



Two descriptions from the U.S. House of Representatives

Tying It All Together: Learn about the Legislative Process

For the Adult Learner

"All Legislative Powers herein granted shall be vested in a Congress of the United States, which shall consist of a Senate and House of Representatives."
(Article I, Section 1, of the [United States Constitution](#))

The chief function of Congress is the making of laws. The legislative process comprises a number of steps, and much information is available from this page concerning the legislation introduced and considered in the 111th Congress. To help you understand the information and how it interrelates, a very brief overview of the legislative process within the House of Representatives is presented below. There are many aspects and variations of the process which are not addressed here. A much more in-depth discussion and presentation of the overall process is available in [How Our Laws Are Made](#). Most of the information presented below was excerpted from that Congressional document.

Forms of Congressional Action

The work of Congress is initiated by the introduction of a proposal in one of four principal forms: the bill, the joint resolution, the concurrent resolution, and the simple resolution.

Bills

A bill is the form used for most legislation, whether permanent or temporary, general or special, public or private. A bill originating in the House of Representatives is designated by the letters "H.R.", signifying "House of Representatives", followed by a number that it retains throughout all its parliamentary stages. Bills are presented to the President for action when approved in identical form by both the House of Representatives and the Senate.

Joint Resolutions

Joint resolutions may originate either in the House of Representatives or in the Senate. There is little practical difference between a bill and a joint resolution. Both are subject to the same procedure, except for a joint resolution proposing an amendment to the Constitution. On approval of such a resolution by two-thirds of both the House and Senate, it is sent directly to the Administrator of General Services for submission to the individual states for ratification. It is not

presented to the President for approval. A joint resolution originating in the House of Representatives is designated "H.J.Res." followed by its individual number. Joint resolutions become law in the same manner as bills.

Concurrent Resolutions

Matters affecting the operations of both the House of Representatives and Senate are usually initiated by means of concurrent resolutions. A concurrent resolution originating in the House of Representatives is designated "H.Con.Res." followed by its individual number. On approval by both the House of Representatives and Senate, they are signed by the Clerk of the House and the Secretary of the Senate. They are not presented to the President for action.

Simple Resolutions

A matter concerning the operation of either the House of Representatives or Senate alone is initiated by a simple resolution. A resolution affecting the House of Representatives is designated "H.Res." followed by its number. They are not presented to the President for action.

For more information on bills and resolutions see [Forms of Congressional Action](#) in [How Our Laws Are Made](#).

Introduction and Referral to Committee

Any Member in the House of Representatives may introduce a bill at any time while the House is in session by simply placing it in the "hopper" provided for the purpose at the side of the Clerk's desk in the House Chamber. The sponsor's signature must appear on the bill. A public bill may have an unlimited number of co-sponsoring Members. The bill is assigned its legislative number by the Clerk and referred to the appropriate committee by the Speaker, with the assistance of the Parliamentarian. The bill is then printed in its introduced form, which you can read in [Bill Text](#). If a bill was introduced today, summary information about it can be found in [Bill Status Today](#).

An important phase of the legislative process is the action taken by committees. It is during committee action that the most intense consideration is given to the proposed measures; this is also the time when the people are given their opportunity to be heard. Each piece of legislation is referred to the committee that has jurisdiction over the area affected by the measure.

For more information on this step of the legislative process see [Introduction and Reference to Committee](#) of [How Our Laws Are Made](#).

Consideration by Committee

Public Hearings and Markup Sessions

Usually the first step in this process is a public hearing, where the committee members hear witnesses representing various viewpoints on the measure. Each committee makes public the date, place and subject of any hearing it conducts. The [Committee Meetings](#) scheduled for today are available along with other [House Schedules](#). Public announcements are also published in the Daily Digest portion of the [Congressional Record](#).

A transcript of the testimony taken at a hearing is made available for inspection in the committee office, and frequently the complete transcript is printed and distributed by the committee.

After hearings are completed, the bill is considered in a session that is popularly known as the "mark-up" session. Members of the committee study the viewpoints presented in detail. Amendments may be offered to the bill, and the committee members vote to accept or reject these changes.

