

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.
- The Library of Congress then receives an electronic copy of the bill and posts the bill and its status on [THOMAS](#), a public website.

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.

- Current Floor Proceedings including major actions on bills are posted for public view on the website of the Clerk of the House.

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).

Source: www.house.gov – Clerk's Office of the U.S. House of Representatives