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How Congress Works

How Congress Works

INTRODUCTION

Our representative system of government places a special responsibility on each of us to make ourselves heard in Washington. In fact, no more important source of information is available to members of Congress than the people who live and work in their State or congressional district. As a constituent, you represent more than an abstract theme or a statistic. You offer personal experiences that make you uniquely qualified to talk about the issues that matter most to you. The more effectively you communicate with your elected officials, the more responsive our representative system of government becomes. But to be effective requires more than a willingness to get involved. It requires a good understanding of how the policy-making process works and who the key players are in that process. Most importantly, it requires that you know **when** your contact with lawmakers can have the greatest impact on the decision-making process. Because no matter how compelling your message is, it will count for little if decisions have already been made.

This document is intended to serve as a common-sense guide to the legislative decision-making process. While it offers some general tips on getting your point across to members of Congress, its primary purpose is to give you basic information about the legislative process, how it works, and when you can have the greatest impact on the decisions that affect your life.

THE LEGISLATIVE PROCESS

To the average person, the process of getting a bill through Congress may seem highly complex and technical. Actually, the process itself is fairly simple. What can be confusing to the layperson is (1) the volume of legislation pending before Congress and (2) the system Congress has for distributing its work. It is true that Congress handles a great deal of legislation each year. But only a handful of bills will be of particular interest to your organization. So long as you keep your sights on the legislation that affects you and your organization, you should have no trouble following the progress of those bills. And once you familiarize yourself with the key committees responsible for handling your issues, following the progress of legislation will become much easier.

The key to deciphering the legislative process is in understanding that legislation is grouped into three main categories:

Authorizing legislation: A bill that creates a new federal program, extends the life of an existing program, or repeals existing law. Authorizing bills usually set a limit on the amount of funds that can be spent annually by a program over a period of 3 to 5 years. But it's important to remember that an authorizing bill only establishes the framework for a federal program - it does not provide funds to operate the program.

Appropriations bill: A bill that allocates funding for specific federal programs. Unlike authorizing legislation, which remains in effect for 3 or more years, an appropriations bill must be enacted into law every year. Each year, in fact, Congress must pass a series of 13 appropriations bills in order to keep federal departments and agencies operating.

Entitlement legislation: A measure that guarantees a certain level of benefits to persons who meet eligibility requirements set by law, such as Medicare, Medicaid and college student loan programs. Entitlement programs typically do not need to be reauthorized, nor do they require annual appropriations.

LAYING THE GROUNDWORK: THE ROLE OF INDIVIDUAL MEMBERS OF CONGRESS

Generally speaking, the **earlier** you get involved, the better your chances of having an impact on decision-making. The further along a bill advances in the legislative process, the more difficult it becomes to change or modify. This is especially true now that Congress often groups several issues into one bill.

The first formal step in the legislative process occurs when one or more members of Congress introduce a bill. But from an advocate's perspective, the work begins much earlier than that. For example, once your organization has identified an issue or a problem that merits special attention, one or two members of Congress should be identified whose philosophy and voting record indicates that they would be willing to play a leadership role in supporting the issue. After extensive discussions with the senator or representative and their staff, formal legislation is prepared for introduction. Bills introduced in the House are assigned an "H.R." number (e.g. H.R. 2037) and bills introduced in the Senate are given an "S." number.

Of course, having legislation introduced and getting it enacted into law are two different things. In order to prevent a bill from languishing in someone's files requires broad support for the issue. In order to do that, constituents must contact their own senators

and representatives and convince them to co-sponsor the bill. The way that is done is by having the lawmaker's staff contact the original sponsor and ask to have his or her name listed as supporting the bill.

THE IMPORTANCE OF THE COMMITTEE SYSTEM

Congressional committees are the "workhorses" of Congress. As the number of issues brought before Congress grows, lawmakers increasingly rely on the committee system to sift through the facts and determine how issues should be resolved. Congress is made up of both standing committees and select committees. Generally, standing committees have the power to generate legislation in their particular areas of jurisdiction, like tax writing or appropriations. Select committees, like the Senate Special Committee on Aging, are primarily advisory in nature.

Most committees have delegated specific issues under their jurisdiction to subcommittees, whose job it is to analyze each issue and eventually make a recommendation to their parent committee, or full committee as it is sometimes called. Here again, it is **vitaly important** that constituent contacts be made with the subcommittees as **early** in the process as possible. In their earliest stages of review, subcommittees welcome input from interested organizations and individuals. At this point, letters and personal visits with members of the subcommittee and their staff can have a tremendous effect on the panel's recommendations. In many instances, a subcommittee will hold public hearings, either in Washington, D.C. or some other region of the country, where constituents may ask to present their positions.

