For Your Information

What is a Vote-a-Rama?

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When the U.S. Senate considers the budget or other large pieces of legislation, they are limited to 50 hours of debate to be equally divided by the majority and minority parties. After the 50 hours, if there are amendments to the budget that were not considered, the Senate may call a “vote-a-rama.”

In a vote-a-rama, Senators discuss and vote on an unlimited number of amendments back-to-back in a condensed time frame. The proposed amendments must be pertinent to the pending legislation and must be submitted before the vote-a-rama begins. During most vote-a-ramas, each amendment receives two minutes of explanation followed by ten minutes to vote. The vote-a-rama may last many hours depending on how many amendments have been submitted. With numerous amendments being discussed and voted on in a short period of time, it can be exhausting and a challenge for Senators and their staff to keep track of which amendments pass and what changes are being made.

During a vote-a-rama, all 100 Senators are either on the Senate floor or nearby to cast their vote during the allotted time. The process ends when there are no more amendments to consider or when every Senator agrees to end the marathon session. The Senate has held two vote-a-ramas in 2021 so far. The first was in February over the budget resolution and included 41 roll call votes; the second was in March over the American Rescue Plan Act and included 37 roll call votes. The first vote-a-rama took place in 1993 when Senators were considering the budget for fiscal year 1994.

Sources:
Congressional Research Service: Congressional Budget Resolutions: Consideration and Amending in the Senate

The New York Times: What’s In a Vote-a-Rama?

Political Dictionary: vote-a-rama

Senate.gov:“Vote-Aramas” (1977 – Present)

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