This process can take place at either the subcommittee level or the full committee level, or at both. Hearings and markup sessions are status steps noted in the Legislative Action portion of [Bill Status](#).

Committee Action

At the conclusion of deliberation, a vote of committee or subcommittee Members is taken to determine what action to take on the measure. It can be reported, with or without amendment, or tabled, which means no further action on it will occur. If the committee has approved extensive amendments, they may decide to report a new bill incorporating all the amendments. This is known as a "clean bill," which will have a new number. Votes in committee can be found in Committee Votes.

If the committee votes to report a bill, the [Committee Report](#) is written. This report describes the purpose and scope of the measure and the reasons for recommended approval. House Report numbers are prefixed with "H.Rpt." and then a number indicating the Congress (currently 107).

For more information on bills and resolutions see [Consideration by Committee](#) in [How Our Laws Are Made](#).

House Floor Consideration

Consideration of a measure by the full House can be a simple or very complex operation. In general a measure is ready for consideration by the full House after it has been reported by a committee. Under certain circumstances, it may be brought to the Floor directly.

The consideration of a measure may be governed by a "rule." A rule is itself a simple resolution, which must be passed by the House, that sets out the particulars of debate for a specific bill—how much time will be allowed for debate, whether amendments can be offered, and other matters. Debate time for a measure is normally divided between proponents and opponents. Each side yields time to those Members who wish to speak on the bill. When amendments are offered, these are also debated and voted upon. If the House is in session today, you can see a summary of [Current House Floor Proceedings](#).

After all debate is concluded and amendments decided upon, the House is ready to vote on final passage. In some cases, a vote to "recommit" the bill to committee is requested. This is usually an effort by opponents to change some portion or table the measure. If the attempt to recommit fails, a vote on final passage is ordered.

Resolving Differences

After a measure passes in the House, it goes to the Senate for consideration. A bill must pass both bodies in the same form before it can be presented to the President for signature into law. If the Senate changes the language of the measure, it must return to the House for concurrence or additional changes. This back-and-forth negotiation may occur on the House floor, with the House accepting or rejecting Senate amendments or complete Senate text. Often a conference committee will be appointed with both House and Senate members. This group will resolve the differences in committee and report the identical measure back to both bodies for a vote. Conference committees also issue reports outlining the final version of the bill.

Final Step

Votes on final passage, as well as all other votes in the House, may be taken by the electronic voting system which registers each individual Member's response. These votes are referred to as Yea/Nay votes or recorded votes, and are available in House Votes by Bill number, roll call vote number or words describing the reason for the vote.

Votes in the House may also be by voice vote, and no record of individual responses is available. After a measure has been passed in identical form by both the House and Senate, it is considered "enrolled." It is sent to the President who may sign the measure into law, veto it and return it to Congress, let it become law without signature, or at the end of a session, pocket-veto it.

Accessed from http://www.house.gov/house/Tying_it_all.shtml

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How a Bill Becomes Law

For the Adolescent Learner

Bills are legislation proposed by Members of Congress to become laws. Bills go through a long process of discussion and voting before they are signed into laws.

Beginning of a Bill

Citizens contact their Representatives with ideas for laws. If the Representative thinks the proposed law would be beneficial to everyone, he will have his staff research the idea, write the text of the bill, and prepare it for proposal to Congress.

Proposal of a Bill

Once the bill text has been written, it must be sponsored by a Member of Congress so it can be introduced in Congress. This could be the same Member or a different Member. The sponsor will talk to other Members about the bill, explaining why it is important that it becomes a law. Once the bill is sponsored it can be formally introduced to Congress. If more than one Member wants to sponsor the bill, they are called co-sponsors. There is no limit to the number of Members who can co-sponsor a bill.

Introduction of a Bill



The Hopper

Bills can be introduced in either the House or the Senate, depending on the bill's sponsor. Bills can be introduced whenever Congress is in session, but only by Members of Congress. In the House, to introduce a bill, the sponsor will place it in the hopper. If the bill is introduced in the Senate it is placed on the presiding officer's desk or by announcing its introduction on the Senate Floor.

