

BIG PICTURE: HOW OUR LAWS ARE MADE

How does a bill become a law? Sometimes it seems like our lawmakers are playing some goofy game to which no one really understands the rules. In fact, it is not quite that bad, but the process is far more complicated than the Schoolhouse Rock cartoon version of poor, dejected Bill, sitting on Capitol Hill, would have you believe. Take a close look at this version of the lawmaking process, and you will not be surprised that so many bills fail to make it to the president's desk. The founders wanted a slow, incremental lawmaking process where the brakes could be applied at multiple points, and that is exactly what they got.



The code of a bill

H. R. 301 [110]
House Of Representatives # in which bill was received Congressional Session



CBO or Congressional Budget Office is a nonpartisan office charged with checking and creating budget estimates.



A Lobbyist is an activist paid by an interest group to promote their position in the legislature. He or she can also work to change public opinion through advertising and other media outlets. †

Lobbyist

Representative

A State Legislature

The People

Executive Branch



All legislation involving appropriations must originate in HOR.

Bill

Introducing Legislation

Like a bill, but less common

Joint Resolution

Con Current Resolution

Not legislation

Simple Resolution

Regards House operations

Committee Assignment

Committee Work

Meetings

Public Hearings

Markup

Report

Final Reading & Vote

Includes purpose and justification for bill; explains how it changes existing law; offers a cost estimate for implementation.

Vote on final amendments and proposed bill as a whole.

Edit and revise to reflect hearings.

could fail to pass

could be "tabled"



HOR has 435 members and 20 standing committees.

Senator

Bill

Introducing Legislation

CBO must confirm the bill adheres to spending and revenue constraints in most recent budget.

Reconciliation

Budget & Engrssment

House Vote

could fail to pass.

A simple majority is required to pass a bill.

House Action

Vote on each amendment individually.

could send back to committee

Committee Rises

Debate closes.

Debate & Amend

Second Reading

Bill read section by section; only germane amendments proposed, and must include a list of "earmarks."

Committee of the Whole

Quorum of one hundred required to open debate. Chair determines length of debate.

Put on Calendar

HOR can approve as amended OR Request a conference

HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES