

CAPITOL HILL 101



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Federal Government Contact Information

- To learn who your Representative is, visit <http://www.house.gov> and type in your zip code.
- To learn who your Senators are, visit <http://www.senate.gov> and choose your state.
- If you do not have access to the internet, call the Capitol Switchboard at (202) 224-3121.
- **To contact your Senator**, visit <http://www.senate.gov> or write to
The Honorable (First Name_Last Name)
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

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- **To contact your Representative**, visit <http://www.house.gov> or write to
The Honorable (First Name_Last Name)
United States House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515
- **To contact the White House**, visit <http://www.whitehouse.gov> or write to
President (First Name_Last Name)
1600 Pennsylvania Ave. NW
Washington, DC 20500

Capitol Hill 101

- ✓ A Congress lasts two years, and is divided into two sessions, each of which is a year in length. For example, the first session of the 115th Congress began in January 2017, and the second session of the 115th Congress will begin in January 2018. The first session of the 116th Congress will begin in January 2019, and so forth.

Congress is made up of two chambers, or Houses:

- ✓ The Senate
- ✓ The House of Representatives

United States Senate

- ❖ The Senate is composed of 100 Members, two from each state regardless of population or area.
- ❖ Senators serve six year terms, and one-third of the Senate is elected every second year. Senators are split into three classes—I, II, III. For example, Class I Senators will be up for re-election in 2018; Class II Senators will be up for re-election in 2020; and Class III Senators will be up for re-election in 2022.
- ❖ For a complete list of all 100 Senators, links to individual Senator's websites and more, go to: www.senate.gov.



Seal of the US Senate

Key Information

- ✓ The Senator from each state with the longest tenure is referred to as the "Senior" Senator; the other, the "Junior" Senator.
- ✓ The two Senators from each state will never be up for re-election simultaneously, and therefore each state's Senators are in different classes.
- ✓ The President of the Senate is the Vice-President of the United States. His or her primary role is to cast a deciding vote in the event of a "tie" (50-50) vote on legislation.
- ✓ Senators deal with all issues affecting our nation, and particularly those issues that their constituents care about. However, Senators often play more integral roles on issues that come before the Committees on which they sit.

U.S. House of Representatives

- ⇒ The House of Representatives is composed of 435 Members, plus four additional non-voting delegates representing American Samoa, District of Columbia, Guam, Virgin Islands, and one Resident Commissioner, elected every four years, representing Puerto Rico.
- ⇒ All Members and Delegates are elected every two years (with the exception of the Resident Commissioner from Puerto Rico). The number of Representatives is determined by a state's population.

Key Information

- ✓ Largely-populated states like California and New York have 53 and 29 Representatives respectively, while the smaller-populated states of Wyoming and Alaska each have one at-large Representative, the minimum number allowed by the Constitution.
- ✓ Congressional districts are redrawn after every national census, or every 10 years.

For a complete list of the Representatives, links to Representative's personal Web sites and more, go to www.house.gov. There is also a very useful FAQ at <http://www.clerk.house.gov>.



US House Chamber: clerk.house.gov



Seal of the US House of Representatives.

How a Bill Becomes a Law

Step 1. Referral to Committee:

With few exceptions, bills are referred to standing committees in the House or Senate according to carefully delineated rules of procedure.

Step 2. Committee Action:

When a bill reaches a committee it is placed on the committee's calendar. A bill can be referred to a subcommittee or considered by the committee as a whole. It is at this point that a bill is examined carefully and its chances for passage are determined. If the committee does not act on a bill, it is the equivalent of killing it.

Step 3. Subcommittee Review:

Often, bills are referred to a subcommittee for study and hearings. Hearings provide the opportunity to put on the record the views of the executive branch, experts, other public officials, supporters and opponents of the legislation. Testimony can be given in person or submitted as a written statement.

Step 4. Mark Up:

When the hearings are completed, the subcommittee may meet to "mark up" the bill, that is, make changes and amendments prior to recommending the bill to the full committee. If a subcommittee votes not to report legislation to the full committee, the bill dies.

Step 5. Committee Action to Report A Bill:

After receiving a subcommittee's report on a bill, the full committee can conduct further study and hearings, or it can vote on the subcommittee's recommendations and on any proposed amendments. The full committee then votes on its recommendation to the House or Senate. This procedure is called "ordering a bill reported."

