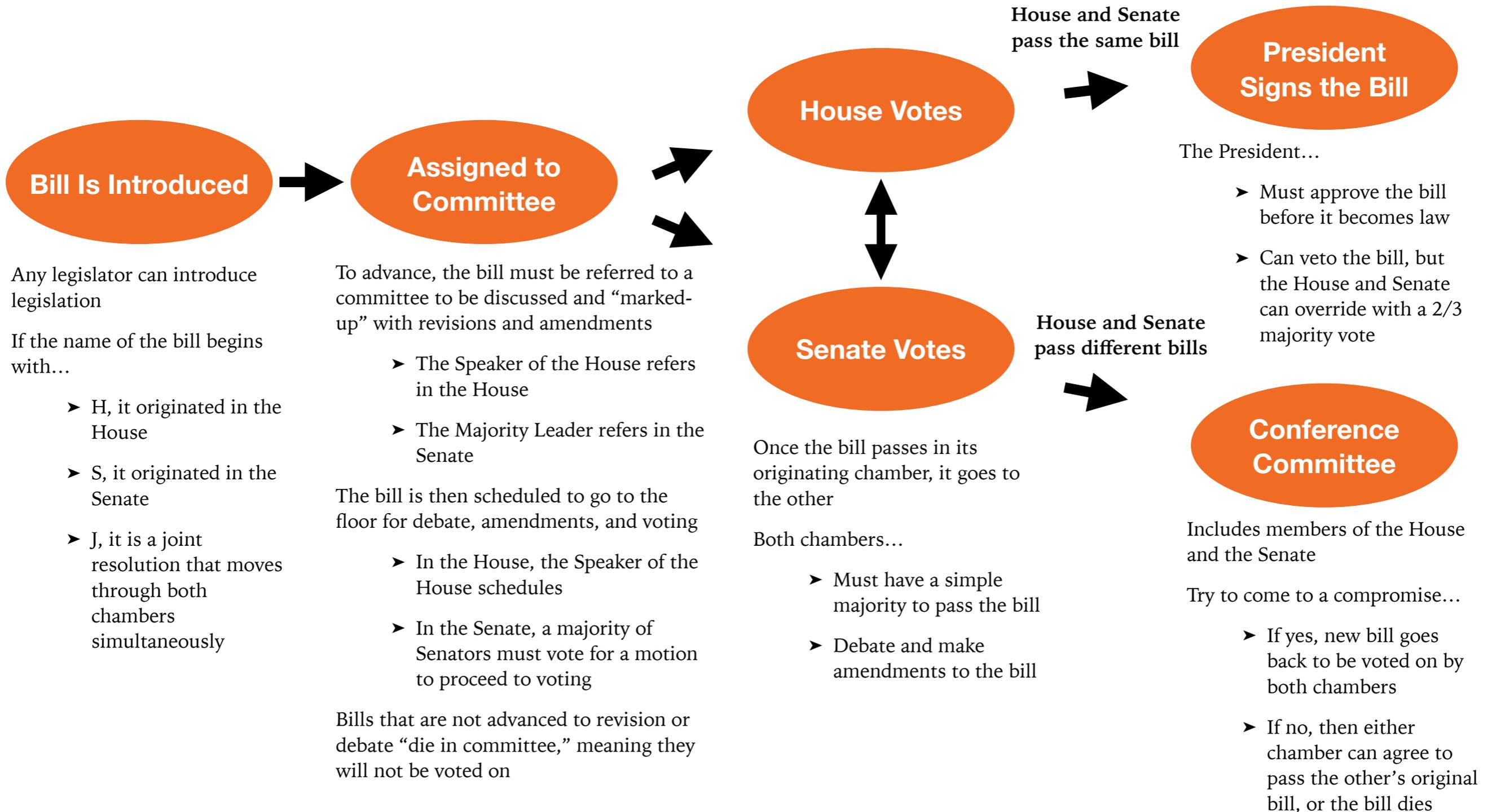


How A Bill Becomes A Law



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Use your time wisely when contacting legislators about proposed legislation. Follow these guidelines to advocate effectively throughout the lawmaking process

