since that time, opinion on how to commemorate important people and events has fluctuated. In 1800, for example, the House of Representatives debated a bill to erect a mausoleum to George Washington “in testimony of the love and gratitude of the citizens of the United States.”² The measure's consideration sparked debate about the form of commemoration. Some argued that honoring George Washington with a mausoleum was nothing more than remembering the “memory of that great man [as] ... a heap of large inanimate objects.”³ Others suggested that there were more “rational ways to remember national heroes, by the simple act of reading history, for instance.”⁴

Since the 1970s, Congress has primarily utilized six types of commemoratives to honor individuals, groups, and events: naming public buildings, including post offices; authorizing postage stamps; issuing commemorative coins; awarding Congressional Gold Medals; establishing memorials and commemorative works; and recognizing commemorative observances, including federal holidays. This report evaluates the number of measures introduced in each category from the 93rd Congress (1973-1974) through the 115th Congress (2017-2018) using data collected from Congress.gov in partnership with a capstone class at the Bush School of Government & Public Service at Texas A&M University. The report begins with a discussion of commemoration as a representational tool for Members of Congress. The report then evaluates the data for the introduction and consideration of each of the six types of commemorative legislation during the 93rd through the 115th Congresses. The report concludes with a discussion of observations from the data.

Commemoration as Representation

Members of Congress strive to meet their constituents' needs.⁵ They can accomplish this goal in a myriad of ways, including introducing legislation and conducting oversight to influence public policy;⁶ assisting constituents to access services offered by the executive branch (casework);⁷ or

¹ Arthur Lee (Virginia) introduced a resolution on May 6, 1783, to erect an equestrian statue to George Washington. *Journals of the Continental Congress, 1774-1789*, (May 6, 1783), ed. Worthington C. Ford, et al. (Washington: GPO, 1922), vol. 25, p. 963. The Continental Congress unanimously agreed to the resolution on August 7, 1783, and authorized a bronze statue of Washington “represented in Roman dress, holding a truncheon in his right hand [and his head encircled with a laurel wreath].” The “best artist” in Europe was to construct the statue. *Journals of the Continental Congress, 1774-1789*, (August 7, 1783), ed. Worthington C. Ford, et al. (Washington: GPO, 1922), vol. 24, pp. 494-495. In 1853, Congress appropriated \$50,000 and commissioned Clark Mills to build the statue (10 Stat. 153). In 1860, the statue's dedication occurred at Washington Circle (James M. Goode, *Washington Sculpture: A Cultural History of Outdoor Sculpture in the Nation's Capital* [Baltimore, MD: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2008], p. 480).

² “Mausoleum to Washington,” *Annals of Congress*, vol. 10 (December 5, 1800), pp. 799-800.

³ Rep. John Nicholas (VA), “Mausoleum to Washington,” *Annals of Congress*, vol. 10 (December 5, 1800), p. 800.

⁴ Kirk Savage, *Monument Wars: Washington, D.C., the National Mall, and the Transformation of the Memorial Landscape* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2005), p. 4. See also Rep. Nathaniel Macon (NC), “Mausoleum to Washington,” *Annals of Congress*, vol. 10 (December 5, 1800), p. 803.

⁵ David Mayhew, *Congress: The Electoral Connection* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1974); Douglas Arnold, *The Logic of Congressional Action* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1990).

⁶ Eric Schickler, *Disjointed Pluralism: Institutional Innovation and the Development of the U.S. Congress* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2002).

⁷ Lee Hamilton, “Constituent Service and Representation,” *The Public Manager*, vol. 21, no. 2 (Summer 1992). For

publicly recognizing people, places, and events that are important for their districts or states.⁸ Members of Congress most frequently recognize people, places, and events through speeches on the House or Senate floor or through the introduction of commemorative legislation.⁹

Each Member of Congress interprets representation differently.¹⁰ Scholars have identified the introduction of commemorative measures as one way that Members of Congress can fulfill their representational responsibilities and connect with their constituents.¹¹ While some of these commemorative measures may be narrowly tailored to a Member's geographic constituency and may not receive much attention outside of the district or state,¹² other measures may have a more durable effect. For example, Members of Congress can refer back to measures they or other Members introduced, even if the House of Representatives or Senate did not consider those measures.¹³

Also, some commemorative measures do have a national appeal and can serve as a broader form of representation by supporting constituent interests that cross district boundaries. These might include commemorative measures to recognize wars (e.g., the World War I Memorial in Washington, DC, the World War I Museum in Kansas City, MO, or the World War II Memorial Commemorative Coin); military units (e.g., the Monument Men or the 65th Infantry Regiments—nicknamed the Borinqueneers); or historic American achievements (Apollo 11 Congressional Gold Medal and 50th Anniversary commemorative coin). In these instances, commemorative legislation can help fulfill a broader representational duty while also providing congressional recognition to particular events, groups, or individuals.

Methodology

In each Congress, many Members introduce commemorative legislation and the House and Senate debate and pass a number of commemorative measures. To understand how the introduction and consideration of commemorative legislation has evolved, the Congressional Research Service (CRS) partnered with graduate students at the Bush School of Government and Public Service at Texas A&M University during the 2019-2020 academic year (September 2019 to May 2020) to collect and analyze data on commemorative measures. Data were collected from Congress.gov for six types of commemoratives—naming federal buildings, authorizing postage stamps, issuing commemorative coins, awarding Congressional Gold Medals, establishing

more information on casework, see CRS Report RL33209, *Casework in a Congressional Office: Background, Rules, Laws, and Resources*, by R. Eric Petersen and Sarah J. Eckman; and CRS Report R44696, *Casework in Congressional Offices: Frequently Asked Questions*, by Sarah J. Eckman and R. Eric Petersen.

⁸ For example, see Colleen J. Shogan and Matthew E. Glassman, "Longitudinal Analysis of One-Minute Speeches in the House of Representatives," in *Party and Procedures in the United States Congress*, ed. Jacob R. Straus and Matthew E. Glassman, 2nd ed. (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2016), pp. 131-150.

⁹ For example, see Zach Bergson, "Congress Recognizes Wide-Ranging Issues in 'Day of,' 'Week of,' 'Month of' Resolutions," *The Hill*, June 20, 2012, at <https://thehill.com/capital-living/cover-stories/233687-congress-recognizes-wide-ranging-issues-in-day-of-week-of-month-of-resolutions>.

¹⁰ J. Tobin Grant and Thomas J. Rudolph, "The Job of Representation in Congress: Public Expectations and Representative Approval," *Legislative Studies Quarterly*, vol. 29, no. 3 (August 2004), p. 432.

¹¹ Roger H. Davidson et al., *Congress and Its Members*, 15th edition (Washington: CQ Press, 2016), p. 456.

¹² J. Tobin Grant and Thomas J. Rudolph, "The Job of Representation in Congress: Public Expectations and Representative Approval," *Legislative Studies Quarterly*, vol. 29, no. 3 (August 2004), p. 435.

¹³ James L. Payne, "Show Horses & Work Horses in the United States House of Representatives," *Polity*, vol. 12, no. 3 (Spring 1980), pp. 428-456.

memorials and commemorative works, and recognizing time periods—that were introduced from the 93rd Congress (1973-1974) through the 115th Congress (2017-2018).

One limitation for the data collection was that Congress.gov includes full text search capabilities beginning in the 101st Congress (1989-1990). Prior to that, the Congress.gov search engine does not allow for full text legislative searches, but does allow searches of measures’ legislative summaries (including the titles). As a result of this limitation, it is possible that some relevant commemorative measures were excluded.

Another limitation was that some legislative measures included multiple commemorations; in these cases each of the commemorations was counted and categorized, so that a single bill could appear more than once in the dataset of commemorative categories. Similarly, legislative actions, such as introduction and enactment, may also have been counted more than once if a legislative measure included commemorations across different categories. **Figure 1** reports the Congress.gov search terms for each type of commemorative legislation. For a detailed explanation of search terms for each type of commemorative legislation, see the **Appendix**.

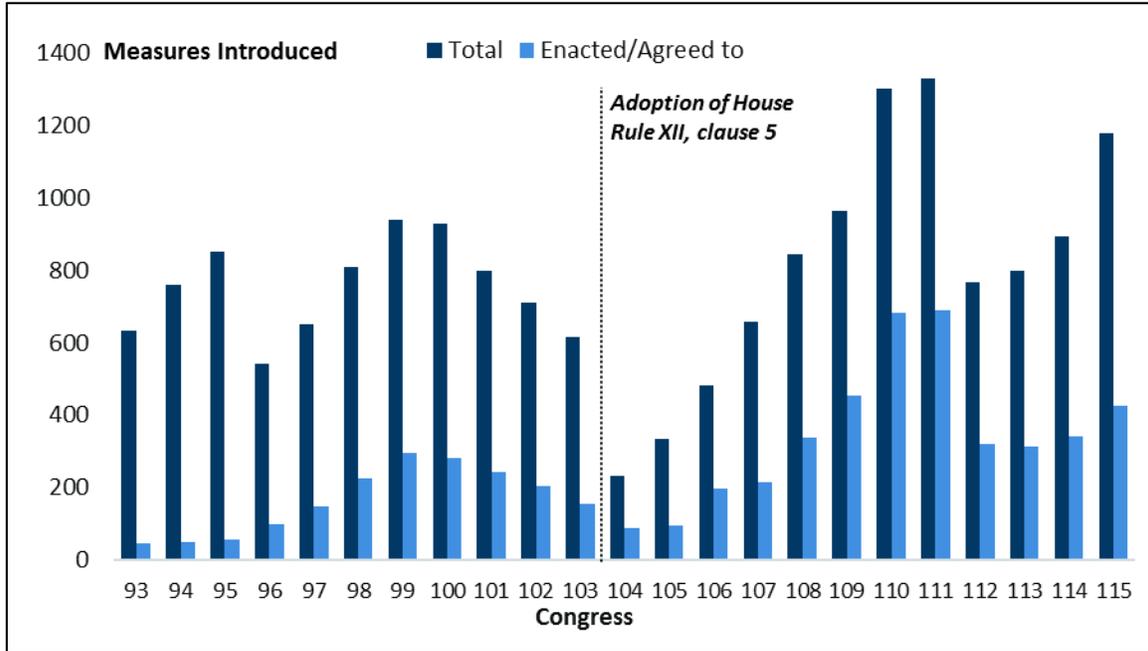
Figure 1. Congress.gov Search Terms for Commemorative Legislation

Commemorative Type	Congress.gov Search Terms	Notes
Naming Federal Buildings	“designate the facility,” “designate the,” and “name the”	Excluded dams, highways, bridges, and other structures
Postage Stamps	“postage stamp” and “semipostal”	Excluded post office operations, cost, revenue, and post office namings
Commemorative Coins	“commemorative coin”	
Congressional Gold Medals	“congressional gold medal”	
Memorials and Commemorative Works	“monument” and “memorial”	Excluded national monuments under the Antiquities Act of 1906, and artwork in the U.S. Capitol
Commemorative Observances		
Federal Holiday	“federal holiday”	
Patriotic and National Observances	“Title 36” “amend*” and “36 U.S.C.”	
Other Time Periods	“day,” “week,” “month,” and “anniversary”	

Commemorative Legislation Overview

Each Congress, hundreds of commemorative measures are introduced in the House and Senate. **Figure 2** reports the aggregate number of commemorative measures introduced and enacted or agreed to for each Congress in this study.

Figure 2. Commemorative Legislation Introduced and Enacted/Agreed To
93rd through 115th Congresses (1973-2018)



Source: Bush School of Government and Public Service and CRS data analysis of Congress.gov.

Note: This figure represents a count of commemorations and not a count of individual legislative vehicles. For example, sometimes one legislative vehicle contained more than one commemoration. In these cases, CRS counted the individual commemorations.

As **Figure 2** shows, the number of commemorative measures introduced in Congresses from the 93rd through the 115th varied widely, as did the number of measures enacted (S., H.R., S.J.Res., and H.J. Res) or agreed to (H.Res., S.Res., H.Con.Res., and S.Con.Res).¹⁴ Of note is the House’s 1995 adoption of House Rule XII, clause 5, which prohibits the introduction or consideration of date-specific commemorative legislation.¹⁵ The House rule, which was readopted as part of the House Rules in each succeeding Congress, appears to have reduced the number of measures introduced and considered in the 104th through 106th Congresses before the number of measures returned to prerule levels (or higher).

