

substituted “in December,” for “in December, after the meeting of the electors shall have been held,”, “or, if the President of the Senate be absent” for “or, if he be absent”, and “that certificate” for “that list”.

1984—Pub. L. 98-497 substituted “Archivist of the United States” for “Administrator of General Services”.

1951—Act Oct. 31, 1951, substituted “Administrator of General Services” for “Secretary of State”.

Statutory Notes and Related Subsidiaries

EFFECTIVE DATE OF 1984 AMENDMENT

Amendment by Pub. L. 98-497 effective Apr. 1, 1985, see section 301 of Pub. L. 98-497, set out as a note under section 2102 of Title 44, Public Printing and Documents.

[§ 14. Repealed. Pub. L. 117-328, div. P, title I, § 108(c)(1), Dec. 29, 2022, 136 Stat. 5237]

Section, act June 25, 1948, ch. 644, 62 Stat. 675, related to forfeiture for messenger’s neglect of duty.

§ 15. Counting electoral votes in Congress

(a) IN GENERAL.—Congress shall be in session on the sixth day of January succeeding every meeting of the electors. The Senate and House of Representatives shall meet in the Hall of the House of Representatives at the hour of 1 o’clock in the afternoon on that day, and the President of the Senate shall be their presiding officer.

(b) POWERS OF THE PRESIDENT OF SENATE.—

(1) MINISTERIAL IN NATURE.—Except as otherwise provided in this chapter, the role of the President of the Senate while presiding over the joint session shall be limited to performing solely ministerial duties.

(2) POWERS EXPLICITLY DENIED.—The President of the Senate shall have no power to solely determine, accept, reject, or otherwise adjudicate or resolve disputes over the proper certificate of ascertainment of appointment of electors, the validity of electors, or the votes of electors.

(c) APPOINTMENT OF TELLERS.—At the joint session of the Senate and House of Representatives described in subsection (a), there shall be present two tellers previously appointed on the part of the Senate and two tellers previously appointed on the part of the House of Representatives by the presiding officers of the respective chambers.

(d) PROCEDURE AT JOINT SESSION GENERALLY.—

(1) IN GENERAL.—The President of the Senate shall—

(A) open the certificates and papers purporting to be certificates of the votes of electors appointed pursuant to a certificate of ascertainment of appointment of electors issued pursuant to section 5, in the alphabetical order of the States, beginning with the letter A; and

(B) upon opening any certificate, hand the certificate and any accompanying papers to the tellers, who shall read the same in the presence and hearing of the two Houses.

(2) ACTION ON CERTIFICATE.—

(A) IN GENERAL.—Upon the reading of each certificate or paper, the President of the Senate shall call for objections, if any.

(B) REQUIREMENTS FOR OBJECTIONS OR QUESTIONS.—

(i) OBJECTIONS.—No objection or other question arising in the matter shall be in order unless the objection or question—

(I) is made in writing;

(II) is signed by at least one-fifth of the Senators duly chosen and sworn and one-fifth of the Members of the House of Representatives duly chosen and sworn; and

(III) in the case of an objection, states clearly and concisely, without argument, one of the grounds listed under clause (ii).

(ii) GROUNDS FOR OBJECTIONS.—The only grounds for objections shall be as follows:

(I) The electors of the State were not lawfully certified under a certificate of ascertainment of appointment of electors according to section 5(a)(1).

(II) The vote of one or more electors has not been regularly given.

(C) CONSIDERATION OF OBJECTIONS AND QUESTIONS.—

(i) IN GENERAL.—When all objections so made to any vote or paper from a State, or other question arising in the matter, shall have been received and read, the Senate shall thereupon withdraw, and such objections and questions shall be submitted to the Senate for its decision; and the Speaker of the House of Representatives shall, in like manner, submit such objections and questions to the House of Representatives for its decision.

(ii) DETERMINATION.—No objection or any other question arising in the matter may be sustained unless such objection or question is sustained by separate concurring votes of each House.

(D) RECONVENING.—When the two Houses have voted, they shall immediately again meet, and the presiding officer shall then announce the decision of the questions submitted. No vote or paper from any other State shall be acted upon until the objections previously made to any vote or paper from any State, and other questions arising in the matter, shall have been finally disposed of.

(e) RULES FOR TABULATING VOTES.—

(1) COUNTING OF VOTES.—

(A) IN GENERAL.—Except as provided in subparagraph (B)—

(i) only the votes of electors who have been appointed under a certificate of ascertainment of appointment of electors issued pursuant to section 5, or who have legally been appointed to fill a vacancy of any such elector pursuant to section 4, may be counted; and

(ii) no vote of an elector described in clause (i) which has been regularly given shall be rejected.

(B) EXCEPTION.—The vote of an elector who has been appointed under a certificate of ascertainment of appointment of electors issued pursuant to section 5 shall not be counted if—

(i) there is an objection which meets the requirements of subsection (d)(2)(B)(i); and

(ii) each House affirmatively sustains the objection as valid.