If your senator or representative is not on the relevant subcommittee, does that mean you have no influence over the outcome? It is true that members of a subcommittee are regarded as "specialists" by their colleagues and therefore, can wield considerable power in deciding whether or not an issue will be advanced through the legislative process. However, your own senators or representatives, whether or not they are on the subcommittee, can often be effective intermediaries, depending on their personal or political relationships with the subcommittee members.

FLOOR ACTION

Once a committee has approved legislation, it becomes eligible for debate on the House and Senate floors, where it may be passed, defeated, or amended. Since floor debates are often scheduled on short notice, you should prepare your messages (e.g. e-mails, letters, etc.) well in advance. However, keep in mind that **timing** is extremely critical.

Any communications about legislation that is coming up for floor debate should arrive as close to the time of voting as possible.

CONFERENCE ACTION

It is usually the case that the House and Senate pass different versions of the same bill. When that occurs, a handful of members from each chamber are appointed to serve on a conference committee where they will attempt to work out a compromise. Representation on the conference committee will usually consist of selected members of the House and Senate subcommittees that originally developed the legislation. In some instances, conference committees may only need to resolve a few issues; in the case of appropriations bills, there may be several hundred to be reconciled. Constituents whose senators or representatives happen to be on a conference committee can play a crucial role in the deliberations.

The end product of the meetings is a conference report containing the compromise bill and a section-by-section explanation of the compromise that was agreed upon. Once both the House and Senate agree to the conference report, the measure is sent to the President for approval (or veto).

THE IMPORTANCE OF STAFF CONTACTS

While senators and representatives are the ultimate decision-makers, it is important to recognize that staff can have significant influence over the course and content of legislation. Constituents are urged to maintain ongoing contacts with these individuals, especially subcommittee staff and the lawmakers' own legislative aides. When the time comes to contact a lawmaker about specific legislation, his or her staff aide should also be alerted. This is one way of assuring that your issues are not lost or overlooked among the stack of legislation that is discussed every day. Also, keep in mind that every senator and representative maintains an office(s) in his or her home state. These district offices offer an excellent opportunity to build relationships with key staff, channel the latest information back to senators and representatives, and generally get your message across to the legislator.

GLOSSARY OF LEGISLATIVE TERMS

The following is a listing of terms commonly used in connection with the legislative process:

Act - The term for legislation that has been passed by Congress and signed into law by the President.

Amendment - The proposal of a member of Congress to alter the wording of a bill being considered by a subcommittee, committee, or on the House or Senate floor. Amendments can also be offered to add or delete entire sections of a bill.

Appropriation - Legislation that directs the spending of funds from the federal treasury for a specific purpose, e.g. funding for the Department of Health and Human Services. By custom, an appropriations bill originates in the House, where it is assigned an H.R. number (e.g. H.R. 5027) until it becomes law or is vetoed by the President. Typically, each appropriations bill includes funding for several hundred federal programs.

Authorization - A law creating a new federal program or extending the life of an existing program. An authorization establishes the framework for operating a federal program, and usually sets the maximum amount of funds that can be given to a program for a period of 3 to 5 years.

Bill - A proposed law introduced by a member(s) of Congress.

Budget - The document the President sends to Congress each year outlining federal expenditures and revenues for the upcoming fiscal year. The President's budget is usually submitted to Congress in late January or early February.

Budget Resolution - Legislation passed by Congress each year, which sets overall limits on spending and revenues. Congressional committees use the budget resolution as a guide for allocating funds to specific federal programs. The budget resolution does not require the President's approval.

Conference - A meeting between House and Senate members to reconcile differences between bills passed by their respective chambers of Congress. Once a compromise has been ironed out, a conference report is issued and voted on by the full House and Senate. The measure is then sent to the President for approval.

Continuing Resolution - An emergency appropriations bill providing funding for federal agencies whose regular appropriations bills have not been passed before the end of the federal government's fiscal year (September 30).

Entitlement - A federal program that guarantees a certain level of benefits to persons who meet requirements set by law, such as Social Security and unemployment benefits. Congress and the President generally have very little discretion over spending by these programs.

Fiscal Year – For the federal government, the fiscal year runs from October 1 through September 30.