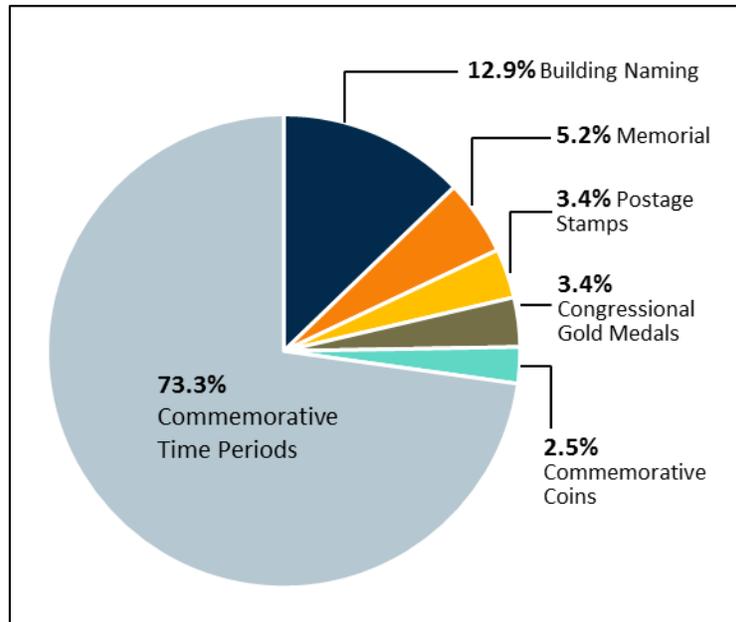
Broadly, commemorative legislation can be divided into six categories: naming federal buildings, authorizing postage stamps, issuing commemorative coins, awarding Congressional Gold Medals, establishing memorials and commemorative works, and recognizing commemorative time periods. In total, more than 18,000 commemorative measures were introduced during the 93rd

¹⁴ For more information on legislation types and characteristics, see CRS Report R46603, *Bills, Resolutions, Nominations, and Treaties: Characteristics and Examples of Use*, by Jane A. Hudiburg.

¹⁵ U.S. Congress, House, *Constitution, Jefferson’s Manual, and Rules of the House of Representatives of the United States One Hundred Sixteenth Congress*, prepared by Thomas J. Wickham, 115th Cong., 2nd sess., H.Doc. 115-177 (Washington: GPO, 2019), at <https://rules.house.gov/sites/democrats.rules.house.gov/files/HouseRulesManual116/rule12.xml>. For more information on House Rule XII, clause 5, see CRS Report R44431, *Commemorative Days, Weeks, and Months: Background and Current Practice*, by Jacob R. Straus and Jared C. Nagel. Prior to the adoption of the House rule in the 104th Congress, in the 103rd Congress (1993-1994) the House Committee on the Post Office and Civil Service had a rule that restricted the committee’s consideration of commemorative legislation under its jurisdiction, including postage stamps, holidays, and celebrations. U.S. Congress, House Committee on Post Office and Civil Service, *Rules of the House Committee on Post Office and Civil Service Together with Pertinent House Rules*, 103rd Cong., 1st sess. (Washington: GPO, 1993), pp. 11-12.

through the 115th Congresses. **Figure 3** shows a breakdown in the percentage of measures introduced for each type of commemorative legislation.

Figure 3. Commemorative Legislation Introduced by Type
93rd through 115th Congresses (1973-2018)



Source: Bush School of Government & Public Service and CRS data analysis of Congress.gov data on commemorative legislation.

Note: Percentages add up to more than 100% due to rounding.

As shown in **Figure 3**, commemorative time period legislation constitutes nearly three-fourths of all commemorative measures introduced. This is followed by building namings, memorials, postage stamps and congressional gold medals, and commemorative coins. A more detailed discussion of each category of commemorative legislation and of the trends found within the introduction and consideration data for each category can be found below.

Types of Commemorations

As mentioned previously, historically, many Members of Congress have introduced and the House and Senate have debated legislation on six types of commemoratives—naming federal buildings, authorizing postage stamps, issuing commemorative coins, awarding Congressional Gold Medals, establishing memorials and commemorative works, and recognizing time periods. Using the data outlined above and collected in coordination with the Bush School of Government and Public Service at Texas A&M University, this report analyzes the introduction and consideration of these six types of commemoratives during the 93rd through the 115th Congresses.

Naming Federal Buildings

Federal buildings and facilities are located throughout the United States. Their basic purpose is to house government offices and functions, but they also “symbolize the power and stability of the

federal government.”¹⁶ Naming federal buildings is one way to honor, celebrate, and remember esteemed individuals, deceased elected officials, fallen military personnel, and other people of local and national importance. **Figure 4** shows an example of a named courthouse and a named federal building.

Figure 4. Examples of Named Federal Buildings



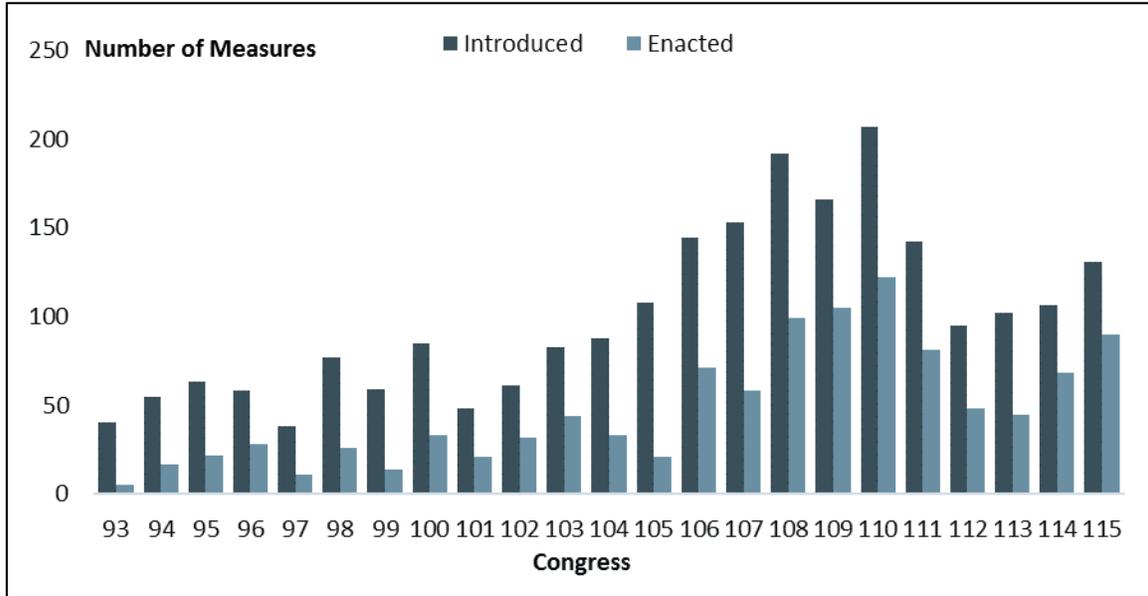
Source: General Services Administration, “Dan M. Russell, Jr., United States Courthouse,” Mississippi Federal Buildings, at <https://www.gsa.gov/about-us/regions/welcome-to-the-southeast-sunbelt-region-4/buildings-and-facilities/mississippi-federal-buildings>; and National Capital Planning Commission, Dana Marks, “Why are There so Many Brutalist Federal Buildings in Washington?” July 25, 2018, at <https://www.ncpc.gov/news/item/52>.

An act of Congress is generally required to name a federal building.¹⁷ From the 93rd through the 115th Congresses, 2,301 building naming bills were introduced proposing to name 2,556 buildings. Of the introduced bills, 1,094 were enacted to name 1,201 buildings. **Figure 5** shows the total number of measures introduced and enacted during the 93rd through 115th Congresses, for all types of federal buildings.

¹⁶ National Park Service, “Federal Courthouses and Post Offices: Symbols of Pride and Permanence in American Communities (Teaching with Historic Places),” at <https://www.nps.gov/articles/federal-courthouses-and-post-offices-symbols-of-pride-and-permanence-in-american-communities-teaching-with-historic-places.htm>.

¹⁷ In some instances, the General Services Administration (GSA) can rename buildings without specific congressional authorization. Pursuant to 40 U.S.C. §3102, “The Administrator of General Services may name or otherwise designate any building under the custody and control of the General Services Administration, regardless of whether it was previously named by statute.” P.L. 107-217, 116 Stat. 1143, August 21, 2002. The Administrator of GSA also has a policy on naming interior spaces. General Services Administration, “Naming of Interior Space Policy,” at https://www.gsa.gov/cdnstatic/Naming_of_Interior_Space_Policy.pdf.

Figure 5. Building Naming Legislation Introduced and Enacted
93rd through 115th Congresses (1973-2018)



Source: Bush School of Government and Public Service and CRS data analysis of Congress.gov.

As shown in **Figure 5**, the total number of bills introduced to name post offices, federal buildings, courthouses, and Veterans' Affairs facilities has generally increased over time, with a decline in the number of measures introduced beginning in the 111th Congress (2009-2010). The number of measures enacted into law follows the same general pattern as bill introduction, but with somewhat less consistency, especially during the time period spanning the 96th Congress (1979-1980) through the 107th Congress (2001-2002), when the number of measures enacted often increased one Congress and then decreased the next. Further, beginning in the 114th Congress, the number of measures enacted has increased along with the number of introduced measures.

Additionally, as shown in **Figure 6**, trends in the introduction and consideration of post office naming bills mirror the trends in the larger building naming dataset. This suggests that post office naming bill introduction and consideration largely drives the overall trends in building naming.

Post Offices

Each Congress, numerous bills are introduced to rename U.S. Post Office facilities. Many of the measures would rename facilities for either a prominent local individual (e.g., the Juanita Millender-McDonald Post Office in Long Beach, CA, for the former U.S. Representative)¹⁸ or a servicemember who died while serving (e.g., the Sergeant First Class Robert Lee "Bobby" Hollar, Jr. Post Office in Thomaston, GA).¹⁹ The U.S. Post Office Department, the predecessor to the U.S. Postal Service, did not officially address the naming of post offices until 1891.²⁰ Before then, postal buildings derived names from a number of sources, including town names, crossroads, and

¹⁸ P.L. 113-268, 128 Stat. 2946, December 18, 2014.

¹⁹ P.L. 109-413, 120 Stat. 2765, December 18, 2006.

²⁰ Standardized written instructions on naming post offices did not exist in that period. For more information, see U.S. National Archives and Records Administration, "Post Office Names," *Post Office Records*, at <https://www.archives.gov/research/post-offices>.

other places of interest.²¹ Congress first honored an individual by naming a post office through freestanding legislation in 1967.²² Since 1967, the introduction and consideration of legislation naming post offices for persons has become common practice.

From the 93rd through the 115th Congresses, bills were introduced to name 1,399 postal facilities, and 794 postal facilities were named in enacted legislation. The most post office namings occurred in the 110th Congress, when 109 facilities were renamed. The fewest occurred in the 93rd Congress, when one post office was renamed. The upper left quadrant of **Figure 6** shows the total number of proposed and enacted post office building namings for each Congress from the 93rd Congress through the 115th Congress.

For more information on naming post office facilities, including congressional rules and practices, and sample legislation, see CRS Report RS21562, *Naming Post Offices Through Legislation*, by Michelle D. Christensen.

Other Federal Buildings

Although legislation to name post offices is the most common type of legislation to name federal buildings,²³ Members of Congress also introduce legislation to name other federal structures. These include federal buildings (e.g., the Sam Nunn Atlanta Federal Center in Atlanta, GA),²⁴ court houses (e.g., the Andrew W. Bogue Federal Building and United States Courthouse in Rapid City, SD),²⁵ and Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) buildings and hospital facilities (e.g., the Robert J. Dole Department of Veterans Affairs Medical and Regional Office Center in Wichita, KS).²⁶

From the 93rd through the 115th Congresses, Members introduced legislation that proposed to name 1,157 nonpostal federal facilities. **Figure 6** shows the total number of proposed and enacted building namings for federal buildings (upper right quadrant), courthouses (lower left quadrant), and VA buildings and hospitals (lower right quadrant) from the 93rd through the 115th Congresses.

²¹ For more information on the history of post office naming, see CRS Report RS21562, *Naming Post Offices Through Legislation*, by Michelle D. Christensen.

²² P.L. 90-232 (81 Stat. 751, December 29, 1967) named a combined post office and federal office building in Bronx, NY, as the “Charles A. Buckley Post Office and Federal Office Building.”

