FROM BILL *to* LAW

Stages of the Legislative Process

Members of the U.S. House or Senate may introduce bills in their respective chamber. Upon introduction, a bill is normally referred to the committee with jurisdiction over its subject. Especially in the House, a bill may be referred to several committees. In the Senate, a bill is sometimes placed directly on the *Calendar*, a list of bills available for floor consideration.

U.S. HOUSE

H.R.19

Bill introduced

Referred to House Committee(s)

U.S. SENATE

S.20

Bill introduced

Referred to Senate Committee

If a committee chooses to act on a subject, it may first hold *hearings* to obtain the views of officials, experts, and interested groups. The committee may hold a *markup* to consider one of the bills referred to it or a new proposal on the subject. (The committee may first refer bills to a subcommittee to conduct hearings, markup, or both.) At the conclusion of markup, the committee may vote to report a bill and any recommended amendments to the chamber. Most referred bills, however, never receive committee action.

Reported by Committee

Reported by Committee

The majority party leadership in each chamber develops a schedule to consider bills, but the process for taking up legislation differs between the House and Senate.

Scheduling Action/ Rules Committee

In the House, major bills are usually brought up and considered under a *special rule*, proposed to the House by the Rules Committee, which sets tailored terms for floor debate and amendment; it can also propose alterations to the bill's text. Most other bills are considered under *suspension of the rules* procedures that limit debate (and allow only committee-proposed amendments), but which require a two-thirds vote for approval.

In the Senate, bills are taken up by *unanimous consent* or by adopting a *motion to proceed*. The leadership often seeks a unanimous consent agreement to limit debate and amendments. Without this agreement, the Senate can limit debate and amendments only if three-fifths of Senators (usually 60) vote to invoke *cloture*. Otherwise, Senators may attempt to prevent a vote by extending debate and other delaying tactics.

Scheduling Action/ Unanimous Consent Negotiations

House Debate Vote on Passage

Senate Debate Vote on Passage

A bill passed by one chamber is transmitted to the other. The second chamber may refer the bill received from the first chamber to a committee or may consider it on the floor directly. The second chamber may amend the bill (sometimes with text reflecting its own bill). If one chamber amends a bill received from the other chamber, the bill cannot go to the President unless both chambers agree on the same text in the same bill. There are three paths to reach bicameral agreement:

The House and Senate shuttle the bill back and forth, each proposing alternatives until they reach agreement.

OR

Each chamber appoints members (primarily from the reporting committees) to a *conference committee*, which negotiates a compromise agreement (a *conference report*).

OR

One chamber agrees to the other chamber's bill without changes.

House approves conference report

AND

Senate approves conference report

AGREEMENT

A bill approved in identical form by the House and Senate is presented to the President.

PRESIDENT SIGNS BILL, AND IT BECOMES LAW

OR

President does not sign within 10 days, and bill becomes law only if Congress is in session.

President *vetoes* bill, and bill becomes law only if both chambers, by two-thirds vote, override.

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For more information, see CRS Report R42843 and the CRS Legislative and Budget Process page at https://www.crs.gov/iap/legislative-and-budget-process.

More resources, including videos, are available to the public on Congress.gov at https://www.congress.gov/resources/display/content/Learn+About+the+Legislative+Process.

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