Hearings - Committee meetings where testimony is taken from witnesses representing government agencies, private sector organizations, and the general public. Most congressional hearings are accessible to the public. Hearings may be held in Washington, D.C. or in local communities.

Mark-Up - A subcommittee or committee meeting for the purpose of writing legislation. Once completed, the measure is ready for debate on the floor of the House or Senate.

Public Law - A bill after it has been passed by the House and Senate and subsequently approved by the President.

Reconciliation bill - Legislation that contains changes (usually spending cuts) to existing laws so as to conform - or reconcile - with policies adopted in the budget resolution.

Rescission - The act of canceling appropriations already enacted into law.

Standing Committee - A committee that is permanently established by House and Senate rules. Standing committees are empowered to prepare and review legislation. (As opposed to *select* committees, which serve only to advise Congress on a limited range of issues.)

Veto - The President's formal disapproval of legislation passed by Congress. When Congress is in session, the President must veto a bill within 10 days after receiving it from Congress, otherwise it becomes law without his approval. A bill can become law after a Presidential veto if two-thirds of Congress votes to override the veto.

The Congressional Budget & Appropriations Process

The Congressional Budget & Appropriations Process

This document is intended to provide you with a basic understanding of the budget process and how it works. It addresses the three basic elements of the budget process in Congress: the budget resolution, authorizing and entitlement legislation, and appropriations.

THE BUDGET RESOLUTION: SETTING A FRAMEWORK

The core of Congress's annual budget process centers on legislation known as the budget resolution. Shortly after the President sends his annual budget plan to Congress, usually in late January or early February, the House and Senate budget committees develop legislation--called a budget resolution--that places aggregate limits on federal spending, sets tax policy and imposes changes on so-called entitlement programs like Medicare and Medicaid. Other congressional committees usually determine exactly how the terms of a budget resolution are carried out later in the year. For example, the budget resolution will set an overall limit on discretionary spending for health. But the task of deciding exactly how that spending is allocated among specific health programs will fall to the appropriations committees.

AUTHORIZING LEGISLATION

No federal funds can be spent for any program until law authorizes the program. Authorizing legislation is a bill that creates a new federal program or extends the life of an existing one. It typically establishes a program and prescribes the terms and conditions under which it will operate. Authorizing legislation also sets annual limits on appropriations that can be made to a program. It is important to understand, however, that authorizing legislation only sets the framework for a federal program. A program cannot become operational unless and until the appropriations committees decide to allocate funds to it.

ENTITLEMENT LEGISLATION

Entitlement legislation also establishes programs. But it differs from authorizing legislation in that an entitlement program **mandates** spending, and does so usually without any time limits. Programs like Medicare and Medicaid are entitlements because

the government is obligated to make payments regardless of the circumstances, if the recipients meet eligibility standards included in the law.

APPROPRIATIONS LEGISLATION

In the legislative arena, appropriations legislation is where the rubber meets the road. And the responsibility for drawing up that legislation rests with the House and Senate appropriations committees, or, more specifically, with the appropriations subcommittees that have jurisdiction over discrete government programs. Once work on the budget resolution is completed, each appropriations subcommittee is told how much money it has available to spend. At that point, the House appropriations subcommittees begin developing funding recommendations for the programs within their jurisdiction. Once the legislation passes the subcommittee level, the appropriations bill will be forwarded to the full appropriations committee to be ratified and then sent to the full House, where it will be debated, amended, and passed. The bill is then sent to the Senate appropriations subcommittee, where the entire process is repeated.

Invariably, there will be differences between the House and Senate appropriations bills. To resolve those differences, a conference committee consisting of members of both the House and Senate subcommittees will be assigned the task of working out a compromise. Once that is done, the full House and Senate will vote on a conference report. After both chambers pass the conference report, the appropriations bill will be sent to the President for approval. Theoretically, appropriations must be enacted by October 1, the start of the federal government's fiscal year. As a practical matter, however, Congress rarely completes its work by the October 1 deadline. In order to permit federal programs to continue operating until final appropriations are enacted, Congress must pass, and the president must approve, a stopgap appropriations bill called a continuing resolution.

The Role of Congressional Staff

The Role of Congressional Staff

Personal Staff

In the House and the Senate, the structure of staff differs greatly, largely depending on whether a Member of Congress chooses to emphasize constituent service or legislation; whether legislative issues are divided up by subject matter, the lawmaker's committee assignments, or the chronological order in which they are considered in committee and on the floor; or other factors. A senator's staff may range in size from fewer than 20 to more than 60. A representative's staff is limited to 18 full-time and four part-time staffers. Senators and representatives also are often assisted on legislative matters by staff of the committees and subcommittees on which they serve and it is not unusual for an aide to perform both committee work and personal office work, regardless of which payroll he or she is on.

