



# Who can propose a law?

- Anyone can suggest an idea for a law.
- However, only a Member of Congress can take a proposed law to the House of Representatives or the Senate.



# What happens first?

- A member of the House or Senate drafts a bill.
- They submit the bill to the House or Senate.
- The bill is assigned a number that begins with:
  - H.R. for House of Representatives
  - S. for Senate
- The bill is then sent to the appropriate committee.



# The Standing Committee

- This is a permanent committee in the House or Senate that studies bills related to a general topic, such as education, agriculture or science.
- The committee chair assigns the bill to the appropriate subcommittee.



# The Subcommittee

- The subcommittee studies bills related to a sub-set of the topics covered by the standing committee.
- All of the members of the subcommittee are part of the standing committee.
- Most of the discussion in Congress takes place here.
- The chair of the subcommittee, in consultation with other committee members, decides whether to schedule a bill for discussion.
- The subcommittee may also decide to stop action on a bill that they think is not necessary or wise. The bill then dies.



# The Subcommittee - continued

- The subcommittee first holds hearings on the bill, giving supporters, opponents and experts a chance to voice their views.
- Amendments (changes) to the bill are then suggested and voted on.
- The subcommittee may also decide to write an entirely new bill.
- Finally, the subcommittee votes on whether to take the bill to the full committee for a vote.
- If the bill does not pass, it dies.



# The Standing Committee

- The committee discusses the bill.
- Committee members suggest and vote on amendments.
- The committee votes on whether to send the bill to the full House or Senate.



# The Standing Committee – cont.

- If the bill passes, the committee writes a report explaining:
  - The key points of the bill
  - The changes they have made
  - How this bill compares to current laws
  - Why they recommend this bill for approval
- The bill and the report are then sent to the full House or Senate.





# The Floor (whole House or Senate)

- The bill is placed on the calendar of the House or Senate until it is scheduled for discussion.
- The House and Senate have different rules for debating the bill.



# Debate on the House floor

- The House is chaired by the Speaker of the House
- Before debate begins, a time limit is set for how long any Member can speak (usually 1 – 5 minutes).
- First a Member speaks who is for the bill and then one who is against the bill. Debate continues in this way.

## **Debate on the House floor – cont.**

- Debate on a bill can be ended by a simple majority vote.
- Following this debate, amendments to the bill can then be suggested and debated. The same rules apply.
- Finally, the bill is put to a vote.



# Debate on the Senate floor

- The Senate is chaired by the Vice President; the President Pro Tempore may chair in his place.
- There are no time limits to debate in the Senate. Members may speak for as long as they choose.
- Amendments may be offered at any time during debate.
- At the end of debate, the bill is put to a vote.



# What happens next?

- Both the House and the Senate must pass similar forms of a bill.
- If a bill is passed in only the House or the Senate, it is sent to the other one for debate, amendment and a vote.
- After both the House and the Senate have passed similar bills, the two bills are sent to a conference committee.



# The Conference Committee

- The conference committee includes members of both the House and the Senate.
- The committee discusses the differences between the two bills.
- They re-write the bill in a form that they think will pass in both the House and the Senate and vote on it.
- After they pass the re-written bill, the committee writes a report that contains:
  - The re-written bill
  - An explanation of how they worked out the differences between the two bills



# Back to the floor

- The conference committee report with the re-written bill is sent to the House for a vote.
- If the House passes the bill, it is sent to the Senate.
- If the House or the Senate does not pass the bill, it dies.
- If the bill passes in both the House and the Senate, it is sent to the President.



# The President

The President has 4 options:

1. **Sign into law.** He can sign the bill, which then becomes a law.
2. **Law without signature.** He can let the bill sit on his desk for 10 days without signing it while Congress is in session. The bill then becomes a law.





# The President - continued

- 3. Veto.** He can choose to not sign the bill, so it will not become a law. However, if the bill is then passed by  $2/3$  of both the House and the Senate, it still becomes a law.
- 4. Pocket veto.** If, after 10 days, he has not signed it and Congress is no longer in session, the bill does not become a law.



# It's Sing-a-Long Time!



- I'm just a bill,
- Yes, I'm only a bill,
- And I'm sitting here on Capitol Hill.
- Well, it's a long, long journey
- To the capital city,
- It's a long, long wait
- While I'm sitting in committee
- But I know I'll be a law someday . . .



# It's Sing-a-Long Time!



- At least I hope and pray that I will,
- But today I'm still just a bill.
- {Interlude}
- I'm just a bill,
- Yes I'm only a bill,
- And I got as far as Capitol Hill.
- Well, now I'm stuck in committee
- And I sit here and wait



# It's Sing-a-Long Time!



- While a few key Congressmen
- Discuss and debate
- Whether they should
- Let me be a law...
- Oh how I hope and pray that they will,
- But today I am still just a bill.
- {Interlude}



# It's Sing-a-Long Time!



- I'm just a bill,
- Yes I'm only a bill,
- And if they vote for me on Capitol Hill,
- Well then I'm off to the White House
- Where I'll wait in a line
- With a lot of other bills
- For the President to sign.



# It's Sing-a-Long Time!



- And if he signs me then I'll be a law . . .
- Oh, how I hope and pray that he will,
- But today I am still just a bill.
- {Interlude}
- No! But how I hope and I pray that I will,
- But today I am still just a bill!
- {Interlude}



# Acknowledgement for Song



- School House Rocks website.
  - [http://media.atlantic-records.com/media/schoolhouse\\_rock\\_rocks/schoolhouse\\_rock\\_rocks/bill.wav](http://media.atlantic-records.com/media/schoolhouse_rock_rocks/schoolhouse_rock_rocks/bill.wav)