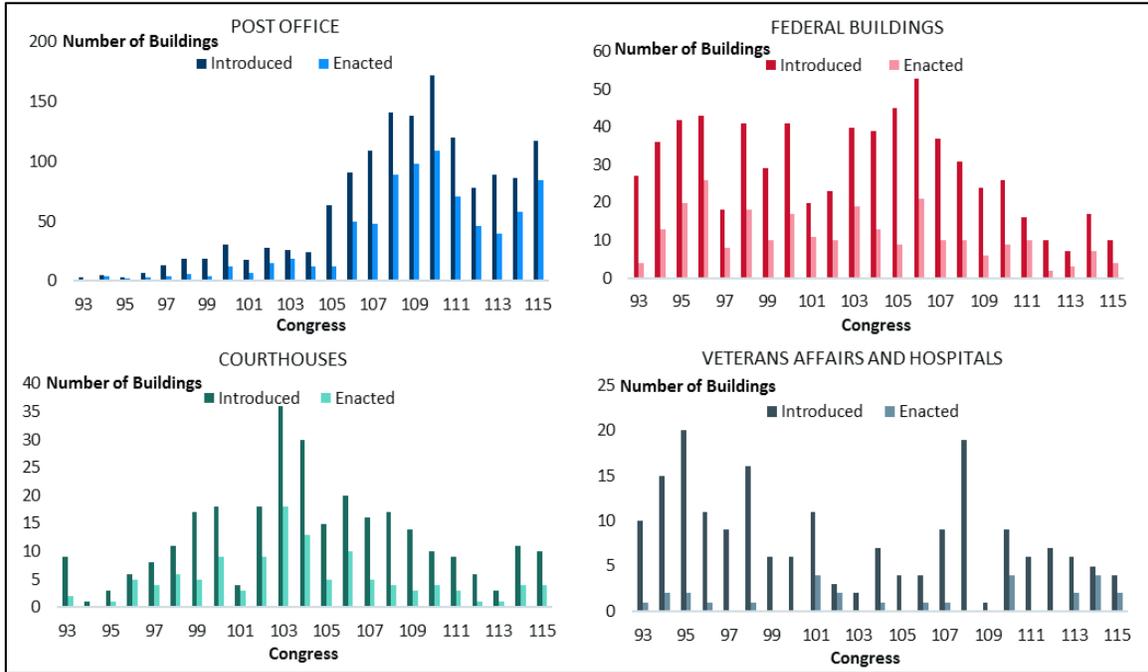
²³ For more information about naming federal buildings, see CRS Report R43539, *Commemorations in Congress: Options for Honoring Individuals, Groups, and Events*, coordinated by Jacob R. Straus.

²⁴ P.L. 105-165, 112 Stat. 37, March 20, 1998.

²⁵ P.L. 111-298, 124 Stat. 3268, December 14, 2010.

²⁶ P.L. 107-184, 116 Stat. 586, May 29, 2002.

Figure 6. Naming Federal Buildings by Type
93rd through 115th Congresses (1973-2018)



Source: Bush School of Government and Public Service and CRS data analysis of Congress.gov.

As **Figure 6** shows, when building-naming data were examined by type of building, the overall patterns in the number of commemorative measures that appear in **Figure 5** were generally no longer present, except for post office namings, which largely mirror the overall data. As such, **Figure 6** shows that the numbers of proposed and enacted post office namings generally increased over the dataset (with a peak in the 110th Congress), while the numbers of namings for federal buildings, courthouses, and Veterans’ Affairs facilities and hospitals were generally variable, with no definitive pattern for the introduction or enactment of legislation.

Postage Stamps

In 1847, Congress authorized the first U.S. postage stamps,²⁷ following Senator Daniel Webster’s advocacy of adopting a standardized postage stamp system similar to what the United Kingdom adopted in 1840.²⁸ Early designs featured Presidents and founding fathers such as George Washington and Benjamin Franklin.²⁹ The first series of commemorative postage stamps was issued to mark the Columbian Exposition of 1893, which was held in Chicago to celebrate the 400th anniversary of Columbus landing in America.³⁰ Since their introduction, commemorative stamps have been popular with both collectors and the public.

²⁷ 9 Stat. 201. See Smithsonian National Postal Museum, “Postal Reform Goes Global,” at <https://postalmuseum.si.edu/exhibition/the-queen%E2%80%99s-own-postal-reforms-that-transformed-the-mail/reform-goes-global>.

²⁸ United States Postal Service, “History of Postage Stamps” *About*, at <https://about.usps.com/who-we-are/postal-history/stamps-postcards.htm#history>.

²⁹ *Ibid.*

³⁰ Smithsonian Institution, National Postal Museum, “The Nation’s First Commemorative Stamps,” at <https://postalmuseum.si.edu/exhibition/the-nation%E2%80%99s-first-commemorative-stamps>.

Beginning with the Columbian Exposition stamp, the U.S. Postal Service (USPS) has issued commemorative stamps to celebrate persons, anniversaries, and historical and cultural phenomena. Typically, USPS issues stamps, including commemorative stamps, under its own statutory discretion and operates the program as a revenue-generating enterprise. Recent examples of commemorative stamps include Lena Horne, Ruth Asawa, the Chinese Lunar New Year, and Star Trek. Relatedly, the post office also issues semipostal stamps, which generally commemorate a cause and attempt to raise money for a designated organization. **Figure 7** includes examples of the first stamps issued in the mid-1800s, an 1893 Columbian Exposition stamp (first commemorative), and two modern semipostal stamps.

Figure 7. Examples of Early and Commemorative Stamps

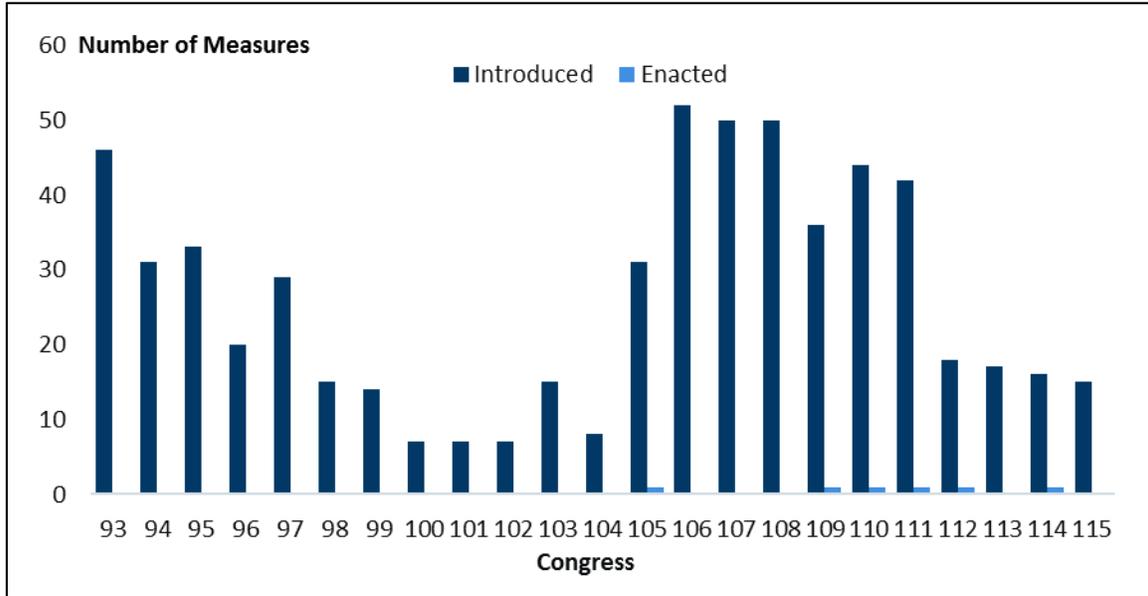


Source: Postage Stamps: Smithsonian Institution, National Postal Museum, “1847-1851 Issues,” at <https://postalmuseum.si.edu/exhibition/about-us-stamps-classic-period-1847-1893-rawdon-wright-hatch-edson-1847-1851/1847-1851>; Commemorative Stamp: Smithsonian Institution, National Postal Museum, “Columbian Exposition Issues (1893),” at <https://postalmuseum.si.edu/exhibition/about-us-stamps-classic-period-1847-1893-american-bank-note-company-1879-1893/columbian>; and U.S. Postal Service, “Semipostal Stamps,” *Community Activities*, at <https://about.usps.com/what/corporate-social-responsibility/activities/semipostals.htm>.

Some Members of Congress often introduce legislation to direct USPS to issue a stamp to commemorate specific people or events. From the 93rd through the 115th Congresses, Members introduced 603 measures to request a stamp design, but less than 1% were enacted or agreed to. The enacted or agreed-to legislation generally requested the creation of or created a semipostal stamp—a stamp sold at a premium to raise money for a designated cause (e.g., the Save the Vanishing Species Semipostal; P.L. 111-241).³¹ Additionally, the number of measures introduced across Congresses varied somewhat over time. **Figure 8** shows postage stamp legislation introduced and enacted between the 93rd and 115th Congresses.

³¹ U.S. Postal Service, “Semipostal Stamps,” *Community Activities*, at <https://about.usps.com/what/corporate-social-responsibility/activities/semipostals.htm>.

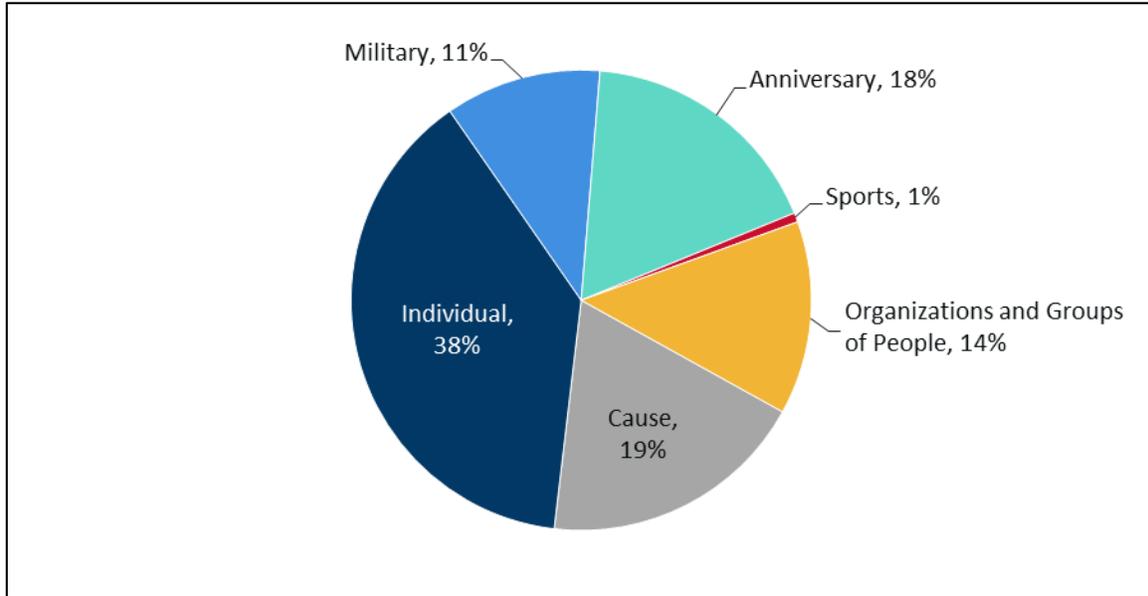
Figure 8. Postage Stamp Legislation Introduced and Enacted
93rd through 115th Congresses (1973-2018)



Source: Bush School of Government and Public Service and CRS data analysis of Congress.gov.

Commemorative postage stamp legislation was coded into five thematic categories. These were stamps commemorating causes, individuals, the military, anniversaries, organizations and groups of people, and sports. **Figure 9** shows a breakdown in the different categories of commemorative stamps. The largest category was stamps commemorating individuals, with a total of 235 bills introduced (38%). The smallest category was postage stamps commemorating sporting events, with a total of 4 bills (~1%).

Figure 9. Categorization of Introduced Postage Stamp Legislation
93rd through 115th Congresses (1973-2018)



Source: Bush School of Government and Public Service and CRS data analysis of Congress.gov.

For more information about postage stamps, see CRS Report RS22611, *Common Questions About Postage and Stamps*, by Michelle D. Christensen; and CRS Report RS20221, *Commemorative Postage Stamps: History, Selection Criteria, and Revenue Potential*, by Michelle D. Christensen.

