

UNDERSTANDING CLOTURE

A Simple Guide for Citizens

What is cloture?

Cloture is the process the U.S. Senate uses to end debate on a bill or nomination and move forward to a final vote. Because the Senate allows unlimited debate — famously known as the filibuster — cloture is the tool that lets senators stop the delay and take action. Think of cloture as the Senate saying: “We’ve talked enough. It’s time to vote.”

Why does cloture exist?

The Senate was designed to encourage thorough debate and protect minority viewpoints. But unlimited debate can also be used to block a vote altogether. Cloture was created to give the Senate a way to eventually move forward while still preserving extended debate.

How cloture works:

Senators file a Cloture Motion

At least 16 senators must sign onto the motion to invoke cloture, signaling they want to end debate

Waiting Period

The Senate must wait until the second day after the motion is filed before voting

Cloture Vote

To approve cloture, the Senate needs 60 votes. If fewer than 60 senators agree, then debate may continue indefinitely

Post-Cloture Debate Time

If cloture is invoked, the Senate receives up to 30 hours of additional debate time, with no senator speaking for more than an hour, and once time is up the final vote must be held.

What happens after cloture?

After debate time runs out, the Senate holds a final up-or-down vote on the bill or nomination. A simple majority — 51 votes — is all that’s needed to pass most items once cloture has been invoked.

Why does cloture matters to you?

Cloture plays a major role in how fast or slow the Senate works. It affects how legislation moves through Congress, whether major bills or nominations can advance, and how the minority party can influence or block decisions. Understanding cloture helps citizens make sense of headlines like: “Senator X blocks bill,” or “Senate fails to reach 60 votes.” Often, these are references to cloture — not the bill’s actual merits.

References

<https://www.senate.gov/about/powers-procedures/filibusters-cloture/senate-adopts-cloture-rule.htm>
https://www.congress.gov/crs_external_products/RS/HTML/98-425.web.html

www.c1af.org



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