Once a bill has been introduced, a bill clerk assigns it a number. House bills begin with "H.R." and Senate bills begin with "S," followed by the assigned bill number. After the bill is numbered, its title is read on the Floor. This is called the first reading. Once it has been read, the bill is sent to committee.

The Bill Goes to Committee



Committee Meeting Room

After it is introduced, the bill goes to the appropriate committee. There are 19 House standing committees, each with several subcommittees. Each committee and subcommittee specializes in a different area of public policy such as agriculture, education, and foreign relations. The topic of the bill determines which committee it is sent to.

Once the bill reaches the committee, it is marked up. If the bill includes lots of amendments, the committee may create a "clean bill" with a new number to avoid confusion. If the committee is happy with the content of the bill it can be reported to the House Floor for a vote. They may also decide that the bill does not need to become a law. In this case, the bill will be "tabled."

If the committee believes that the bill could become a valuable law but they need more information, it will be referred to a subcommittee for further research.

The Bill Goes to Subcommittee

When the bill reaches subcommittee it is studied and researched very carefully. The subcommittee may hold hearings so experts, supporters, and opponents can voice their opinions. The subcommittee can decide to "table" the bill, reject the changes and discuss the bill further, or approve the changes and send it back to committee. If the bill goes back to committee, they will again follow the steps above until the bill is ready for a vote.

The Bill is Reported

Once the committee has decided the bill is ready for a vote by the Members of Congress, the bill is sent back to the Bill Clerk along with a report explaining the provisions of the bill. The bill is now considered reported and a vote is scheduled for the bill.

The Bill is Considered on the House Floor

Before the bill is voted on, Members are given a chance to debate the bill on the House Floor. The House Rules govern the conduct of the debate. During the debate, members who support the bill and Members who oppose the bill each have a turn to voice their opinions. Following the debate the bill is read again, section-by-section. During this second reading, Members may suggest additional amendments. After all of the amendments have been considered, the House is ready to vote. When this happens, the bill becomes available for the public to view on the Office of the Clerk's website.

The Bill is put to a Vote



Electronic Voting Machine

The bill's title is ready by a Reading Clerk before the Members being their vote on whether or not the bill should become a law. Members vote using the Electronic Voting System by sliding their voting card into the machine and selecting "yea" for yes, "nay" for no, or "present" if they do not want to vote on a particular bill. These are called Roll Call Votes and they are recorded in the House Journal, Congressional Record, and posted on the Office of the [Clerk's Web site](#).

If the majority of the House votes to pass the bill and the vote count has been certified by the Clerk, the bill is called engrossed. The engrossed bill is then referred to the Senate to undergo a similar process of approval.

The Bill is Referred to the Senate

In order to become a law, the bill must be passed by both the House and Senate, and be signed by the president. The two Houses of Congress make up the bicameral legislature, part of a system of checks and balances created by the Founding Fathers to ensure that laws are created democratically.

In the Senate, if the Senators do not agree with the bill in its entirety, the bill may be sent to a committee for markup. Once they have agreed on the content of the bill, the Senate votes on whether or not to pass the bill. If the bill has changed and does not match the bill created by the House, it must be sent for review by a conference committee. Any changed must be approved by this committee before the bill can be sent to the President. At this point, the bill is called enrolled.

The Bill is Sent to the President

The President must approve and sign the bill in order for it to become a law. The President can take one of several possible actions when the bill is delivered to him.

1. The President may do nothing. If Congress is in session, the bill automatically becomes law after ten days. If Congress is not in session, the bill dies and does not become a law. This is called a "pocket veto."
2. The President may decide that the bill is unwise or unnecessary and veto the bill.
3. The President may sign the bill, and the bill becomes law.

The Bill is Vetoed

If the President vetoes the bill, it returns to the House. The President's reasons for vetoing the bill are discussed and debated on the House Floor. If there are enough objections in the House to the presidential veto, a vote can be taken to override it.

The Veto is Overridden

At least two-third vote or greater is needed in both the House and Senate to override the President's veto. If two-thirds of both houses in Congress agree to override the veto, the bill automatically becomes a law. If the House and Senate do not agree to override the President's veto, the bill dies and does not become a law.

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