Commemorative Coins

Commemorative coins are “produced with the primary intention of creating a special souvenir to be sold (at a premium above face value) to observe or memorialize an anniversary, special occasion, or other event.”³² Designed and struck by the U.S. Mint pursuant to an act of Congress, these coins celebrate and honor American people, places, events, and institutions. Although they are considered legal tender, they are not minted for general circulation. Instead, they are designed to be collected and to help designated groups raise money to support group activities.³³ Each calendar year, the U.S. Mint is statutorily limited to minting two commemorative coin

³² Q. David Bowers, *A Guide Book of United States Commemorative Coins: History, Rarity, Values, Grading, Varieties* (Atlanta, GA: Whitman Publishing Company, 2008), p. 1. The first commemorative coin was a half dollar minted in 1892, to recognize the Columbian Exposition in Chicago (27 Stat 389). From 1954 through 1981, Congress did not authorize any new commemorative coins. In 1982, Congress restarted the commemorative coin program when it authorized a commemorative half dollar to recognize George Washington’s 250th birthday. From 1982 through 1996—when Congress limited the Mint to issuing two coins per year, for coins minted after January 1, 1999, in an effort to restrict the number of coins minted each year—the number of commemorative coins minted was as high as six per year (1994). For more information on commemorative coins, see CRS Report R44623, *Commemorative Coins: Background, Legislative Process, and Issues for Congress*, by Jacob R. Straus.

³³ Ted Schwarz, *A History of United States Coinage* (San Diego, CA: A.S. Barnes & Company, Inc., 1980), pp. 319-320. Today, Members of Congress introduce commemorative coin legislation to celebrate individual or events and to raise money for a designated group. For example, the 2019 Apollo 11 50th Anniversary commemorative coin’s proceeds were to benefit the Smithsonian Institution’s Air and Space Museum, the Astronauts Memorial Foundation, and the Astronaut Scholarship Foundation (P.L. 114-282, 130 Stat. 1441, December 16, 2016).

programs.³⁴ **Figure 10** shows the full range of commemorative coins minted in 2020 for the two authorized programs—the Naismith Memorial Basketball Hall of Fame and the Women’s Suffrage Centennial.³⁵

Figure 10. 2020 Commemorative Coins



Source: U.S. Mint, “Women’s Suffrage Centennial 2020 Proof Silver Dollar,” at <https://catalog.usmint.gov/womens-suffrage-centennial-2020-proof-silver-dollar-20CJ.html>; U.S. Mint, “Basketball Hall of Fame 2020 Proof \$5 Gold Coin,” at <https://catalog.usmint.gov/basketball-hall-of-fame-2020-proof-5-gold-coin-20CA.html>; U.S. Mint, “Basketball Hall of Fame 2020 Proof Silver Dollar,” at <https://catalog.usmint.gov/basketball-hall-of-fame-2020-proof-silver-dollar-20CC.html>; and U.S. Mint, “Basketball Hall of Fame 2020 Colorized Half Dollar,” at <https://catalog.usmint.gov/basketball-hall-of-fame-2020-colorized-half-dollar-20CP.html>.

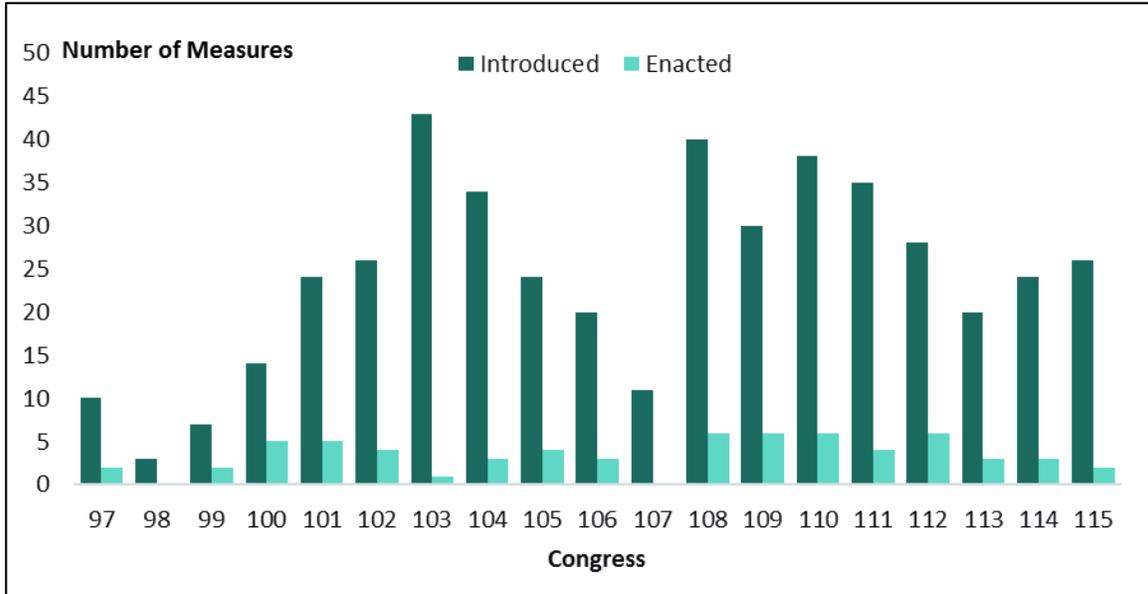
Legislation to authorize commemorative coins has been introduced in every Congress since the 97th (1981-1982), when Congress restarted the issuance of commemorative coins.³⁶ **Figure 11** shows the number of commemorative coin measures introduced and enacted from the 97th Congress (1981-1982) through the 115th Congress (2017-2018).

³⁴ 31 U.S.C. §5112(m)(1). A commemorative coin program is the subject matter statutorily authorized to be depicted on a commemorative coin. Within each commemorative coin program, multiple denominations of coins might be authorized. For example, P.L. 112-201 (§3, 126 Stat. 1480, December 4, 2012) authorized a commemorative coin program for Mark Twain. The statute authorized the minting of both \$5 gold coins and \$1 silver coins.

³⁵ Naismith Memorial Basketball Hall of Fame: P.L. 115-343, 132 Stat. 5043, December 21, 2018; and Women’s Suffrage Centennial: P.L. 116-71, 133 Stat. 1147, November 25, 2019.

³⁶ The moratorium on new commemorative coins was in part because public interest in the coins had waned, and the Department of the Treasury was concerned that “multiplicity of designs on United States coins would tend to create confusion among the public, and to facilitate counterfeiting.” U.S. Congress, Senate, *The City of New York Tercentennial Commemorative Coin—Veto Message*, 83rd Cong., 2nd sess., February 3, 1954, S.Doc. 94 (Washington: GPO, 1954), p. 1.

Figure 11. Commemorative Coin Legislation
97th to 115th Congresses (1973-2018)



Source: Bush School of Government and Public Service and CRS data analysis of Congress.gov.

As **Figure 11** shows, the number of commemorative coin measures introduced ranged from a low of 3 in the 98th Congress to a high of 43 in the 103rd Congress. Commemorative coin laws enacted ranged from zero in the 98th and 107th Congresses to six each in the 108th, 109th, 110th, and 112th Congresses.

Some Members introduce commemorative coin measures to honor or memorialize groups, individuals, and events. Data on the introduction of commemorative coin measures were coded into seven categories based on who or what was being honored. These categories are

- causes, such as the March of Dimes Commemorative Coin;³⁷
- individuals, such as Chief Justice John Marshall;³⁸
- military units or events, such as the Black Revolutionary War Patriots;³⁹
- anniversaries, such as the United States Marshals Service 225th Anniversary;⁴⁰
- sports organizations and groups, such as the National Baseball Hall of Fame;⁴¹
- general organizations and groups, such as the Girl Scouts;⁴² and
- national symbols, such as Yellowstone National Park.⁴³

Figure 12 shows the number of measures introduced in each category by Congress.

³⁷ P.L. 112-209, 126 Stat. 1510, December 18, 2012.

³⁸ P.L. 108-290, 118 Stat. 1021, August 6, 2004.

³⁹ P.L. 104-329, §101(3), 110 Stat. 4007, October 20, 1996.

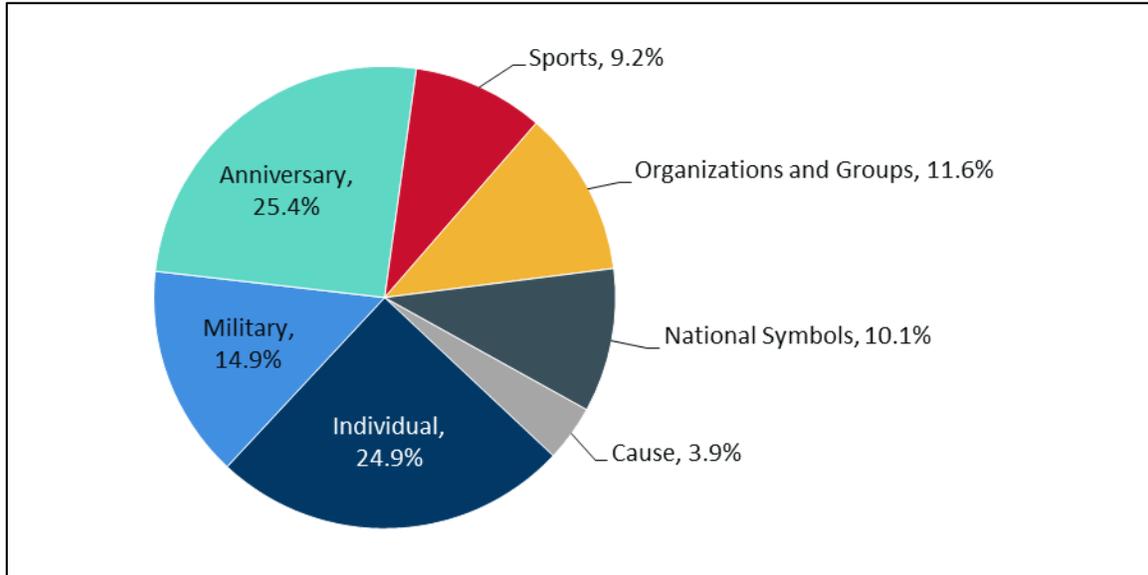
⁴⁰ P.L. 112-104, 126 Stat. 286, April 2, 2012.

⁴¹ P.L. 112-152, 126 Stat. 1155, August 3, 2012.

⁴² P.L. 111-86, 123 Stat. 2881, October 29, 2009.

⁴³ P.L. 104-329, §101(5), 110 Stat. 4008, October 20, 1996.

Figure 12. Commemorative Coin Legislation Themes
97th to 115th Congresses (1973-2018)



Source: Bush School of Government and Public Service and CRS data analysis of Congress.gov.

As **Figure 12** shows, the largest percentage of commemorative coin measures were introduced to honor anniversaries and individuals. This was followed by military-themed coins, organizations and groups, and national symbols. Sports and other causes made up the smallest percentages of introduced measures.

For more information on commemorative coins, see CRS In Focus IF10262, *Commemorative Coins: An Overview*, by Jacob R. Straus; and CRS Report R44623, *Commemorative Coins: Background, Legislative Process, and Issues for Congress*, by Jacob R. Straus.

Congressional Gold Medals

The Congressional Gold Medal is the “highest expression of national appreciation for distinguished achievements and contributions that the Congress can bestow upon one of our fellow citizens.”⁴⁴ The first Congressional Gold Medal was awarded in 1776 to George Washington, and most of the early medals recognized military leaders. Today, Congressional Gold Medals have been awarded to a diverse group of individuals and groups, including individuals such as Sir Winston Churchill, Bob Hope, George Washington, Robert Frost, Joe Louis, and Mother Teresa of Calcutta; and groups such as Native American Code Talkers, the Montford Point Marines, and the Office of Strategic Services. **Figure 13** shows two recent examples of Congressional Gold Medals, one for a group (USS *Indianapolis* sailors) and one for an individual (Stephen “Steve” Gleason).⁴⁵

⁴⁴ Rep. Randy Hultgren, “Bob Dole Congressional Gold Medal Act,” *Congressional Record*, daily edition, vol. 142 (September 5, 2017), p. H6639.

⁴⁵ USS *Indianapolis* Congressional Gold Medal: P.L. 115-338, 132 Stat. 5033, December 20, 2018; Stephen Michael Gleason: P.L. 115-415, 132 Stat. 5433, January 3, 2019.

