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Types of Bills

- More than 10,000 bills are introduced a session but only a few 100 become law
- Private bills deal with individual people or places
- They usually deal with claims against the government
- Public bills apply to the entire nation

Types of Bills

- They deal with taxes, civil rights, or terrorism
- Aside from bills, Congressmen pass resolutions
- These merely state a politician's opinion or a decision
- These do not have the force of law

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Types of Bills

- Joint resolutions are passed by both Houses
- These do become law if signed by the President
- These can be to propose a new amendment, correct errors in bills already passed, or money for a special purpose
- Today these are used to declare war or create temporary committees to investigate

From Bill to Law

- Bills originate from many different places
- Some ideas come from members of Congress or private citizens
- Other ideas come from the White House for Congress to make into law
- Some are suggested by special interest groups, people with common interests that influence government decisions

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Committee Action

- Committees receive a large number of bills to consider
- The chairperson has the role to decide which bills get ignored or studied
- Those that are to be studied are assigned to a subcommittee and researched
- Committees also hold public hearings to listen to experts and concerned members of the public

Committee Action

- Standing Committees have life and death power over bills
- A-Pass the bill without changes
- B-Mark it up with changes and suggest it is passed
- C-Replace the bill with a new alternative

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Committee Action

- D-Ignore the bill and let it die (pigeonhole)
- E-Kill the bill by majority vote
- The House or Senate can vote to overrule the decisions of the committee
- Usually if a committee wants to kill a bill, it's dead

Floor Debate

- Bills that make it out of committee are then put on a calendar
- Senate takes on the bills in order
- House is controlled by the 'Rules Committee' that gives priority to bills
- When the bills are on the floor, pro's and con's are both argued

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Floor Debate

- Amendments can be discussed on the floor
- The House accepts only amendments that deal with the actual bill
- The Senate accepts 'riders' that can be completely unrelated
- The House Rules Committee puts a time limit on the discussion of any bill and debate

Floor Debate

- Senators can speak as long as they want, not even on topic
- Sometimes they talk a bill to death, a filibuster, until the bill's sponsor gives up
- A vote of 3/5 in the Senate can end a filibuster, called a cloture
- Cloture is rarely used though, a 1964 filibuster lasted 74 days

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Voting on a Bill

- Voice vote where those in favor say 'yea' and those against say 'no'
- Standing vote in the House today is done by a computer
- In the Senate, members can vote with a roll-call vote
- Bills passed must be identical, and if not a conference committee is formed to work out differences and vote again

Presidential Action

- Once a bill passes both houses, one of four things can happen
- President can sign and declare the bill a law
- President can refuse to sign the bill and veto it
- President can do nothing for ten days
- If Congress is in session, bill becomes law
- If Congress is not in session, bill has gotten a 'pocket veto'
- A Presidential veto can be overridden by a 2/3 vote in each house