Constituent Service

A major responsibility of a Member's personal staff, especially in the House, is to provide service to the people back in the state or congressional district. Staffers respond to a myriad of constituent requests: among other duties, they untangle bureaucratic snarls in collecting Social Security or veterans' benefits; they answer questions about federal student loans and other government aid; they help home state or district organizations navigate red tape for landing federal grants; they respond to constituent mail on legislative and national issues; and they produce newsletters and other mailings to keep constituents informed of their representative's or senator's activities.

Such services are important not only for the benefits they provide to constituents, but also for the relationship they help foster between a Member of Congress and a voter. Junior Members of Congress tend to focus more attention on constituent service than their more senior colleagues, and representatives often spend more time on constituent service than senators.

Who is involved?

❖ Staff Assistant/Receptionist

The staff assistant/receptionist is most often located at the front desk of a Member's office and is responsible for greeting guests and answering the phones. Other responsibilities may include: arranging Capitol and White House tours for constituents, handling general requests, opening and routing office mail and minor legislative responsibilities.

❖ Caseworker

Most offices have several caseworkers that divide up the federal agencies and deal with constituent questions and problems (a lost Social Security check, a denied veterans' benefit, etc.) associated with those agencies' programs. Some caseworkers also do legislative research or correspondence on matters relating to the agencies in which they have specialized. They also may go by the title of research assistant or staff assistant. Although casework operations may be centered either in the district/state office or in Washington, the majority of caseworkers are housed in the district office.

❖ **Legislative Correspondent (LC)**

This individual is responsible for monitoring all incoming mail and drafting responses to constituent letters concerning pending legislation. In some offices, a legislative assistant (LA) drafts letters in their own issue areas; however, in others, the LC drafts letters for the LA's regardless of the subject.

❖ **Grants staff**

The grants staff is responsible for assisting organizations (e.g. state and local government agencies, businesses, educational institutions, etc.) and individuals that are seeking federal grants. Grant programs range from federal aid for the construction of schools, sewers, airports and highways to awarding contracts to individuals and corporations to provide specialized assistance to the government.

Legislative Duties

Making laws is the fundamental job of a Member of Congress. To do the work, Members need LA's for substantive and political guidance through the daily congressional agenda of complex, interdependent issues. There are more committee meetings, constituent meetings and hearings than any one individual can adequately prepare for and other Members, federal officials, special interest groups, and sometimes even the White House staff must be consulted before final decisions are made. Because of the sheer volume of national issues that must be covered on a daily basis, a Member MUST rely on his/her staff at every major phase of the legislative process.

Who is involved?

❖ **Legislative Director (LD)**

The LD is the lawmaker's senior legislative aide and is responsible for supervising the work of a cadre of legislative assistants and legislative correspondents. The LD's primary responsibility is to guide the development of the lawmaker's legislative

agenda and to monitor all of the legislative activities in the office. The LD is typically the final arbiter when it comes to developing legislative priorities and advising on key legislative decisions (such as whether or not to introduce or co-sponsor a bill or how to vote on a particular piece of legislation).

❖ **Legislative Assistant (LA)**

The LA typically monitors legislation through the committee review stage and on the floor, and works under the supervision of the Legislative Director to initiate and advance legislation sponsored or supported by the lawmaker. The LA must be knowledgeable of the committee system and the rules of the House and Senate, and meet with lobbyists and constituents interested in the proposed legislation. In addition, the LA typically performs other tasks such as handling the Member's legislative correspondence, drafting legislation, writing floor speeches, monitoring Committee activity, and meeting with constituents and special interest groups. You will find that most offices have a team of LA's that divide up and specialize in various issues areas. Representatives and Senators who are senior members of committees or subcommittees often have additional committee staff available to them to assist with drafting and introducing legislation.

Political Duties

In any congressional office, a substantial amount of time is devoted to nurturing political ties in the state or congressional district as well as in Washington. A Member's staff must work hard to ensure that the lawmaker receives due credit for legislative achievements and recognition for his or her efforts on behalf of constituents. In addition, staff members may spend considerable time developing relationships with the lawmaker's party leaders. This is particularly helpful in securing key committee assignments that ultimately benefit the Member's district and his or her constituents.

Who is involved?

❖ **Chief of Staff (COS)**

Sometimes referred to as the Administrative Assistant (AA), this individual coordinates and supervises the work of the office and has supervisory responsibilities over the entire staff. The COS is the chief administrator and often acts as the final arbiter in the Member's office. Frequently, the COS serves as the Member's chief political advisor, keeping the Member abreast of district and

Washington politics. Some have accumulated enough power to act as the Member's virtual alter ego.

❖ **District/State Director**

This staff member is often the lawmaker's key political advisor in the district/state and is responsible for managing the local office and maintaining strong ties with community leaders as well as constituents. Most Members maintain one or more offices in their district or state to help with the casework load and to provide an accessible contact for constituents. Some Members even have mobile offices that travel around the districts.

❖ **Press Secretary**

This staff person serves as the Member's chief spokesperson to the media. The press secretary composes press releases dealing with legislative issues as well as notable casework or grants efforts; writes newsletters; organizes press conferences; and generally maintains a detailed accounting of the Member's stand on the issues. In many cases, the Press Secretary is a key political liaison for the office and is responsible for relaying the Member's views and activities to his or her constituents. Most press staff in the House work exclusively with media outlets in their respective district while Senators, who receive more national publicity and represent larger areas, often have several deputy press secretaries in addition to the Press Secretary.

Administrative Duties

Running a Congressional office is very similar to running a business. Constituents expect their elected official to be responsive to their needs in a timely and efficient manner. To do that, lawmakers rely on administrative specialists whose job it is to ensure that the work of the office is carried out effectively.

Who is Involved?

❖ **Scheduler/Executive Assistant**

This person is responsible for managing and controlling demands on the Member's time. Often the lawmaker's closest confidant, this individual maintains the lawmaker's schedule, deciding who does or does not see the lawmaker; maintaining the Member's personal correspondence and travel arrangements,

and ensuring that the Member and his/her office is in full compliance with House and Senate rules and regulations. In the offices of more senior Members, this individual is key to gaining access to the lawmaker and staff.

❖ **Office Manager and Systems Administrator**

The office manager oversees all other administrative duties in the office. In many offices, this position will be combined with the scheduling and/or systems duties. The systems administrator is responsible for maintaining the office computer system particularly as it relates to correspondence.

Committee Staff

The introduction of legislation in Congress is a simple procedure, but whether the legislation is ever enacted into law depends on a complex and variable chain of events. Although thousands of pieces of legislation are introduced in Congress every year, a relatively small number become law. The task of reviewing proposed legislation and determining which bills pass and which do not fall primarily to congressional committees, or what some refer to as the backbone of the legislative process. Committee staff has a high degree of expertise on the subjects within their jurisdiction, and it is at the committee review stage that legislation comes under its sharpest congressional scrutiny. Usually, only those bills that have survived the scrutiny of the experts will be given serious consideration on the floor of the House and Senate. It is important, therefore, to understand the role committee staff plays in the legislative process.

General Background

Because the House is four times as large as the Senate, House committees generally are larger than Senate committees, which mean more business in the House gets done at the committee and subcommittee level. Note also that senators rely more heavily on their staff because senators have more committee and subcommittee assignments than do House members.

Each congressional committee (and subcommittee) is headed by a chairperson who belongs to whichever party controls the majority of seats in the House or Senate chamber. His or her counterpart from the minority party is called "ranking member." The term "majority staff" refers to staff working for the party controlling the chamber; their counterparts are called "minority staff."

Staff Functions

Titles and responsibilities may differ slightly from one committee to another. Following is a description of the staff in a typical committee office.

- ❖ **Staff Director** (chief clerk, chief of staff or chief counsel)

At the full committee level, the staff director is the top administrator of the committee, and usually is someone with extensive experience in Congress, or in federal agencies or private sector associations involved in the same types of issues as the committee. Subcommittee staff directors frequently are staff that have worked in the personal office of the subcommittee chair (as legislative or administrative assistants), and move to manage the subcommittee when their Member of Congress becomes the chair of the subcommittee.

The staff director is responsible for hiring and firing staff for the chairperson, and directs the activities of the committee staff. He or she also manages the committee's work agenda, schedules markups and hearings (including finding witnesses for hearings) and is frequently the chief spokesman for the committee (except on committees that employ a press secretary).