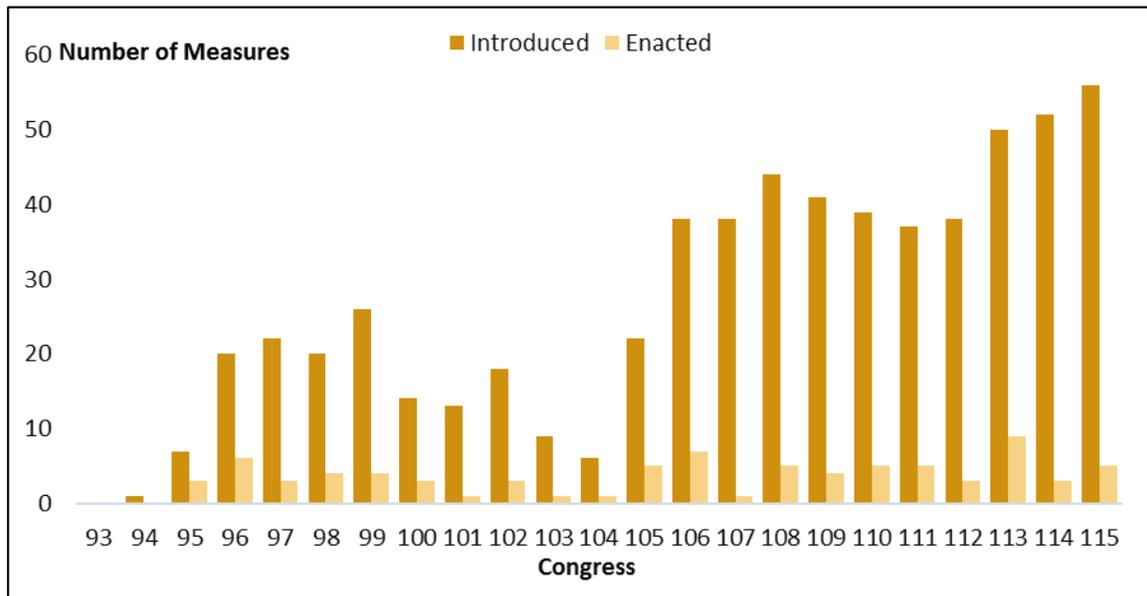
Figure 13. Examples of Congressional Gold Medals



Source: U.S. Mint, “USS Indianapolis Congressional Gold Medal”, at <https://www.usmint.gov/coins/coin-medal-programs/medals/uss-indianapolis>; and U.S. Mint, “Steve Gleason Congressional Gold Medal,” at <https://catalog.usmint.gov/steve-gleason-bronze-medal-3-inch-19MB.html>.

In most Congresses, some Members introduce legislation to award Congressional Gold Medals and a few measures are enacted into law. **Figure 14** shows the number of Congressional Gold Medal bills introduced and enacted from the 93rd through the 115th Congresses.

Figure 14. Congressional Gold Medal Legislation Introduced and Considered
93rd through 115th Congresses (1973-2018)



Source: Bush School of Government and Public Service and CRS data analysis of Congress.gov.

As shown in **Figure 14**, the number of Congressional Gold Medal measures introduced has varied since 1973, with as many as 56 measures introduced (115th Congress) and as few as zero (93rd Congress). The number of Congressional Gold Medal bills enacted per Congress has also

varied, with a low of zero in the 93rd and 94th Congresses and a high of nine in the 113th Congress. In total, 8% (48) of Congressional Gold Medal bills introduced were enacted into law.

For more information about Congressional Gold Medals, see CRS Report R45101, *Congressional Gold Medals: Background, Legislative Process, and Issues for Congress*, by Jacob R. Straus.

Commemorative Works

Commemorative works—memorials, monuments, and statues—honor important people, groups, and events. For much of American history, monuments and memorials were authorized in a piecemeal fashion, with no specific definition of what constituted a memorial or specified rules for the selection of site locations or memorial designs. In recent Congresses, legislation has been introduced to authorize commemorative works both inside and outside of the nation’s capital.

Figure 15 shows an example of a memorial in the District of Columbia (the Eisenhower Memorial) and a memorial outside of Washington, DC (the National Memorial to Fallen Educators in Emporia, KS).⁴⁶

Figure 15. Examples of Memorials Established by Congress



Source: Eisenhower Memorial Commission, “Dwight D. Eisenhower Memorial,” August 28, 2020, at https://eisenhowermemorial.gov/sites/all/themes/emc/img/memorial/banner_photo.jpg; and National Teachers Hall of Fame, “National Memorial to Fallen Educators,” at <https://nthfmemorial.org>.

Commemorative Works in the District of Columbia

Within the District of Columbia and its environs,⁴⁷ the Commemorative Works Act of 1986 (CWA) statutorily defines memorials and provides specific standards for the consideration, siting, design, and building of memorials in areas administered by the National Park Service (NPS) and

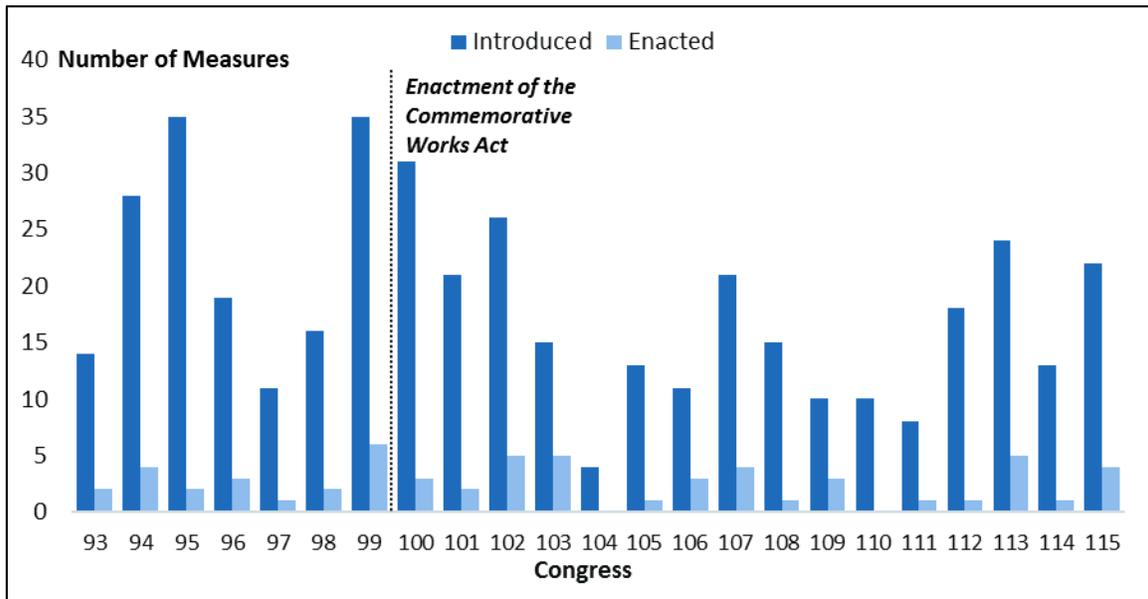
⁴⁶ Dwight D. Eisenhower Memorial: P.L. 107-117, §8120, 115 Stat. 2273, January 10, 2002; and National Memorial to Fallen Educators: P.L. 115-186, 132 Stat. 1285, April 30, 2018.

⁴⁷ “The term ‘the District of Columbia and its environs’ means those lands and properties administered by the National Park Service and the General Services Administration located in the Reserve, Area I, and Area II as depicted on the map entitled “Commemorative Areas Washington, DC and Environs”, numbered 869/86501 B, and dated June 24, 2003.” For a map of the commemorative areas of Washington, DC, and environs, see CRS Report R41658, *Commemorative Works in the District of Columbia: Background and Practice*, by Jacob R. Straus. Memorials to be located on land under the Jurisdiction of the District of Columbia are governed by D.C. Law 13-275, the Commemorative Works on Public Space Amendment Act of 2000. 40 U.S.C. §8902(a)(2).

the General Services Administration (GSA).⁴⁸ Additionally, some Members of Congress have frequently introduced legislation to authorize memorials on Department of Defense (DOD) controlled property. These can include Arlington National Cemetery, which is under the jurisdiction of the Department of the Army, and other properties such as the Pentagon or the Washington Navy Yard. DOD memorials are not covered by the CWA, but they are included in the dataset of memorials because legislation often authorizes their placement in the National Capital Region.⁴⁹

Legislation to establish a commemorative work in the District of Columbia, or on adjacent military controlled property is introduced nearly every Congress, but it is infrequently enacted. The greatest numbers of measures were introduced in the 95th and 99th Congresses (35 each), and the largest numbers of measures enacted were six in the 99th Congress, and five each in the 102nd, 103rd, and 113th Congresses. **Figure 16** shows the numbers of introduced and enacted measures to authorize a commemorative work in the District of Columbia from the 93rd through the 115th Congresses.

Figure 16. Memorial Legislation in the District of Columbia
93rd through 115th Congresses (1973-2018)



Source: Bush School of Government and Public Service and CRS data analysis of Congress.gov.

As shown in **Figure 16**, the number of measures introduced to create a new memorial in the National Capital region has ranged from 35 in the 95th and 99th Congresses to 11 in the 104th

⁴⁸ 40 U.S.C. §§8901-8909. For more information on the role of NCPC and CFA, see CRS Report R41658, *Commemorative Works in the District of Columbia: Background and Practice*, by Jacob R. Straus. For more information on memorial completed under the CWA, see CRS Report R43743, *Monuments and Memorials Authorized and Completed Under the Commemorative Works Act in the District of Columbia*, by Jacob R. Straus. For more information on memorials currently in-progress or that have lapsed authorizations, see CRS Report R43744, *Monuments and Memorials Authorized Under the Commemorative Works Act in the District of Columbia: Current Development of In-Progress and Lapsed Works*, by Jacob R. Straus.

⁴⁹ The National Capital Region includes “the District of Columbia; Montgomery and Prince Georges Counties in Maryland; Arlington, Fairfax, Loudoun, and Prince William Counties in Virginia; and all cities in Maryland and Virginia in the geographic area bounded by the outer boundaries of the combined area of the counties listed [above]....” 40 U.S.C. §8702.

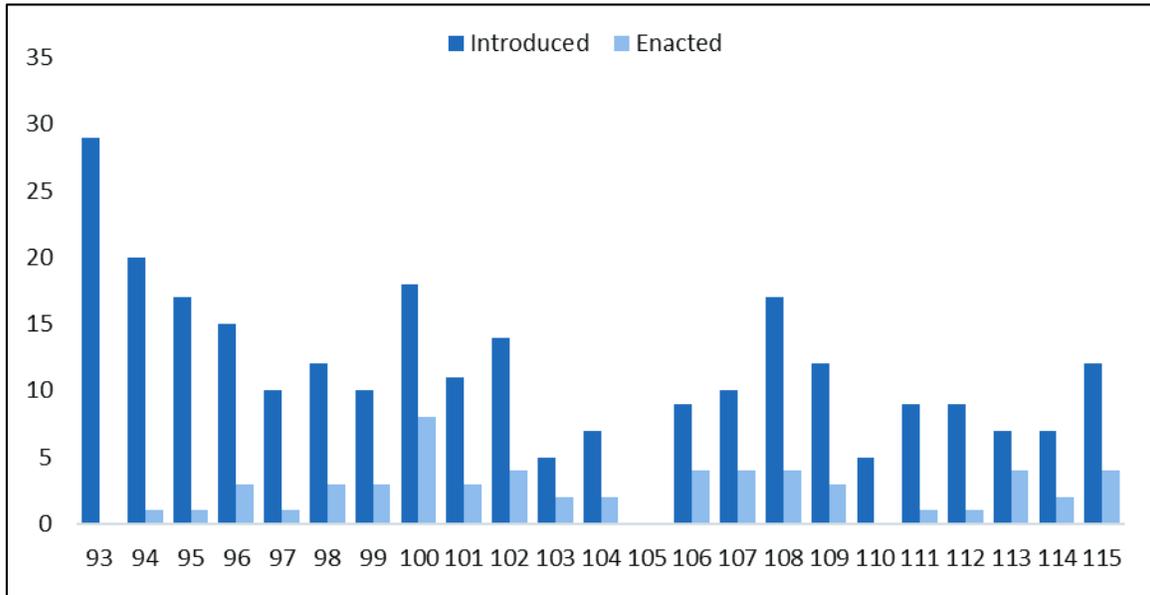
Congress. The number of enacted measures has ranged from six in the 99th Congress to zero in the 104th and the 110th Congresses. Additionally, the CWA’s enactment does not appear to have had an effect on the number of measures introduced or enacted.

For more information on the CWA and memorials in the District of Columbia, see CRS Report R41658, *Commemorative Works in the District of Columbia: Background and Practice*, by Jacob R. Straus; CRS Report R43743, *Monuments and Memorials Authorized and Completed Under the Commemorative Works Act in the District of Columbia*, by Jacob R. Straus; and CRS Report R43744, *Monuments and Memorials Authorized Under the Commemorative Works Act in the District of Columbia: Current Development of In-Progress and Lapsed Works*, by Jacob R. Straus.

