

THE BASIC STEPS OF CREATING LAWS

The Constitution requires that revenue bills start in the House, but most are given simultaneous treatment by the House and Senate.

Some bills are processed by the Senate and then the House, others by the House and then the Senate. All bills must be considered by both chambers of Congress in order to become law.

Process:

1. Staff members of House and Senate leaders assign bills numbers for processing (e.g., HR 1..., S 1...).
2. Leaders get bills assigned to committees.
3. Committee chairpersons assign bills to subcommittees for study and debate.
4. Subcommittees hold public hearings, amend bills, and vote on bills. This is known as the "markup" procedure. If the bill is approved, it is then referred to the full committee.
5. The committee can hold further hearings and debates, but it often votes based on subcommittee recommendations.
6. The committee refers the bill to the full House or Senate floor.
7. Floor debates can occur, and, if passed, the bill is referred to the other chamber.
8. The powerful House Rules Committee frames House debates, times, etc.
9. Once both chambers have passed the bill, a Conference Committee is formed to join the two versions into a single bill.

10. Both the House and the Senate vote on the Conference Committee version of the bill.
11. The bill is then sent to the president.
12. If the president signs it, the bill becomes federal law.
13. If the president ignores the bill for 10 days (not counting Sundays), it automatically becomes law without the president's signature.
14. If the Congressional session has fewer than 10 days remaining and the president ignores a new bill, then the bill dies at the end of the session. This is the "pocket veto."
15. If the president vetoes the bill, the House and Senate can vote to override with a two-thirds majority.

MODERN ADDITIONS AND REVISIONS TO PROCEDURES

Traditional committee procedures for debates, amendments, and votes have been modified by Congress to allow for more efficiency. Here are examples:

- **Fast tracking.** No amendments allowed; take the bill as is, or not. Because amendments are often lengthy and difficult to debate, fast tracking speeds the entire process.
- **Slow tracking.** Sequential committee hearings are required; this is usually a sign of a bill's being delayed through lengthier processing.
- **Multiple referrals.** Many bills need to be seen by different committees that cover areas of government under their control. To speed this process, bills can be sent to these committees simultaneously.
- **Outside amendments.** Some revisions can be set up by leaders to be added outside of committee meetings.
- **Unanimous consent rules.** As an efficiency measure, such rules allow for the usual procedures of votes to be suspended, as long as no single member objects. Long vote counts can be avoided.
- **King of the Hill votes.** This newer procedure has several amendment versions voted on in order. As long as amendments pass, the voting continues. When an amendment fails, the last one to win becomes the version selected for the bill. Prior amendments are then ignored.
- **Queen of the Hill votes.** This system gives the amendment with the biggest margin of approval the victory over all other amendments.

A SAMPLE OF CONGRESSIONAL EFFICIENCY (DATA FROM THE 102ND CONGRESS)

Total bills introduced in the two-year term:	10,238 (100%)
Bills sent to committees by leaders:	10,178 (99.4%)
Bills referred out of committees:	1,205 (11.7%)
Bills referred from floor debates:	1,201 (11.7%)
Passed by both the House and the Senate:	667 (6.5%)
Finally becoming federal law:	590 (5.7%) of all bills introduced

MAJOR PLACES WHERE LEGISLATION IS BLOCKED

- Leaders can assign bills to openly hostile committees or committee chairpersons.
- Chairpersons can delay the bill's consideration ("pigeonhole").
- Subcommittee and committee members can vote no. (This is done often.)
- Subcommittee and committee amendments can change the bill so much that the original sponsors withdraw their support.
- Lobby groups can create opposition and pressure to kill the bill.
- Debate rules and issues can cause changes in votes or amendments.
- Members of the Senate can filibuster or threaten to filibuster. Senators can hold the floor as long as they can stand, thus delaying any other business. This tactic of "filibuster" can force compromises when the minority cannot stop a vote in any other manner.
- Individual senators can place a "hold" on any bill and keep it from being debated on the floor.
- Floor votes in either chamber can be no.
- The Conference Committee can change the bill enough to change support in chambers.
- The president can pocket veto or veto, and Congress isn't able to override that veto.

KEY COMMITTEES OF CONGRESS

<p>House Committees:</p> <p>Appropriations</p> <p>Budget</p> <p>Rules</p> <p>Ways and Means</p>	<p>Duties:</p> <p>Project money (pork) and other expenditures are controlled here. These are called "earmarks."</p> <p>Oversight of government spending is watched and controlled.</p> <p>Debate rules, bill sequence, and rules of amendments are set.</p> <p>Taxation rules, tariff issues, benefits, and Social Security are set.</p>
<p>Senate Committees:</p> <p>Appropriations</p> <p>Budget</p> <p>Finance</p> <p>Foreign Relations</p> <p>Judiciary</p>	<p>Duties:</p> <p>Federal discretionary spending programs are set.</p> <p>Oversight of government agencies and spending is done.</p> <p>Duties are similar to those of the HR Ways and Means committee.</p> <p>Policy debates and treaty votes are main duties.</p> <p>Judges and justices are debated and possibly confirmed.</p>