- ❖ **Counsel (or deputy counsel, assistant counsel, general counsel)**

This staff person is almost always an attorney. These staffers draft legislation, evaluate information, work out compromise language and perform the nitty-gritty technical work in legislative markups. They frequently specialize in specific legislative areas within a committee jurisdiction. Counsels are rarely bipartisan in allegiance, and, if not directly attached to the committee chairman or a ranking member, they are likely to be appointees of another committee member.

- ❖ **Professional staff**

Behind this catchall title, you will find lawyers, economists, investigators, and other experts of various sorts, administrators, press coordinators and hearing editors. The role is roughly comparable to the legislative assistant in the member's personal office (except professional staff focus on a portion of the subject jurisdiction of the committee or subcommittee). The title is sometimes used by staff directors to minimize competition for status within the internal pecking order, and sometimes to cloud the public's view of who does what.

❖ **Associate staff**

This title is most commonly found on major House committees (Appropriations, Rules, Ways and Means). Associate staffs are hired by a committee member to be the member's eyes and ears on the committee. Associate staff normally works exclusively for their appointing representative, and perform research and other duties relating to legislation before their committee.

❖ **Economists or other specialists**

Committees sometimes hire specialist economists, doctors, engineers, scientists and other experienced professionals to work in such areas as the economy, tax law, health or energy. These experts sometimes are "consultants," hired for a limited time or paid on a daily basis over a continuing period.

❖ **Clerical positions include secretaries, receptionists, staff assistants and clerical assistants**

Some perform mainly internal paperwork such as keeping the committee calendar up-to-date, referring bills that have been introduced to the appropriate departments and to administration officials for comment, and sorting mail. Other clerical staffers keep committee roll call votes; announce hearings, contact witnesses and process committee publications. These people can be vital for obtaining scheduling information and committee documents, and to help you gain access to professional staffers.

Communicating With Congress

Communicating With Congress

GETTING YOUR MESSAGE ACROSS IN CONGRESS

WHY GET INVOLVED?

- ❖ It's your **right** to let elected officials know how you feel about important issues.
- ❖ It's your **responsibility** to speak out on matters that affect you.

WHAT'S REQUIRED?

- ❖ **Learn** all the facts you need to make the strongest argument for your position.
- ❖ **Organize** your arguments and encourage others to get involved.
- ❖ **Contact** your elected officials.
- ❖ **Express** your views in a clear and concise and respectfully ask for a commitment from your elected officials.

WHAT ARE THE METHODS?

- ❖ **Personal visits** are the most effective means of getting your point across.
- ❖ **Written communication** also gives you an opportunity to let your elected officials know where you stand.
- ❖ **E-mail and phone messages** allow you to convey your message when time is of the essence.

WHEN DO YOU GET INVOLVED?

- ❖ Generally speaking, it's best to express your views when legislation is in the early stages of review by a congressional committee. It's also important to remember that issues can arise on short notice. In those instances, quick action on everyone's part can mean the difference between success and failure.

HELPFUL HINTS WHEN VISITING A CONGRESSIONAL OFFICE

MAKE AN APPOINTMENT

- ❖ It is important to make an appointment as early as possible. If you don't have the telephone number for the congressional office you want to visit, call the U.S. Capitol switchboard at (202) 224-3121.
- ❖ If your Senator or Representative is unavailable, ask to meet with the legislative assistant who handles the issue of interest to you.

BE PREPARED

- ❖ Review what you want to say in advance of your meeting.
- ❖ Explain how the issues you raise affect you and your community.

BE BRIEF

- ❖ Since legislators and their staff have extremely busy schedules, plan on getting your message across in 5 to 10 minutes. Don't get sidetracked into small talk-make your time really count.

LISTEN CAREFULLY

- ❖ Be prepared to answer questions. If you don't know the answer to a question, admit it and offer to provide the answers later. Contact your organization for any additional information you need.

BE FIRM

- ❖ Try to find out exactly where your legislator stands on the issues, particularly as they affect your organization and its members. Ask what action he or she intends to take, and don't be afraid to press for specifics.

FOLLOW UP

- ❖ Send a thank-you letter to the legislator and/or staff aide; include a summary of your views, together with any additional information that may be relevant. You may also want to make a follow-up call a week or two after your visit.

WRITING AN EFFECTIVE LETTER TO MEMBERS OF CONGRESS

KEEP IT BRIEF AND TO THE POINT

- ❖ Keep your letter reasonably brief and limit your subject matter to a single issue. State the issues clearly in the first paragraph, so that the letter can be assigned to the appropriate staff aide.