Memorials Outside of DC

The CWA does not govern congressional involvement in memorials outside of the District of Columbia. Instead, the process for creating or authorizing such memorials is largely based on whether the works are located on existing federal land and whether federal resources are utilized. Recently, Congress has handled the creation of memorials outside the District of Columbia in two ways: by directly authorizing a new commemorative or by making an existing commemorative a “national” memorial. **Figure 17** shows the number of introduced and enacted measures to authorize or designate a memorial outside the District of Columbia.

Figure 17. Memorial Legislation Outside the District of Columbia
93rd through 115th Congresses (1973-2018)



Source: Bush School of Government and Public Service and CRS data analysis of Congress.gov.

As shown in **Figure 17**, with the exception of the 105th Congress, legislation to recognize a national memorial outside of Washington, DC, has been introduced in every Congress from the 93rd through the 115th, with the most introduced in the 93rd Congress (29) and the fewest in the 110th Congress (5). Most Congresses also see legislation enacted to recognize or authorize a memorial outside of the District of Columbia, with the most enacted in the 100th Congress (eight) and the fewest in the 93rd, 105th, and the 110th Congress (zero each).

For more information on memorials outside the District of Columbia, see CRS Report R45741, *Memorials and Commemorative Works Outside Washington, DC: Background, Federal Role, and Options for Congress*, by Jacob R. Straus and Laura B. Comay.

Commemorative Observances

Each Congress, measures are introduced to recognize, support, honor, or acknowledge individuals, groups, and events (including anniversaries) with a national day, week, or month. This type of legislation can be divided into three categories: federal holidays; patriotic and national observances; and recognition of a specific day, week, or month for a specific individual, group, or event (including anniversaries).

Federal Holidays

The United States has 11 permanent federal holidays.⁵⁰ These federal holidays are codified at 5 U.S.C. §6103 and are New Year’s Day, Martin Luther King Jr.’s Birthday, Inauguration Day (every four years, following a presidential election), George Washington’s Birthday, Memorial Day, Independence Day, Labor Day, Columbus Day, Veterans Day, Thanksgiving Day, and Christmas Day. Although frequently called public or national days, these celebrations are only legally applicable to the federal government and the District of Columbia, as the states individually decide their own legal holidays.⁵¹ Recent proposed federal holidays include Juneteenth and Election Day.⁵²

The introduction and enactment of federal holiday measures is a relatively rare occasion in more recent Congresses. From the 93rd Congress through the 115th Congress, 128 bills were introduced to create a federal holiday. Of these bills, one was enacted—creating Martin Luther King Jr. Day in 1983.⁵³

For more information on federal holidays, see CRS Report R41990, *Federal Holidays: Evolution and Current Practices*, by Jacob R. Straus.

Patriotic and National Observances

Since 1914, Congress has authorized 45 perpetual patriotic and national observances. The first of these observances recognized Mother’s Day and requested that the President issue an annual proclamation “on the second Sunday in May, as a public express of our love and reverence for the mothers of our country.”⁵⁴

⁵⁰ 5 U.S.C. §6103.

⁵¹ For more information on federal holidays and their history, see CRS Report R41990, *Federal Holidays: Evolution and Current Practices*, by Jacob R. Straus.

⁵² For Juneteenth, see S. 4019 (116th Congress), introduced June 22, 2020; and H.R. 7232 (116th Congress), introduced June 18, 2020. For Election Day, see H.R. 7820 (116th Congress), introduced, July 29, 2020.

⁵³ P.L. 98-144, 97 Stat. 917, November 2, 1983.

⁵⁴ 38 Stat. 771, May 8, 1914.

Codified in Title 36, *United States Code*, these patriotic and national observances include days for individuals,⁵⁵ groups,⁵⁶ events,⁵⁷ and other commemorations.⁵⁸ The creation of new patriotic and national observances requires the enactment of a law. In recent Congresses, for example, legislation has been introduced to designate March 29 as Vietnam Veterans Day to honor and recognize “the contributions of veterans who served in the United States Armed Forces in Vietnam during war and during peace.”⁵⁹

Other Commemorative Time Periods

In addition to statutory federal holidays and patriotic and national observances, Congress has historically considered legislation that recognizes, supports, honors, or acknowledges certain days, weeks, months, and anniversaries. For example, in the 115th Congress, the Senate agreed to a resolution “recognizing the month of October 2017 as Filipino American History Month.”⁶⁰ Usually introduced as simple resolutions (H.Res. or S.Res.), these commemorative measures provide recognition by one congressional chamber of individuals, groups, and events without creating a new federal holiday or permanent patriotic and national observance.⁶¹

Figure 18 shows the number of commemorative time period measures introduced and agreed to in both chambers. A total of 12,980 measures were introduced from the 93rd through the 115th Congresses, and 1,325 were agreed to in both chambers (H.Con.Res., S.Con.Res). Since the 104th Congress, House Rule XII, clause 5, has prohibited the introduction and consideration of date-specific commemorative legislation in the House (see “Commemorative Time Period Legislation in the House” below for more information). This rule only applies to the introduction and consideration of date-specific commemorative legislation in the House. Therefore, the rule might explain why the numbers of introduced and considered commemorative time period resolutions decline in **Figure 18**. The rule does not apply to the Senate. The rule’s adoption is indicated in **Figure 18** with the dotted line.

⁵⁵ Patriotic and national observances that celebrate individuals include, for example, the Wright Brothers (§143), Leif Erikson (§114), and Stephen Foster (§140).

⁵⁶ Patriotic and national observances that celebrate groups include, for example, Mother’s Day (§117) and Peace Officers (§136).

⁵⁷ Patriotic and national observances that celebrate events include, for example, Patriot Day (9/11) (§144), Korean War Veterans Armistice Day (§127), and the signing of the Constitution (§106 and §108).

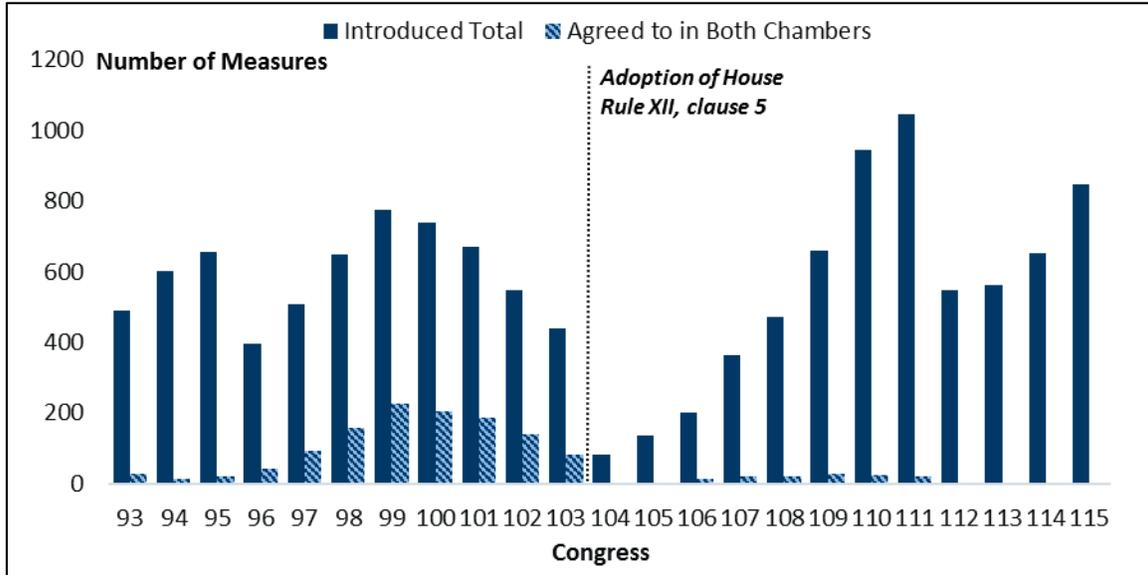
⁵⁸ Patriotic and national observances that celebrate items include, for example, Flag Day (§110), Poison Prevention Week (§130), and Heart Month (§101).

⁵⁹ S. 409 (113th Congress), introduced February 28, 2013.

⁶⁰ S.Res. 305 (115th Congress), agreed to on October 25, 2017.

⁶¹ Simple resolutions can only be considered in the chamber in which they were introduced. Therefore, the Senate cannot act on a House resolution (H.Res.) and the House cannot act on a Senate resolution (S.Res.).

Figure 18. Title 36 and Other Time Period Commemorations
93rd through 115th Congresses (1973-2018)



Source: Bush School of Government and Public Service and CRS data analysis of Congress.gov.

As shown in **Figure 18**, the number of introduced measures has varied significantly since the 93rd Congress. Before the adoption of House Rule XII, clause 5, as many as 775 measures were introduced (99th Congress) and as few as 396 were introduced (96th Congress). After the rule’s adoption, as many as 1,047 measures were introduced (111th Congress) and as few as 81 measures were introduced (104th Congress). Prior to the rule’s adoption, the number of measures agreed to by both chambers tended to be higher in years when more measures were introduced, with the 99th Congress having the most adopted measures and the 94th having the fewest. After the rule, few measures were agreed to by both chambers, with as few as zero in the 112th and 113th Congresses and as many as 26 in the 109th Congress.

Commemorative Time Period Legislation in the House

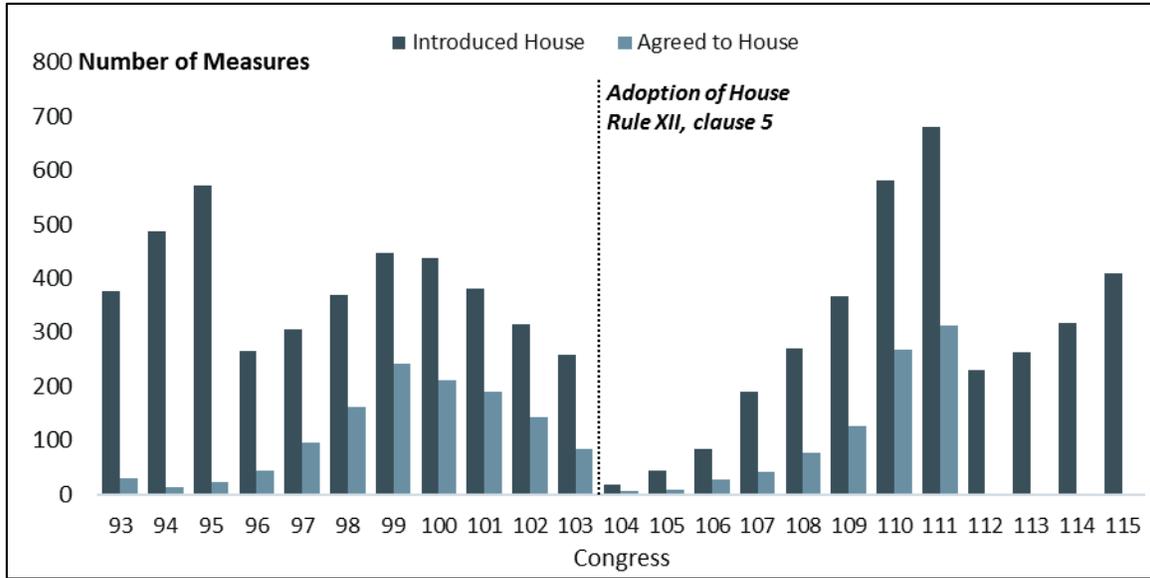
In the 104th Congress (1995-1996), the House adopted a new standing rule to reduce the number of commemorative bills and resolutions introduced and considered by the chamber. House Rule XII, clause 5, prohibits the introduction and consideration of date-specific commemorative legislation.⁶² The House Majority Leader’s Legislative Protocols provide additional guidance to the majority leader when scheduling commemorative legislation. These protocols currently prohibit the majority leader from scheduling such legislation under “Suspension of the Rules” procedures.⁶³

⁶² U.S. Congress, House, “Rule XII,” *Constitution, Jefferson’s Manual, and Rules of the House of Representatives of the United States, One Hundred Sixteenth Congress, 115th Cong., 2nd sess.*, H.Doc. 115-177 (Washington: GPO, 2019), at <https://rules.house.gov/sites/democrats.rules.house.gov/files/HouseRulesManual116/rule12.xml>. For more information about the rule, see CRS Report R44431, *Commemorative Days, Weeks, and Months: Background and Current Practice*, by Jacob R. Straus and Jared C. Nagel.

