

How a Bill Becomes a Law

Beginning of a Bill

- An idea for a bill may come from anybody, however only Members of Congress can introduce a bill in Congress. Bills can be introduced at any time the House is in session.
- There are four basic types of legislation: bills; joint resolutions; concurrent resolutions; and simple resolutions.
- A bill's type must be determined. A private bill affects a specific person or organization rather than the population at large. A public bill is one that affects the general public.

Proposal of a Bill

- After the idea for a bill is developed and the text of the bill is written, a Member of Congress must officially introduce the bill in Congress by becoming the bill's sponsor.
- Representatives usually sponsor bills that are important to them and their constituents.
- Representatives who sponsor bills will try to gain support for them, in hopes that they will become laws.
- Two or more sponsors for the same bill are called co-sponsors.

Introduction of a Bill

- Bills can be introduced whenever the House is in session.
- In the House, bills are officially introduced by placing them in a special box known as the *hopper*, which is located at the rostrum, or Speaker's platform. In the Senate, a bill is introduced by placing it on the presiding officer's desk or by formally introducing it on the Senate Floor.
- In the House, a bill clerk assigns the bill a number. House bills begin with "H.R." Resolutions begin with "H. Res.," "H. Con. Res.," or "H. J. Res.," depending what type they are. Senate bills begin with "S."
- The first reading of a bill means the bill's title is read on the House Floor. The bill is then referred to a committee for markup.

Committee Action

- The bill is referred to the appropriate committee. The 19 [House standing committees](#) and 16 Senate committees each have jurisdiction over different areas of public policy, such as agriculture, education and the workforce, and international relations.
- The bill is placed on the committee's calendar.
- The committee debates on and marks up the proposed bill, and may or may not make changes to it.
- Committee members vote to accept or reject the changes made during the markup session.
- If a bill includes many amendments, the committee may decide to introduce a "*clean bill*" with a new number.
- The committee votes on the bill after it has been debated and/or amended.
- A committee may stop action, or "*table*" a bill it deems unwise or unnecessary.
- If the bill is not tabled, it will be sent either to a subcommittee for intensive study, or reported back to the House Floor.

Subcommittee Action

- The bill is referred to a subcommittee, and placed on its calendar.

- The bill is carefully studied. The subcommittee may hold hearings to obtain the views of experts, supporters, and opponents.
- The bill is tabled when the subcommittee deems it unwise or unnecessary.
- If changes are needed, the subcommittee will meet to mark up the bill.
- Subcommittee members vote to accept or reject the changes.
- If the subcommittee accepts the bill, the bill is sent back to the full committee for approval or rejection.

The Bill is Reported

- The bill is released from the committee, along with a report explaining the provisions of the bill, and is thus ordered *reported*.
- The reported bill is put on one of five House calendars, the Union Calendar and the House Calendar being the most commonly used.
- The bill is sent to the House Floor for consideration.

The Bill is Considered on the House Floor

- A bill can come to the House Floor for consideration in a variety of ways. Many House bills are debated through a parliamentary device known as the Committee of the Whole, which is a mechanism that permits faster consideration.
- Floor action begins and Members debate the bill.
- The conduct of debate is dictated by the Rules of the House generally, and may also be governed by a special rule granted specifically for the bill under consideration.
- Following debate, the second reading of the bill begins in a section-by-section manner, during which amendments may be offered.
- At the conclusion of all amendment debate, the bill is read a third time.
- Next, the House is ready to vote on the bill.

The Bill is Put to a Vote

- The bill is read by title only and put to a vote.
- Members in attendance will vote to pass or not to pass the bill.
- Members most often vote electronically in the House Chamber using the Electronic Voting System. Members of the Senate cast their votes by non-electronic means.
- Roll Call votes cast by the U.S. House of Representatives are recorded in the House Journal, the Congressional Record, and posted on the website of the Clerk of the House.
- Members may vote "Yea" for approval, "Nay" for disapproval, or "Present" to record that they were in attendance but chose not to vote.
- If a majority of the House votes to pass the bill, the bill is then referred to the Senate to undergo a similar process of approval.

The Bill is Referred to the Senate

- When a bill passes in the House, it must also pass in the Senate in order to become a law. The two houses of Congress make up the bicameral legislature, part of a system of checks and balances that ensures that laws are created democratically.
- Once the bill and its amendments has been officially passed by the House and certified by the Clerk, it is said to be "engrossed."
- In the Senate, the bill again may be sent to a committee for study or markup.
- Members may choose to ignore the bill and continue to work on their own legislation.
- Members may vote to pass or not to pass the bill.

- If the bill passes with different language, it must be sent for review to a conference committee, which is a committee made up of members from both the House and the Senate.
- Differences must be agreed upon before the bill is sent to the President for signature. At this point the bill is "enrolled."

The Bill is sent to the President

- When a bill passes in the House and Senate and is sent to the President for a signature, it is said to be enrolled.
- The President can take one of several possible actions:
 - The president may take no action. If Congress is in session, the bill automatically becomes law after ten days.
 - A pocket veto occurs when the president takes no action and Congress has adjourned its session. In this case, the bill dies and does not become a law.
 - The president may decide that the bill is unwise or unnecessary and veto the bill.
 - The president may sign the bill, and the bill becomes law.

The Bill Becomes a Law

- If the President signs the bill, or takes no action while Congress is in session, then the bill becomes a law.
- If Congress overrides a presidential veto, the bill becomes a law.
- New public and private laws are prepared and published by the Office of the Federal Register (OFR) of the National Archives and Records Administration (NARA).

The Bill is Vetoed

- If the President decides a bill is unwise or unnecessary, the President does not sign the bill, but issues an official statement of objections to the bill called a *veto*.
- The President can veto a bill indirectly by withholding approval of the bill until Congress has adjourned *sine die*. This informal way of preventing a bill from becoming a law is called a pocket veto.
- When the President issues a veto, the bill returns to its House of origin.
- Objections to the veto are read and debated on the House Floor.
- If there are enough objections in the House to the presidential veto, a vote is taken to [override](#), or overrule, the veto.
- If the House does not vote on a veto override, the bill is stalled and does not become a law.

The Veto is Overridden

- If enough Members object to the presidential veto, a vote is taken to *override*, or overrule the veto.
- A two-thirds vote or greater is needed in both the House and the Senate to override the President's veto. If two-thirds of both houses of Congress vote successfully to override the veto, the bill becomes a law.
- If the House and Senate do not override the veto, the bill "dies" and does not become a law.

**Referenced from the United States Clerk Website*