

How a Bill Becomes a Law

Introduction of Bill

A member of Congress introduces a new piece of legislation or bill. It can be introduced in either the House of Representatives (House) or Senate or both, except that all appropriations or funding bills start in the House. A bill number is assigned (S. 1, for instance, for the first Senate bill introduced; or H.R. 50 for the fiftieth bill introduced in the House).

Committee Consideration

Then the bill goes to the appropriate committee, based on the issue addressed, for consideration. That committee refers the bill to a specific subcommittee, where a hearing is often held and interested parties can testify for and against the bill. After the hearing, a mark-up occurs where amendments are debated and voted on to revise the original bill. The bill then is voted out of the subcommittee to the full committee, where more hearings and another mark-up may take place. The committee votes to decide if the bill will be "reported out" of the committee for consideration by the entire legislative body.

Floor Action

Once the bill is reported out of the committee, the process differs somewhat in the House and Senate. In the House, the bill goes to the Rules Committee, where rules are given to the legislation that regulate time limits for debate and determine whether all members of the House can offer amendments. In the Senate, the bill moves from committee passage to floor debate.

Debate

The speaker of the house and the senate majority leader hold great power due to their responsibility for scheduling floor debate. A common tactic for "killing" a bill is to delay scheduling of the bill so that it may not be voted on. After the bill is scheduled, floor debate occurs and amendments may be offered (if allowed by the rule in the House). The bill is then voted on for final passage. If it passes, the same process occurs in the other chamber.

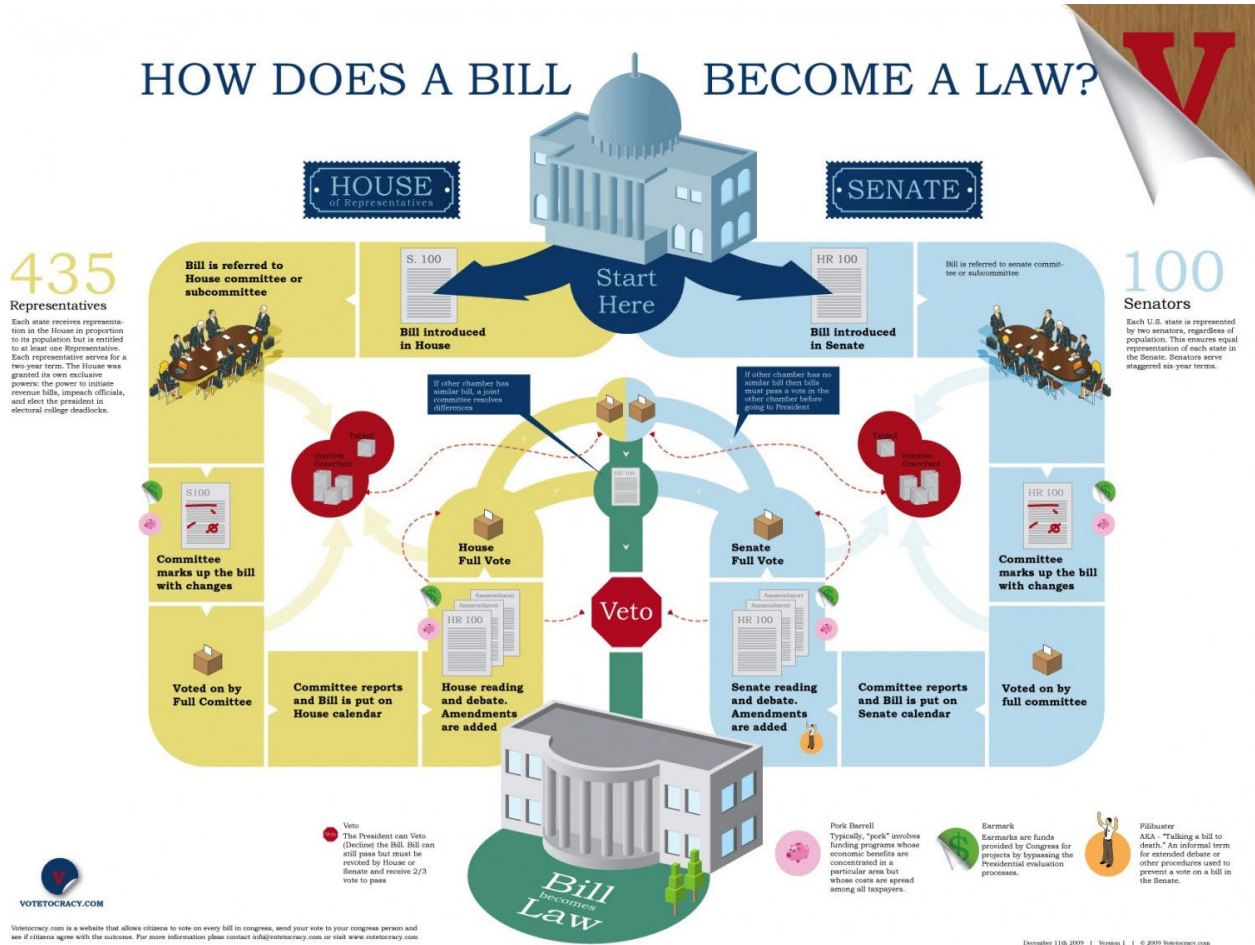
Conference

The legislation passed individually by the House and Senate sometimes differs due to the amendments offered in the committees and on the floor. If that's the case, each chamber's version can go to a conference committee made up of members from both chambers in order to work out the differences. A conference report is issued which contains the bill with all agreed upon compromises.

The Bill Becomes Law or is Vetoed

The bill is sent to the president for signature so that the bill can become a law. If the president does not agree with the bill, it can be vetoed and returned to Congress. The bill dies unless the required two-thirds majority in both the House and Senate overrides the veto.

Source: National School Board Association



Source: votetocracy.com