⁶³ U.S. Congress, House, Office of Majority Leader Steny Hoyer, “116th Congress Legislative Protocols,” at <https://www.majorityleader.gov/content/116th-congress-legislative-protocols>. Similar protocols have existed in previous Congresses. For example, from the 104th to the 109th and the 112th to the 115th Congresses, the Republican Party held the majority of seats in the House. During this time, consideration of commemorative legislation was also

Although the House prohibits the introduction and consideration of date-specific commemorative legislation, House resolutions to achieve a similar purpose continue to be introduced. CRS has observed that these resolutions generally do not include, in a measure’s resolved clause, a specific time period.⁶⁴ Consequently, the introduction of such a measure, lacking a specific time period in the resolved clause, appears to be allowed in the House.⁶⁵ **Figure 19** shows the number of time period commemorations introduced and agreed to from the 93rd through the 115th Congresses in the House.

Figure 19. Title 36 and Other Time Period Commemorations in the House
93rd through 115th Congresses (1973-2018)



Source: Bush School of Government and Public Service and CRS data analysis of Congress.gov.

As shown in **Figure 19**, House Rule XII, clause 5 seemed to initially impact the number of measures agreed to. After the rule was adopted, the number of measures introduced and agreed to decreased to nearly zero in the 104th Congress before increasing through the 111th Congress. Beginning in the 112th Congress, while some measures were introduced, very few were agreed to. Since the 112th Congress, however, the number of measures introduced has again increased, but the number of measures agreed to remains near zero. Overall, the House agreed to approximately 26% of time period commemorative measures introduced from the 93rd through the 115th Congresses, with approximately 30% of introduced measures agreed to before the adoption of House Rule XII, clause 5 and approximately 22% of introduced measures agreed to after the rule’s adoption.

effectively governed by a rule of the House Republican Conference. Conference Rule 28(a)(6) generally prohibited the Republican leader from scheduling certain commemorative bills and resolutions for floor consideration under suspension of the rules. For those leadership protocols, issued November 1, 2016, see “Floor Protocols” at <https://www.republicanleader.gov/protocols>.

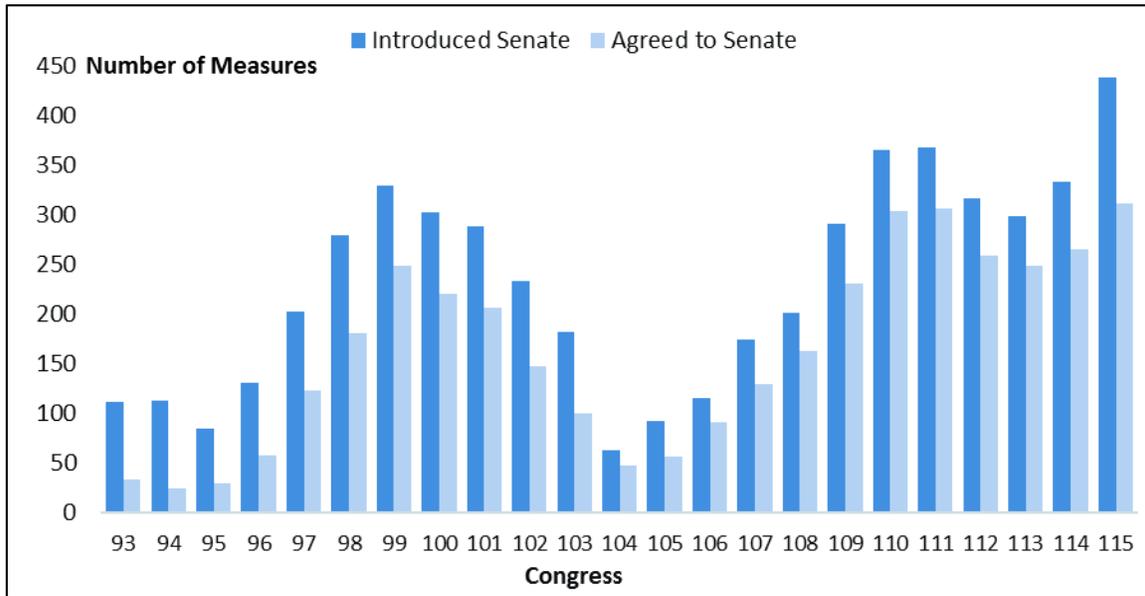
⁶⁴ The resolving clause is the opening language of a resolution, beginning “Resolved, That the House of Representatives [Senate] ...” For more information, see Walter Kravitz, *Congressional Quarterly’s American Congressional Dictionary*, 3rd ed. (Washington: CQ Press, 2001), pp. 89, 217-218.

⁶⁵ For more information, see “Introduction of House Resolutions,” in CRS Report R44431, *Commemorative Days, Weeks, and Months: Background and Current Practice*, by Jacob R. Straus and Jared C. Nagel.

Commemorative Time Period Legislation in the Senate

Unlike in the House, no Senate rules prohibit the introduction or consideration of commemorative measures.⁶⁶ Figure 20 shows the number of time period commemorations introduced and agreed to from the 93rd through the 115th Congresses in the Senate.

Figure 20. Title 36 and Other Time Period Commemorations in the Senate
93rd through 115th Congresses (1973-2018)



Source: Bush School of Government and Public Service and CRS data analysis of Congress.gov.

As shown in Figure 20, the number of measures introduced in the Senate has varied over time from a high of 439 in the 115th Congress to a low of 63 in the 104th Congress. The number of measures agreed to has also varied over time, from a high of 312 in the 115th Congress to a low of 24 in the 94th Congress. Overall, from the 93rd through the 115th Congresses, the Senate agreed to an average of 66% of all commemorative time period measures introduced.

For more information on legislation that designates a period of time, see CRS Report R44431, *Commemorative Days, Weeks, and Months: Background and Current Practice*, by Jacob R. Straus and Jared C. Nagel.

Observations and Conclusions

Many Members of Congress frequently introduce commemorative legislation. From the 93rd through the 115th Congresses, more than 18,000 measures were introduced and nearly 6,000 were enacted into law (S., H.R., S.J.Res, or H.J.Res.) or agreed to by the Senate (S.Res.), the House

⁶⁶ In the past, the Senate Judiciary Committee has had unpublished guidelines on the consideration of commemorative legislation. These guidelines were not officially part of the committee’s rules. Past guidance restricted consideration of commemorative legislation without a minimum number of bipartisan cosponsors, and prohibited commemoration of specific categories. U.S. Congress, Senate Committee on the Judiciary, “Committee Policy for the Consideration of Commemorative Measures: 106th Congress (unpublished).” Categories for which the committee did not consider requests for commemorations included a commercial enterprise, industry, or specific product, or a fraternal, political, business, labor, or sectarian organization; a particular state or any political subdivision of a state, city, town, county, school, or institution of higher learning; or a living person.

(H.Res.), or both (S.Con.Res. and H.Con.Res.). During this period, approximately 300,000 measures were introduced in the House and Senate, and nearly 31,000 were enacted into law or agreed to. Therefore, from the 93rd through the 115th Congresses, commemorative legislation made up approximately 6% of all introduced measures and about 19% of all enacted or agreed to legislation.

As a popular mechanism, commemorative legislation presents opportunities for Members of Congress to honor individuals, groups, and historic events in six different ways—naming federal buildings, authorizing postage stamps, issuing commemorative coins, awarding Congressional Gold Medals, establishing memorials and commemorative works, and recognizing a period of time. Some observers see time spent on commemorative measures as a way to respond to constituents and to honor important people, groups, events, and places.⁶⁷ Others feel that congressional time spent on commemoratives is time that should be spent on policy matters.⁶⁸

In any event, the introduction and consideration of the six types of commemoratives identified in this report continues. This analysis presents data that may inform consideration of two interrelated questions: should Congress place limits on the introduction and consideration of commemorative legislation; and what role should Congress play in establishing a national collective memory?

Limits on Commemoratives

In 1994, the House of Representatives adopted a new rule to reduce the number of commemorative measures introduced and considered by the chamber.⁶⁹ The rule (House Rule XII, clause 5) was adopted in part to address the perception that the House was spending too much time on date-specific commemorative measures rather than public policy.⁷⁰ As **Figure 19** shows, since the adoption of House Rule XII, clause 5, the number of commemorative measures introduced and considered in the House has varied, initially declining before trending upward again in recent Congresses. The rule does not apply to Senate consideration of legislation or to House consideration of non-date-specific legislation (e.g., building naming, postage stamps, commemorative coins, Congressional Gold Medals, and memorials).

The House adoption of Rule XII, clause 5, was neither the first time Congress proposed restricting commemorative legislation nor the only way that the House and Senate have limited the consideration of such legislation. During the mid-1960s, for example, several proposals were introduced to shift the responsibility of designating commemorative celebrations to a presidential commission. Twice the commission idea passed the House, but neither proposal was acted upon

⁶⁷ Rep. Mervyn Dymally, in U.S. Congress, House Committee on Post Office and Civil Service, Subcommittee on Census and Population, *Advisory Commission on National Commemorative Events*, H.R. 539 and H.R. 746, 101st Cong., 2nd sess., February 6, 1990, Serial No. 101-42 (Washington: GPO, 1990), p. 3. (Hereinafter, *1990 Commemorative Commission Hearing*.)

⁶⁸ Rep. William D. Ford, in *1990 Commemorative Commission Hearing*, pp. 4-5.

⁶⁹ U.S. Congress, House, *Constitution, Jefferson's Manual, and Rules of the House of Representatives of the United States One Hundred Sixteenth Congress*, 115th Cong., 2nd sess., H.Doc. 115-177 (Washington: GPO, 2019), at <https://rules.house.gov/sites/democrats.rules.house.gov/files/HouseRulesManual116/rule12.xml>.

⁷⁰ U.S. Congress, House Committee on Post Office and Civil Service, Subcommittee on Census and Population, *Advisory Commission on National Commemorative Events*, hearings on H.R. 539 and H.R. 746, 101st Cong., 2nd sess., Feb. 6, 1990 (Washington: GPO, 1990), pp. 7-8, 11-14. The committee report notes that “A 1990 House survey found that an overwhelming majority of respondents felt Congress’s time would be better spent on matters having a “higher priority” than commemorative legislation.

by the Senate.⁷¹ Creating a presidential commission to decide when and how to commemorate a person, place, or event would have potentially reduced the number of measures introduced and considered by the House and Senate, theoretically freeing up floor time for public policy-related measures.⁷² However, allowing a presidentially appointed commission to be the sole arbiter of commemorations would have potentially removed one connection between Members' representational duties and the interests of their constituents.⁷³

Several other congressional methods have been used to attempt to limit the number of commemorative measures introduced or considered. These include creating committee rules for legislative hearings, markups, or reporting; and creating party protocols to guide the scheduling of commemorative legislation by the House majority leader.

Committee Rules

Some congressional committees have adopted rules to guide the consideration of commemorative measures. For example, in the 114th Congress, the House Committee on Oversight and Government Reform first adopted a provision to address the committee's consideration of commemorative legislation. Committee Rule 13 states:

(a) Commemorative Stamps. The determination of the subject matter of commemorative stamps and new semi-postal issues is properly for consideration by the Postmaster General, and the Committee will not give consideration to legislative proposals specifying the subject matter of commemorative stamps and new semi-postal issues. It is suggested that recommendations for the subject matter of stamps be submitted to the Postmaster General.

(b) Postal Naming Bills. The consideration of bills designating facilities of the United States Postal Service shall be conducted so as to minimize the time spent on such matters by the Committee and the House.

(c) Resolutions. The Chair of the Committee shall not request to have scheduled any resolution for consideration under suspension of the Rules, which expresses appreciation, commends, congratulates, celebrates, recognizes the accomplishments of, or celebrates the anniversary of, an entity, event, group, individual, institution, team or government program; or acknowledges or recognizes a period of time for such purposes.⁷⁴

Similarly, the Senate Committee on Environment and Public Works has a rule that limits the committee's ability to consider or report naming a building for living person. Rule 7(d) states:

(d) Naming Public Facilities: The committee may not name a building, structure or facility for any living person, except former Presidents or former Vice Presidents of the United States, former Members of Congress over 70 years of age, former Justices of the United States Supreme Court over 70 years of age, or Federal judges who are fully retired and over 75 years of age or have taken senior status and are over 75 years of age.⁷⁵

⁷¹ "Commission on National Observances and Holidays," *Congressional Record*, vol. 112, part 18 (October 3, 1966), p. 24828; and "Commission on National Observances and Holidays," *Congressional Record*, vol. 113, part 6 (March 20, 1967), pp. 7258-7263.