Step 6. Publication of a Written Report:

After a committee votes to have a bill reported, the committee chairman instructs staff to prepare a written report on the bill. This report describes the intent and scope of the legislation, impact on existing laws and programs, position of the executive branch, and views of dissenting members of the committee.

Step 7. Scheduling Floor Action:

After a bill is reported back to the chamber where it originated, it is placed in chronological order on the calendar. In the House there are several different legislative calendars, and the Speaker and majority leader largely determine if, when, and in what order bills come up. In the Senate there is only one legislative calendar.

Step 8. Debate:

When a bill reaches the floor of the House or Senate, there are rules or procedures governing the debate on legislation. These rules determine the conditions and amount of time allocated for general debate.

Step 9. Voting:

After the debate and the approval of any amendments, the bill is passed or defeated by the members voting.

Note:

- ✓ There are four basic types of legislation: bills, joint resolutions, concurrent resolutions, and simple resolutions.
- ✓ The official legislative process begins when a bill or resolution is numbered, - "H.R." signifies a House bill and "S." a Senate bill - referred to a committee and printed by the Government Printing Office.

Step 10. Referral to Other Chamber:

When a bill is passed by the House or the Senate, it is referred to the other chamber, where it usually follows the same route through committee and floor action. This chamber may approve the bill as received, reject it, ignore it, or change it.

Step 11. Conference Committee Action:

If only minor changes are made to a bill by the other chamber, it is common for the legislation to go back to the first chamber for concurrence. However, when the actions of the other chamber significantly alter the bill, a conference committee is formed to reconcile the differences between the House and Senate versions. If the conferees are unable to reach agreement, the legislation dies. If agreement is reached, a conference report is prepared describing the committee members' recommendations for changes. Both the House and the Senate must approve the same version of the conference report.

Step 12. Final Actions:

After a bill has been approved by both the House and Senate in identical form, it is sent to the President. If the President approves the legislation, he signs it, and it becomes law. Or, the President can take no action for ten days, while Congress is in session, and it automatically becomes law. If the President opposes the bill he can veto it; or, if he takes no action after the Congress has adjourned its second session, it is a "pocket veto" and the legislation dies.

