



The Legislative Process

The legislative process begins with an introduction of a bill to Congress.

- A bill can be written by anyone; however, it is important to note that only members of Congress can introduce legislation.
- The initial bill can undergo a multitude of changes during the legislative process.

House (H.R.) vs Senate (S):

- Senators **CANNOT** cosponsor House (H.R.) bills. They can cosponsor Senate (S.) bills.
- Representatives **CANNOT** cosponsor Senate bills. They can cosponsor House (H.R.) bills.

Once the bill is introduced it is then referred to the appropriate committee for review.

- There are 17 Senate committees, with 70 subcommittees.
- There are 23 House committees, with 104 subcommittees.
- House and Senate committees change in number and form with each new Congress.
- Committees oversee a specific policy area, whereas the subcommittees take on more specialized policy areas.

A bill is first considered in a subcommittee.

- In the subcommittee a bill may be accepted, amended, or rejected entirely.
- If the members of the subcommittee agree to move a bill forward, it is reported to the full committee, where the process is repeated.
- Throughout this stage of the process, the committees and subcommittees call hearings to investigate the merits and flaws of the bill.
 - During these hearings they invite experts, advocates, and opponents to appear before the committee and provide testimony and can compel people to appear using subpoena power if necessary.

If the full committee votes to approve the bill, it is reported to the floor of the House or Senate, and the majority party leadership decides when to place the bill on the calendar for consideration.

- If a bill is particularly urgent, then the bill may be considered right away.
- Other bills may wait for months to be placed on the calendar for consideration or may never be scheduled at all.

When the bill comes up for consideration-

- The House has a very structured debate process:
 - Every member who desires to speak only has a few minutes to do so.
 - The number and kind of amendments are usually limited.
- The Senate debate on most bills is unlimited:
 - Senators may address issues other than the bill under consideration during their speeches, and any amendment can be introduced.
 - Senators can use this to filibuster bills under consideration, a procedure by which a Senator delays a vote on a bill — and by extension its passage — by refusing to stand down.



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- A supermajority of 60 Senators can break a filibuster by invoking cloture, or the cessation of debate on the bill, and forcing a vote.
- Once debate is over, the votes of a simple majority pass the bill.

A bill must pass both houses of Congress before it goes to the President for consideration.

- Though the Constitution requires that the two bills have the exact same wording, this rarely happens in practice.
- To bring the bills into alignment, a Conference Committee is convened, consisting of members from both chambers.
- The members of the committee produce a conference report, intended as the final version of the bill.
 - Each chamber then votes again to approve the conference report.
- Depending on where the bill originated, the final text is then enrolled by either the Clerk of the House or the Secretary of the Senate and presented to the Speaker of the House and the President of the Senate for their signatures.
- The final step is that the bill is then sent to the President.

When receiving a bill from Congress, the President has several options.

- If the President signs the bill into law then the bill is then printed in the Statutes at Large.
- If the President veto's the bill then it is sent back to Congress.
 - Congress may override the veto with a two-thirds vote of each chamber, at which point the bill becomes law and is printed.
- There are two other options that the President may exercise.
 1. If Congress is in session and the President takes no action within 10 days, the bill becomes law.
 2. If Congress adjourns before the 10 days are up and the President takes no action, then the bill dies, and Congress may not vote to override.
 - This is called a pocket veto, and if Congress still wants to pass the legislation, they must begin the entire process again.