

Study Guide



Chapter 6, Section 4

For use with textbook pages 157–161

How a Bill Becomes a Law



KEY TERMS

joint resolution a resolution passed by both houses of Congress dealing with unusual or temporary matters, such as correcting an error in an earlier law (page 157)

special-interest groups organizations of people with some common interest who try to influence government decisions (page 158)

rider an unrelated amendment that is tacked on to a bill (page 159)

filibuster to talk a bill to death (page 159)

cloture a procedure used in the Senate to limit debate on a bill (page 159)

voice vote a vote in which those in favor say “Yea” and those against say “No” (page 161)

roll-call vote a vote in which members vote in turn as an official record (page 161)

veto to refuse to sign a bill (page 161)

pocket veto the president’s power to kill a bill, if Congress is not in session, by not signing it for 10 days (page 161)

DRAWING FROM EXPERIENCE

What is an issue that you think Congress should consider making a law? How would you go about suggesting a law be passed by Congress?

The last section described the staffs and agencies that help Congress with its work. This section discusses the steps involved in a bill becoming a law.

ORGANIZING YOUR THOUGHTS

Use the diagram on the next page to help you take notes. The president can take several actions after Congress passes a bill. List these actions in the diagram.

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**Actions President Can
Take After Congress
Passes a Bill**

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____

READ TO LEARN

• **Types of Bills** *(page 157)*

Although thousands of bills are introduced to Congress each term, only a few hundred actually become laws. Bills fall into two categories. Private bills usually deal with individual claims against the government. Public bills apply to the entire nation, involving general matters like taxation or civil rights.

In addition to bills, Congress also considers resolutions, or formal statements that express lawmakers' opinions or decisions. Some resolutions do not have the force of law, such as those permitting a ceremony in the Capitol. **Joint resolutions**, however, do become law if the president signs them. These resolutions are passed by both houses of Congress and are used to propose amendments, to set up money for a special purpose, and to correct errors in bills already passed.

5. What two categories do bills fall under?

Study Guide**Chapter 6, Section 4 (continued)****• From Bill to Law** (*page 158*)

Ideas for bills come from several sources. Some come from members of Congress or private citizens. Some ideas begin in the White House. Some are suggested by **special-interest groups**, or organizations of people with some common interest who try to influence government decisions.

Only senators and representatives can introduce bills in Congress. Bills that involve money must start in the House. A bill is given a title and a number when it is submitted. The bill is then sent to a subcommittee that seems most qualified to deal with it.

Committees receive more bills than they can handle. The chairperson of the committee decides which bills get ignored and which ones get looked at. Those that are considered are often researched and reported on by a subcommittee. Often, public hearings are held and citizens voice their opinions for or against the bill.

Standing committees have power over the bills. They can pass the bill without any changes, change parts of the bill and suggest that it be passed, replace the bill with an alternative one, ignore the bill and let it die (this is called “pigeonholing”), or kill the bill by a majority vote. Although the House and Senate can overrule the decisions of the committees, that rarely happens. If a committee opposes a bill, it almost never becomes a law.

Once a committee approves a bill, it is ready to be considered by the House or Senate. The bills are put on a calendar in the order in which they come out of committees. In the Senate, the bills are considered in the order listed. In the House, however, the powerful Rules Committee controls the schedule. This committee can give priority to bills it considers important and kill other bills by not letting them get to the floor.

When a bill reaches the floor of the House or Senate, the members argue the pros and cons of the bill. They consider amendments to the bill as well. The House only considers amendments that are relevant to the bill. The Senate, however, allows **riders**, or completely unrelated amendments, to be added to the bill. Senators consider riders to a bill that they believe are going to pass. These riders usually benefit their constituents.

The House sets time limits on debates about bills. Senators can speak as long as they wish, though. Sometimes they take advantage of this to **filibuster**, or talk a bill to death. A senator can hold the floor for hours,

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delaying a vote until the person who sponsored the bill withdraws it. A filibuster can be ended when three-fifths of the members vote for **cloture**. Under this procedure, no one may speak for more than one hour.

Members of Congress vote for a bill in several ways. In a **voice vote**, those in favor say “Yea” and those against say “No.” In a standing vote, those in favor of a bill stand to be counted and then those against it stand to be counted. Today the House uses a computerized voting system to record the votes. Senators voice their votes in turn as an official records them in a **roll-call vote**.

A simple majority is needed to pass a bill. If a bill passes in one house, it is sent to the other. If either house makes changes in a bill it receives from the other house, a conference committee is formed with members from both houses. This committee works out the differences between the two versions of the bill. Once the bill is revised, the House and Senate must either accept it or completely reject it.

After both houses approve a bill, it goes to the president. The president can sign it and it becomes law. The president may **veto**, or refuse to sign, it. The president may do nothing for 10 days. If Congress is in session, the bill becomes law without the president’s signature. If Congress is not in session, the bill dies. Killing a bill in this way is called a **pocket veto**. If the president vetoes a bill, Congress can save it by overriding the veto with a two-thirds vote of each house.

- 6. What happens if either house makes changes in a bill after receiving it from the other house?

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