PERSONALIZE YOUR LETTER

- ❖ Explain your position, and give the lawmaker reasons for supporting it. Make your communication your own. Stress how you—the lawmaker's constituent—will be affected and cite specific examples if you can. Don't limit your correspondence to slogans or phrases from a newsletter or form letter. Your own words will make the crucial difference.

BE POSITIVE

- ❖ Frame your concerns in a way that captures the lawmaker's attention. Show your awareness of the lawmaker's past actions (i.e., cite the lawmaker's past voting record, public announcements, etc.)

ASK FOR A RESPONSE

- ❖ To obtain a personal response, ask a thoughtful question about an issue that concerns you. Example, at the end of your letter - "Can I count on your support?"

FOCUS ON THE MERITS

- ❖ Never threaten or beg a Member of Congress. Always appeal to the lawmaker on the merits of an issue.

WRITE TO YOUR LEGISLATOR AT THESE ADDRESSES:

❖ United States Senate

The Honorable _____
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

❖ United States House of Representatives

The Honorable _____
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

WRITE TO YOUR LEGISLATOR ONLINE AT THESE ADDRESSES:

❖ United States Senate

www.senate.gov

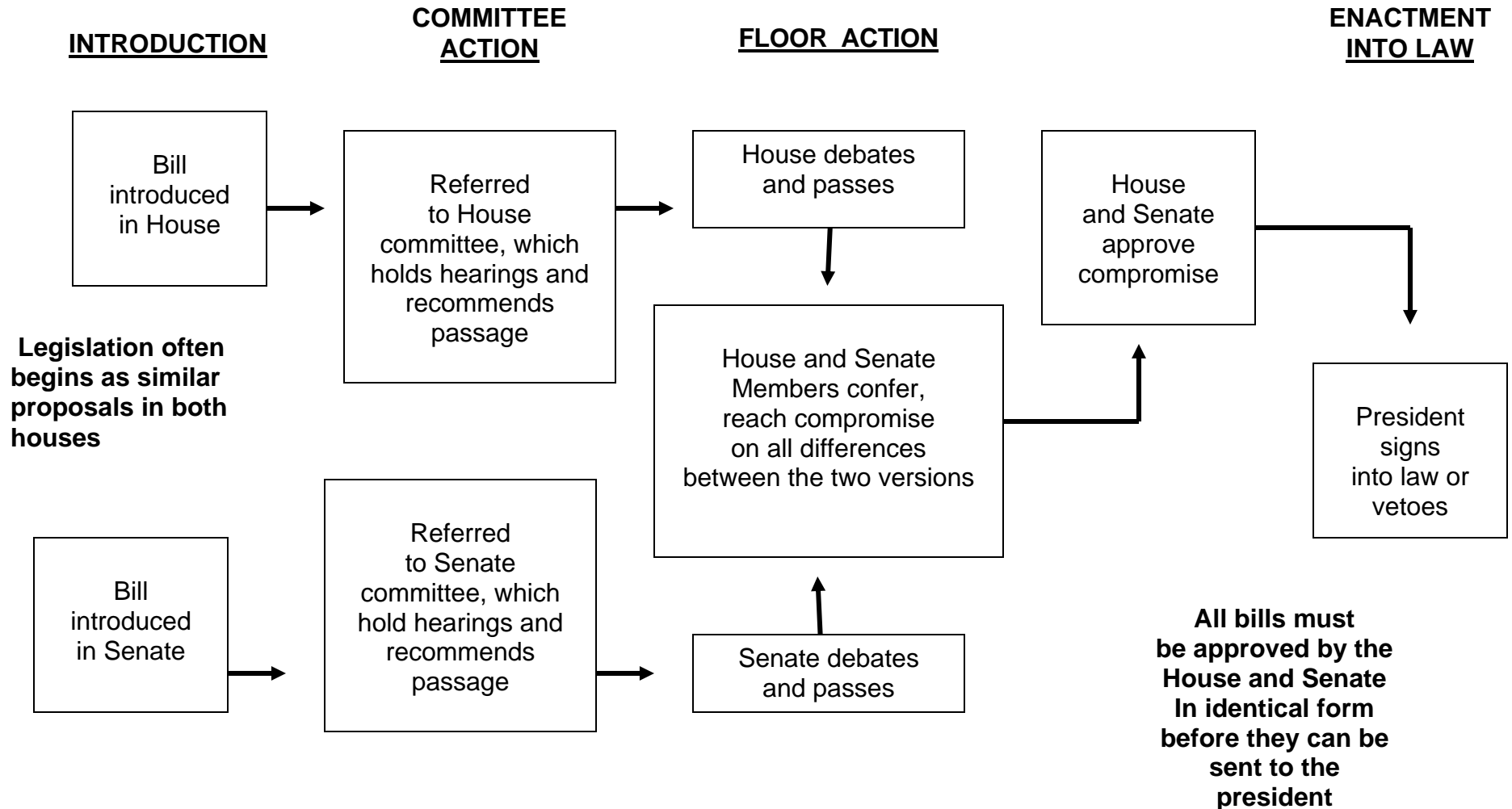
❖ United States House of Representatives