(2) DETERMINATION OF MAJORITY.—If the number of electors lawfully appointed by any State pursuant to a certificate of ascertainment of appointment of electors that is issued under section 5 is fewer than the number of electors to which the State is entitled under section 3, or if an objection the grounds for which are described in subsection (d)(2)(B)(ii)(I) has been sustained, the total number of electors appointed for the purpose of determining a majority of the whole number of electors appointed as required by the Twelfth Amendment to the Constitution shall be reduced by the number of electors whom the State has failed to appoint or as to whom the objection was sustained.

(3) LIST OF VOTES BY TELLERS; DECLARATION OF WINNER.—The tellers shall make a list of the votes as they shall appear from the said certificates; and the votes having been ascertained and counted according to the rules in this subchapter provided, the result of the same shall be delivered to the President of the Senate, who shall thereupon announce the state of the vote, which announcement shall be deemed a sufficient declaration of the persons, if any, elected President and Vice President of the United States, and, together with a list of the votes, be entered on the Journals of the two Houses.

(June 25, 1948, ch. 644, 62 Stat. 675; Pub. L. 117–328, div. P, title I, §109(a), Dec. 29, 2022, 136 Stat. 5237.)

Editorial Notes

AMENDMENTS

2022—Pub. L. 117–328 amended section generally. Prior to amendment, section related to counting electoral votes in Congress.

Statutory Notes and Related Subsidiaries

COUNTING OF ELECTORAL VOTES

2013—Pub. L. 112–228, §1, Dec. 28, 2012, 126 Stat. 1610, provided that: “The meeting of the Senate and House of Representatives to be held in January 2013 pursuant to section 15 of title 3, United States Code, to count the electoral votes for President and Vice President cast by the electors in December 2012 shall be held on January 4, 2013 (rather than on the date specified in the first sentence of that section).”

2009—Pub. L. 110–430, §2, Oct. 15, 2008, 122 Stat. 4846, provided that: “The meeting of the Senate and House of Representatives to be held in January 2009 pursuant to section 15 of title 3, United States Code, to count the electoral votes for President and Vice President cast by the electors in December 2008 shall be held on January 8, 2009 (rather than on the date specified in the first sentence of that section).”

1997—Pub. L. 104–296, §2, Oct. 11, 1996, 110 Stat. 3558, provided that: “The meeting of the Senate and House of Representatives to be held in January 1997 pursuant to section 15 of title 3, United States Code, to count the electoral votes for President and Vice President cast by the electors in December 1996 shall be held on January 9, 1997 (rather than on the date specified in the first sentence of that section).”

1989—Pub. L. 100–646, Nov. 9, 1988, 102 Stat. 3341, provided: “That in carrying out the procedure set forth in section 15 of title 3, United States Code, for 1989, ‘the

fourth day of January’ shall be substituted for ‘the sixth day of January’ in the first sentence of such section.”

1985—Pub. L. 98–456, Oct. 9, 1984, 98 Stat. 1748, provided: “That, in carrying out the procedure set forth in section 15 of title 3, United States Code, for 1985, ‘the seventh day of January’ shall be substituted for ‘the sixth day of January’ in the first sentence of such section.”

§ 16. Same; seats for officers and Members of two Houses in joint session

At such joint session of the two Houses seats shall be provided as follows: For the President of the Senate, the Speaker’s chair; for the Speaker, immediately upon his left; the Senators, in the body of the Hall upon the right of the presiding officer; for the Representatives, in the body of the Hall not provided for the Senators; for the tellers, Secretary of the Senate, and Clerk of the House of Representatives, at the Clerk’s desk; for the other officers of the two Houses, in front of the Clerk’s desk and upon each side of the Speaker’s platform. Such joint session shall not be dissolved until the count of electoral votes shall be completed and the result declared; and no recess shall be taken unless a question shall have arisen in regard to counting any such votes, or otherwise under this subchapter, in which case it shall be competent for either House, acting separately, in the manner hereinbefore provided, to direct a recess of such House not beyond the next calendar day, Sunday excepted, at the hour of 10 o’clock in the forenoon. But if the counting of the electoral votes and the declaration of the result shall not have been completed before the fifth calendar day next after such first session of the two Houses, no further or other recess shall be taken by either House.

(June 25, 1948, ch. 644, 62 Stat. 676; Pub. L. 117–328, div. P, title I, §110(c)(1), Dec. 29, 2022, 136 Stat. 5240.)

Editorial Notes

AMENDMENTS

2022—Pub. L. 117–328 substituted “session” for “meeting” in section catchline and wherever appearing in text.

§ 17. Same; limit of debate in each House

When the two Houses separate to decide upon an objection pursuant to section 15(d)(2)(C)(i) that may have been made to the counting of any electoral vote or votes from any State, or other question arising in the matter—

(1) all such objections and questions permitted with respect to such State shall be considered at such time;

(2) each Senator and Representative may speak to such objections or questions for up to five minutes, and not more than once;

(3) the total time for debate for all such objections and questions with respect to such State shall not exceed two hours in each House, equally divided and controlled by the Majority Leader and Minority Leader, or their respective designees; and

(4) at the close of such debate, it shall be the duty of the presiding officer of each House to