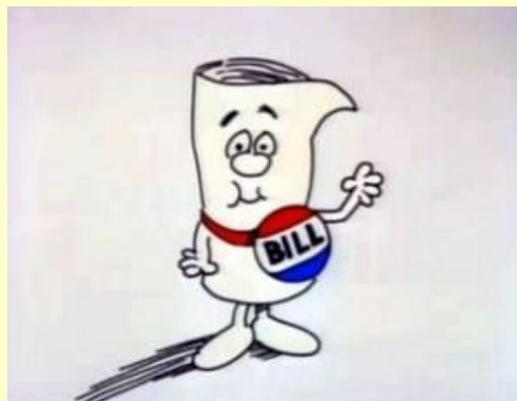
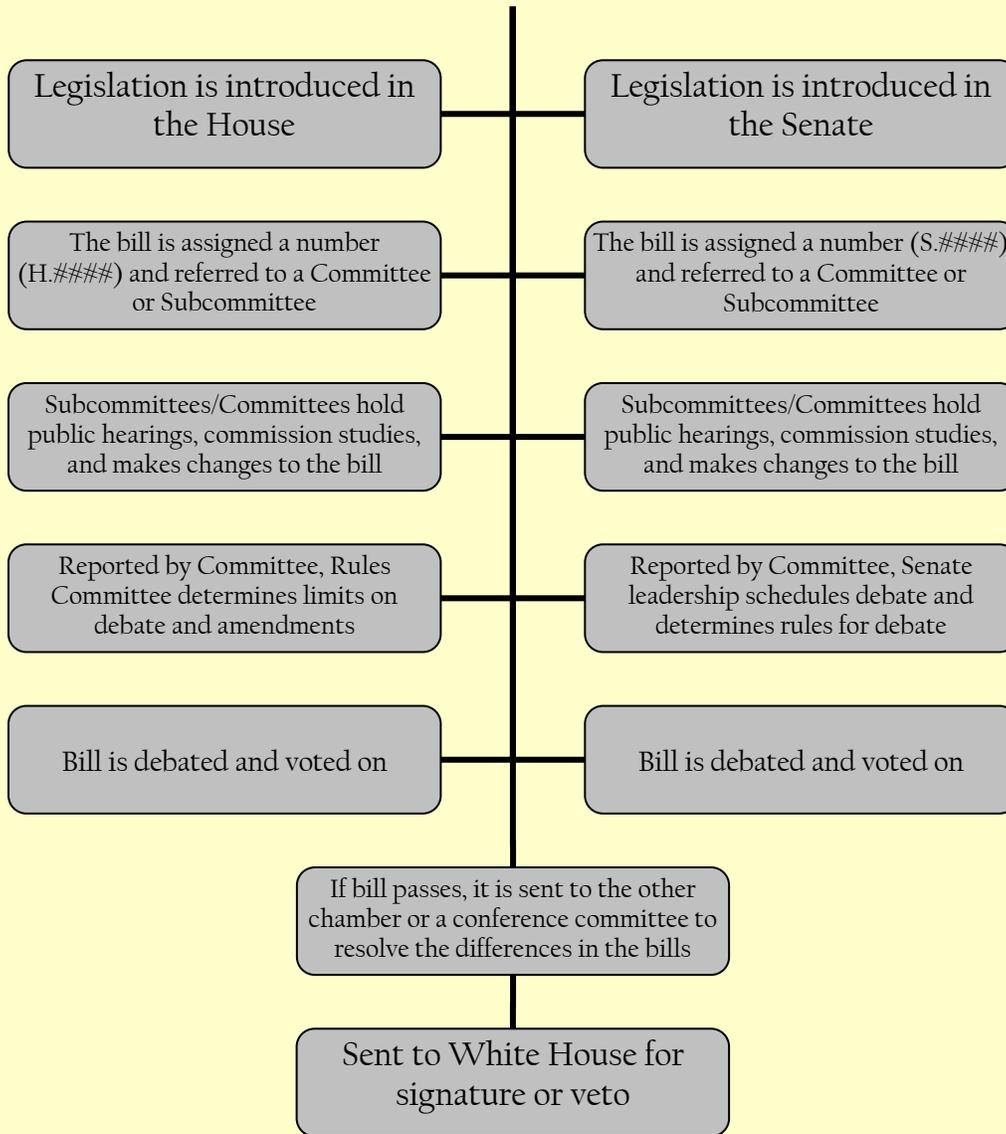
Step 13. Overriding a Veto:

If the President vetoes a bill, Congress may attempt to "override the veto." This requires a two-thirds roll call vote of the members who are present in sufficient numbers for a quorum.

Source: Adapted from *Congress at Your Fingertips* from Capitol Advantage (<http://capitoladvantage.com>).

NOTE: For more detailed information about how the House and Senate make laws, visit the official Congressional site at <http://congress.gov>

How a Bill Becomes a Law Continued



School House Rock: "I'm Just a Bill"

How Legislative Committees Work

- **How many committees are there?**
 - There are, at present, 20 standing committees in the House and 16 in the Senate as well as several select committees in both Houses. In addition, there are four standing joint committees of the two Houses that have oversight responsibilities but no legislative jurisdiction.

- **How does Congress decide which bills go to which committees?**
 - Each committee's jurisdiction is divided into categories under the rules of the House and the Senate. All measures affecting a particular area of the law are referred to the committee with jurisdiction over the particular subject matter. The Speaker of the House or the Senate Majority Leader may refer an introduced bill to multiple committees for consideration of those provisions of the bill within the jurisdiction of each committee concerned. The Speaker or Majority Leader must designate a primary committee of jurisdiction on bills referred to multiple committees.

- **Which committees do Members seek to be on?**
 - A member usually seeks selection to the committee that has jurisdiction over a field in which the Member is most qualified, or which is of interest to their constituency. Many Members are nationally recognized experts in the specialty of their particular committee or subcommittee. For example, the Committee on the Judiciary is traditionally composed almost entirely of lawyers.

- **Are there an equal number of Republicans and Democrats on each committee?**
 - Membership on the various committees is divided between the two major political parties. The proportion of Republicans and Democrats on a particular committee depends upon who holds the majority in that particular House of Congress, and in what ratio. The one exception to this rule is the Committee on Ethics, whose membership is always divided equally among the two major political parties.



Senate Committee Room– Wikipedia Commons

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