	Before a Bill Is Introduced	After Bill Is Introduced	While Bill is Waiting to be Referred to Committee	While Bill is in Committee	While Bill is Waiting to be Scheduled	While Senate or House Debates and Votes	Bill in Conference Committee
Point of Contact	Your Congressperson or Senator	Your Congressperson or Senator (depending on where the bill originated)	Speaker of the House or the Majority Leader of the Senate	Members of the House or Senate committee to which the bill is assigned	Speaker of the House or your Senator	Your Congressperson or Senator	Members of the Conference Committee
Ask(s)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Sponsor legislation on the issue that is important to you ▶ Put forward legislation written by your organization on your behalf 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Add or remove themselves as a cosponsor ▶ Publicly state their support/opposition for the bill 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Refer the bill to the appropriate committee so it does not die 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Move the bill forward for a vote ▶ Add an amendment ▶ Remove a provision 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Put the bill on the schedule so it can move forward to be debated and voted on 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Add an amendment to the bill ▶ Vote for/against the bill 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Keep/Remove parts of the bill

Frequently Asked Questions

What happens if a bill is introduced but never gets scheduled or referred to committee and the Congressional session ends?

If a bill is introduced but never gets scheduled or referred, then the bill effectively “dies” and must be reintroduced in the next session of Congress for another chance to be voted on.

What is the role of a cosponsor?

A cosponsor is a legislator who champions a bill that is up for consideration by putting their name on it.

What is the influence of majority party in each chamber?

The majority party in each chamber determines the leadership of the chamber. In the House, the Speaker is voted in by the majority party. In the Senate, the person with the most administrative power is voted in by the majority party, known as the Majority leader. This also influences which bills are referred to committee, scheduled, and passed.

What are the debate rules on the floor of both chambers?

In the House, debate is typically limited to pass legislation more quickly, and the Rules committee controls the time of debate & admissibility of amendments. There are no time limits for debate in the Senate. Additionally, Senators may filibuster, which means that they speak on the floor long enough to block an action on a bill. The only way a Senate can vote to limit the time of a debate is when 60 Senators agree to motion for a “cloture.” The filibuster can make it much more challenging to pass legislation in the Senate even if there is majority support for a bill.

How many bills are introduced versus how many are passed?

Historically, many more bills are introduced than passed every year. In the past five sessions of Congress, only 1% to 3% of proposed bills became law¹.

How can you follow the legislative schedule? The progress of a bill?

To follow the legislative schedule or the progress of a bill, you can visit www.govtrack.us and search for the bill's number or name.

What kind of committees are there? How are committees structured, and who sits on them?

There are three types of committees: standing, select, and joint. Standing committees are permanent and have their defined jurisdiction in the House or Senate rules. Select committees are not permanent and are created to consider specific topics. Joint committees bring together members of both chambers for legislative coordination. In the Senate, committee members on standing committees are appointed through a party conference. In the house, the steering committee for each party makes standing committee appointments. In both chambers, committees have a chairperson, typically the longest-serving member from the majority party, and a ranking member, the longest-serving member from the minority party. Seniority is incredibly important in both chambers for determining who gets the power in a committee.

What if there's a tied vote on a bill?

If there is a tie in the Senate, the Vice President of the United States (who is also the President of the Senate) casts the tie-breaking vote. If there is a tie in the House, then the Speaker of the House may cast the tie-breaking vote. Speakers typically do not vote on legislation unless a situation like this arises.

What is the role of a “rider,” or non-germane amendment?

In the Senate, Senators may add a provision to a bill that has irrelevant or unrelated material to the bill's original content. This allows Senators to pass legislative measures without having to introduce them as a separate bill. It is usually most effective for controversial issues that might not get support on their own.