How a Bill Becomes a Law

Sources of Bills

A bill is Introduced
Only members of Congress may introduce bills. In the Senate a bill is formally introduced by being officially presented on the floor of the Senate.
Referral to Committee
The bill is assigned a number and sent to a committee

Committee Hearings

Committee Actions
Report the bill favorably to the entire Senate
Amend (modify) the bill or combine it with similar bills
Let the bill die
Scheduled for Floor Debate

The Majority Leader then decides which bills will be brought up for debate by the full Senate.

Moving to the Floor

The majority leader then moves that the bill be considered and the Senate votes whether or not it will consider the bill.

* Placing a “Hold”

Legislative Holds

A bill can be blocked from floor consideration by the anonymous request of a single Senator.
The bill faces the whole Senate on the floor

Amendments
The bill may be altered by formal amendments offered by other senators.

Filibusters
Based on the Senate tradition of unlimited debate
From the Dutch term for “pirate”
Debate may shut off by a “cloture” vote of 3/5ths of Senate

The record for a solo filibuster is held by Senator Strom Thurmond who spoke without a break for 24 hours and 18 minutes in an unsuccessful effort to stop the 1957 Civil Rights bill
Increase in Filibusters

Cloture Votes per Congress

Today, most important votes are “roll call” votes in which the votes of individual Senators are recorded.

“Logrolling” is when Members of Congress trade votes.

If the bill passes the Senate...
The process begins in the House

In the House, a bill is introduced by a Member signing it and dropping it into the “hopper”

The Bill Goes to Committee

The Speaker assigns or “refers” a bill to a committee.

House Committee
Committee Actions
Report the bill favorably to the entire House
Amend (modify) the bill or combine it with similar bills
Do nothing and let the bill die
✓ Discharge petition

House “Calendars”
After a bill passes out of a House committee it goes onto a list or "calendar" and is taken up in order

Taking Bills Out of Order
♦ Suspension of the rules
♦ Special Rules
Suspension of the rules

Controlled by Speaker
Requires 2/3 vote for passage of bill
Can be used to make passage harder

A Bill’s “rule”

Each bill’s “rule” specifies the amount of debate, types of amendments permitted and other details of the process.

- Closed rules
- Open rules
- Modified rule

Sample Rule

Resolved, That upon the adoption of this resolution the Speaker declares pursuant to rule XVIII that the House resolve itself into the Committee of the Whole House on the State of the Union for the consideration of the bill (H.R.____) entitled, etc., and the first reading of the bill shall be dispensed with. After general debate, which shall be confined to the bill and shall continue not to exceed _ hours, to be equally divided and controlled by the chairman and ranking minority member of the Committee on __, the bill shall be read for amendment under the five-minute rule. At the conclusion of the consideration of the bill for amendment, the Committee shall rise and report the bill to the House with such amendments as may have been adopted, and the previous question shall be considered as ordered on the bill and amendments thereto to final passage without intervening motion except one motion to recommit with or without instructions.
The bill is debated by the whole House

House Floor Consideration
Committee of the Whole
Floor voting

If the bill passes the House...
Conference Committee
Special committee created to resolve the differences between House and Senate versions of a bill.

Final passage
Once the bill has passed both houses in exactly the same form it is enrolled and given to the president for action.
- The president may sign the bill
- The president may veto the bill
- The president may ignore the bill

The president may sign the bill
The president may veto the bill

If the vetoed bill does not get a 2/3 vote of both houses...

If the veto is over-ridden by two-thirds of both houses...
If the president ignores the bill and Congress is not in session