⁷² For example, see Rep. Claudine Scheider, "Dealing with Commemoratives," *Congressional Record*, vol. 135 (January 31, 1989), p. 1359.

⁷³ John Lapinski et al., "What Do Citizens Want from Their Members of Congress?" *Political Research Quarterly* vol. 69, no. 3 (September 2016), p. 537; and Morris P. Fiorina, *Congress, Keystone of the Washington Establishment* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1989), p. xiii.

⁷⁴ U.S. Congress, House Committee on Oversight and Reform, "Committee on Oversight Rules," 116th Congress, at <https://oversight.house.gov/sites/democrats.oversight.house.gov/files/COR%20Rules%20-%20passed.pdf>.

⁷⁵ U.S. Congress, Senate, Committee on Environment and Public Works, "Rules of Procedure," 116th Congress, at

Congressional committees often serve as legislative gatekeepers for the thousands of measures introduced in any given Congress.⁷⁶ In that role, committee rules help establish if and when certain types of measures might be considered by the committee. By establishing rules about commemorative legislation, relevant committees have signaled when such measures might advance through the legislative process, if at all. These rules, therefore, generally serve as a filter for legislation, limiting the committee's ability to report a measure without meeting specified criteria, thus reducing the number of potential commemoratives that might be considered by the House or Senate.

Party Protocols

In recent Congresses, the Republican and Democratic parties in the House have adopted party rules or protocols to guide the scheduling of commemorative legislation by the House majority leader. From the 104th to the 109th and the 112th to the 115th Congresses, the Republican Party held the majority of seats in the House. During this time, consideration of commemorative legislation was also effectively governed by a rule of the House Republican Conference. Conference Rule 28(a)(6) generally prohibited the Republican leader from scheduling certain commemorative bills and resolutions for floor consideration under suspension of the rules.⁷⁷ Although party rules are not enforceable by points of order on the House floor, the rule arguably reflected a reluctance on the part of the majority party during this period to schedule any legislation with commemorative intent.⁷⁸ The Democratic Party, which holds the majority of House seats in the 116th Congress and therefore is responsible for scheduling floor action, has also instituted protocols for the scheduling of commemorative legislation. The majority leader's protocols for the 116th Congress state that

the Majority Leader shall not schedule any bill or resolution for consideration that expresses appreciation, commends, congratulates, celebrates, recognizes the accomplishments of, or celebrates the anniversary of, an entity, event, group, individual, institution, team or government program; or acknowledges or recognizes a period of time.⁷⁹

Additionally, the Democratic Party's protocols for the 116th Congress provide that the House majority leader "shall consider" the first three Congressional Gold Medal bills and the first three commemorative coin bills reported by the House Financial Services Committee that have 290

<https://www.epw.senate.gov/public/index.cfm/committee-rules>.

⁷⁶ Christophe Crombez, Tim Groseclose, and Keith Krehbiel, "Gatekeeping," *Journal of Politics* vol. 68, no 2 (May 2006), pp. 322-334; and David Epstein, "An Informational Rationale for Committee Gatekeeping Power," *Public Choice* vol. 91 (1997), pp. 271-299.

⁷⁷ U.S. Congress, House Republican Conference, "Conference Rules." In the 116th Congress, this is Rule 29(a)(6) of the party conference rules. See <https://www.gop.gov/conference-rules-of-the-116th-congress/>. Another portion of the rule allowed a waiver to be granted by a majority of the party's elected leadership.

⁷⁸ While in the majority, the House Republican Conference also issued leadership protocols "intended to guide the majority leadership in the scheduling and consideration of legislation on the House floor," indicating that a "resolution of bereavement, or condemnation, or which calls on others (such as a foreign government) to take a particular action, but which does not otherwise violate the provisions of [Republican Conference] Rule 28 is eligible to be scheduled under suspension of the Rules." For those leadership protocols, issued November 1, 2016, see "Floor Protocols" at <https://www.republicanleader.gov/protocols>.

⁷⁹ U.S. Congress, House, Majority Leader Steny Hoyer, "116th Congress Legislative Protocols," at <https://www.majorityleader.gov/content/116th-congress-legislative-protocols>. However, the protocols also state that a "resolution on condemnation, or which calls on others to take a particular action, is eligible to be scheduled for consideration."

cosponsors (two-thirds of the House).⁸⁰ This protocol effectively signals that the first three gold medal or commemorative coin measures that meet the two-thirds cosponsorship threshold *and* are reported by the committee must be scheduled. Whether or not additional measures are scheduled appears to be up to the majority leader.

Party rules and protocols signal the party's intent on how the House should handle commemorative legislation. By placing restrictions on the majority leader's ability to handle certain types of legislation, the party potentially limits the number of measures considered.

Congress and National Collective Memory

Commemoration “encompasses all the various ways people have imagined—in monuments, ceremonies, festivals, pageants, fairs, museums, reenactment, and more—to conjure deep regard for the past.”⁸¹ Since the Continental Congress authorized an equestrian statue of George Washington, Congress has been involved in the recognition of individual and group contributions to the shared American experience through commemorations.⁸² As a result, Congress has arguably become an arbiter of what is worthy of national commemoration through the introduction, consideration, and passage of legislation to honor individuals, groups, events, and places.

The extent to which Congress should be involved in commemoration is a long-standing discussion. As shown above, some Members of Congress have advocated that Congress should play a larger role in commemorating American people, events, and concepts,⁸³ whereas others believe that Congress should focus primarily on public policy rather than commemorations, many of which may be of narrow interest to most Americans.⁸⁴ As the national policymaking body, however, Congress is in a unique position to influence public sentiment. For example, in establishing the National Mall and declaring it a completed work of civic art,⁸⁵ Congress has set aside a permanent place where one observer has suggested “the nation's soul is embedded” and where American ideals can be communicated in more than words.⁸⁶

Not all commemoratives have the lasting influence of the National Mall. Some are enduring, such as those established by law (e.g., naming federal buildings, authorizing postage stamps, issuing commemorative coins, awarding Congressional Gold Medals, establishing memorials, and recognizing federal holidays or patriotic and national observances). These enduring commemorations can appeal to either broader (e.g., federal holidays) or narrower (e.g., naming

⁸⁰ Ibid.

⁸¹ Seth C. Bruggeman, “Introduction: Conundrum and Nuance in American Memory,” in *Commemoration: The American Association for State and Local History Guide*, ed. Seth C. Bruggeman (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2017), p. 1.

⁸² *Journals of the Continental Congress, 1774-1789*, (May 6, 1783), ed. Worthington C. Ford, et al. (Washington: GPO, 1922), vol. 25, p. 963. Also, see footnote **Error! Bookmark not defined.**

⁸³ Mervyn M. Dyrnally, “A Reply to Republican Unhappiness with Way House is Run,” *Congressional Record*, vol. 134, part 10 (June 9, 1988), p. 13923.

⁸⁴ Rep. David McCurdy, in *1990 Commemorative Commission Hearing*, pp. 5-8. Also, see “Don't Give Up Commemoratives.” *Roll Call* (January 18, 1990), p. 4.

⁸⁵ 40 U.S.C. §8901 note. In P.L. 108-126, §202(a) [117 Stat. 1349], Congress found that “(1) the great cross-axis of the [National] Mall in the District of Columbia, which generally extends from the United States Capitol to the Lincoln Memorial, and from the White House to the Jefferson Memorial, is a substantially completed work of civic art.”

⁸⁶ Roger C. Aden, “Conclusion: Soul Searching and Public Memory on the National Mall,” in *US Public Memory, Rhetoric, and the National Mall*, ed. Roger C. Aden (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2018), p. 233.

public buildings) groups and can rhetorically serve as civics lessons.⁸⁷ Others—like legislatively recognizing a commemorative day, week, or month—are temporary recognitions, only applying to a specific day, month, or year rather than establishing a permanent, automatically repeating recognition. No matter the path that Congress chooses, however, the mere fact that Congress acts has meaning.

⁸⁷ Barbara Biesecker, “Remembering World War II: The Rhetoric and Politics of National Commemoration at the Turn of the 21st Century,” *Quarterly Journal of Speech*, vol. 88, no. 4 (2002), pp. 393-409.

Appendix. Detailed Methodology

As initially discussed under “Methodology” above and shown in **Figure 1**, this appendix contains details on the search strategies used by the Bush School of Government and Public Service and CRS to construct the commemorative legislation dataset used in this report. To identify commemorative legislation, searches were conducted using the available information on all legislative measures on Congress.gov from the 93rd (1973-1974) through the 115th (2017-2018) Congresses. From the 93rd through the 100th (1987-1988) Congresses, the only available information in Congress.gov on all legislative measures is summaries of the measures (including the titles). Beginning in the 101st Congress (1989-1990), full bill text searches are available on Congress.gov. For measures introduced from the 101st through the 115th Congress, searches were conducted using both summaries and full text.

Naming Federal Buildings

In general, a law is required to rename a federal facility, including a federal building. Within Congress.gov, there are a variety of ways that building naming legislation is described. The federal building naming legislation included in this report was identified through searches for terms such as “designate the facility,” “designate the,” and “name the.” The searches were structured to collect legislation on naming federal buildings, including courthouses, post offices, veterans’ hospitals, and other federal facilities. Occasionally, the searches turned up legislation that named dams, highways, bridges, and other structures. These were excluded from the dataset because they were relatively infrequent and were not clearly focused on federal facilities.

Postage Stamps

Commemorative postage stamp legislation often suggests themes to the United States Postal Service or authorizes a “semipostal” stamp (i.e., fundraising). Legislation for postage stamps was identified by searching Congress.gov using the search terms “postage stamp” and “semipostal.” The dataset includes legislation that would have authorized commemorative postage stamps but excludes measures that addressed postal service operations, costs, revenue, or post office namings. Post office naming legislation is included in the building-naming dataset.

Commemorative Coins

Commemorative coins honor individuals and groups with a noncirculating, numismatic product. Legislation was identified by searching Congress.gov using the term “commemorative coin.” Using the term “commemorative coin” provided a precise dataset that excluded legislation to create or extend circulating coin programs or legislation that would make changes to coin or paper money design features.

Congressional Gold Medals

Congressional Gold Medals are the highest award bestowed by Congress. Legislation was identified by searching Congress.gov using the term “congressional gold medal.” Using this search term excluded other types of medals, including military medals.

Memorials and Commemorative Works

Data on memorials and commemorative works both inside the District of Columbia and elsewhere in the United States were identified in Congress.gov using the search terms “monument” and “memorial.” In an attempt to specifically focus on memorials, legislation to authorize artwork in the U.S. Capitol was excluded.

Commemorative Observances

Commemorative observances take three general forms: federal holidays; patriotic and national observances (codified in Title 36 United States Code); and the recognition of a specific time period by the House, the Senate, or both. The federal holiday data were collected by searching Congress.gov for the term “federal holiday.” The other commemorative time periods category within the report includes results from a search for the terms “day,” “week,” “month,” and “anniversary.” Legislation that would create a patriotic or national observance was compiled using the same search terms as other commemorative time periods, but limiting legislative vehicles to bills or joint resolutions, since creating a Title 36 observance requires the enactment of a law. Additionally, CRS searched Congress.gov using search terms such as “Title 36,” “amend*”⁸⁸ and “36 U.S.C.”

Author Information

Jacob R. Straus
Specialist on the Congress

Jared C. Nagel
Senior Research Librarian

Acknowledgments

Jamie L. Hutchinson, Visual Information Specialist, designed the report’s figures and graphics.

Disclaimer

This document was prepared by the Congressional Research Service (CRS). CRS serves as nonpartisan shared staff to congressional committees and Members of Congress. It operates solely at the behest of and under the direction of Congress. Information in a CRS Report should not be relied upon for purposes other than public understanding of information that has been provided by CRS to Members of Congress in connection with CRS’s institutional role. CRS Reports, as a work of the United States Government, are not subject to copyright protection in the United States. Any CRS Report may be reproduced and distributed in its entirety without permission from CRS. However, as a CRS Report may include copyrighted images or material from a third party, you may need to obtain the permission of the copyright holder if you wish to copy or otherwise use copyrighted material.

⁸⁸ A “*” symbol is used in Congress.gov to find variations of a term. For example, “amend*” would search for “amendment,” “amends,” and other variations of the term “amend.” For details on searching Congress.gov, see <https://www.congress.gov/help/search-intro>.