www.house.gov
www.house.gov/writerep

Appendix

Appendix

How a Bill Becomes Law



U.S. Senate

Leadership Structure

President Pro Tempore (*Senator Robert C. Byrd, WV*)

Elected by the majority party, and presides over the Senate.

Democrats

- **Majority Leader** (*Senator Harry Reid, NV*)
Elected by majority party. Serves as the principal “voice” of the majority party and sets the legislative agenda for the Senate.
- **Assistant Majority Leader** (*Senator Richard Durbin, IL*)
Mobilizes support for the majority party position on key votes, and works to maintain lines of communications between the majority leadership and rank-and-file Members.
- **Democratic Policy Committee Chairman** (*Senator Byron Dorgan, ND*)
Leads the Policy Committee in developing policy positions. Serves as the party’s communicator and educator on key policy issues.
- **Democratic Senatorial Campaign Committee** (*Senator Charles Schumer, NY*)
Principal fundraising vehicle for Senate Democrats. Provides financial assistance to promising candidates for the Senate.

Republicans

- **Minority Leader** (*Senator Mitch McConnell, KY*)
Elected by minority party. Serves as the principal “voice” for the legislative priorities of the minority party.
- **Assistant Minority Leader, Republican Whip** (*Senator Jon Kyl, AZ*)
Mobilizes support for the minority party position on key votes, and works to maintain lines of communications between the minority leadership and rank-and-file Members.
- **Republican Conference Chairman** (*Senator Lamar Alexander, TN*)
Leads the Republican Conference, which is used to organize and communicate with members of the Republican Party.
- **Republican Policy Committee Chairman** (*Senator Kay Bailey Hutchison, TX*)
Leads the Policy Committee in developing minority policy positions. Serves as the party’s communicator and educator on key policy issues.
- **National Republican Senatorial Committee** (*Senator John Ensign, NV*)
Principal fundraising vehicle for Senate Republicans. Provides financial assistance to promising candidates for the Senate.

U.S. House of Representatives

Leadership Structure

Speaker of the House (*Rep. Nancy Pelosi, CA*)

Elected by the full House. The Speaker has several formal duties including, but not limited to, calling the House to order, referring bills to committees, recognizing Members for speaking purposes, and signing bills passed by the House.

Democrats

- **Majority Leader** (*Rep. Steny Hoyer, MD*)
Elected by Democratic Caucus, and serves as primary advocate for the minority party's agenda.
- **Majority Whip** (*Rep. James E. Clyburn, SC*)
Mobilizes support for majority party positions on key votes, and works to maintain lines of communication between majority leadership and rank-and-file Members.
- **Chair of the Democratic Caucus** (*Rep. Rham Emanuel, IL*)
Vehicle used by Democrats to organize and communicate with their members. Caucus Chairman presides over meetings of all House Democrats.
- **Democratic Congressional Campaign Committee** (*Rep. Chris Van Hollen, MD*)
Principal fundraising vehicle for House Democrats. Provides financial assistance to promising candidates for the House.

Republicans

- **Minority Leader** (*Rep. John A. Boehner, OH*)
Speaker's likely successor should that position become vacant. Serves as an advocate for the legislative priorities of the majority party and sets the legislative agenda.
- **Minority Whip** (*Rep. Roy Blunt, MO*)
Mobilizes support for minority party positions on key votes, and works to maintain lines of communication between minority leadership and rank-and-file Members.
- **Chair of the Conference** (*Rep. Adam H. Putnam, FL*)
Leads the Republican Conference, which is used to organize and communicate with members of the Republican Party.
- **National Republican Congressional Committee** (*Rep. Tom Cole, OK*)
Principal fundraising vehicle for House Republicans. Provides financial assistance to promising candidates for the House.