Chapter 12: Congress in Action Section 3 Lecture Notes

AMERICAN GOVERNMENT





- 1. Identify the first steps in the introduction of a bill to the House.
- 2. Describe what happens to a bill once it is referred to a committee.
- 3. Explain how House leaders schedule debate on a bill.
- Explain what happens to a bill on the House floor, and identify the final step in the passage of a bill in the House.



- bill: a proposed law presented to the House or Senate for consideration
- joint resolution: measure similar to bills that have the force of law
- concurrent resolution: measure addressed by the House and Senate that lack the force of law
- resolution: measure having to do with a matter dealt with by only one house

Key Terms, cont.

- rider: a provision attached to an important measure likely to pass
- **pigeonhole:** to bury a bill in committee
- discharge petition: a petition that lets members force a bill onto the floor
- quorum: a majority of the full membership
- **engrossed:** printed in its final form



- What steps does a successful bill follow as it moves through the House?
 - A bill is introduced, receives a first reading, and is assigned to a committee.
 - The committee may hold hearings on a bill and amend it before reporting it to the floor.
 - On the floor, a bill receives a second reading and can be debated and amended before being voted on, printed, and receiving a third and final reading.

The First Steps

- Most bills are drafted in the executive branch or by special interest groups before being presented to members of Congress.
- Members often try to get support or cosponsors from members before introducing a proposed bill.
- All tax bills must begin in the House.
- House members introduce bills by dropping them into a hopper on the clerk's desk.

Bills and Resolutions

- Public bills are measures that apply to the nation as a whole.
- Private bills are measures that apply to certain persons or places.
- Joint resolutions are special measures that have the force of law. They are used to deal with unusual or temporary matters, such as funding inaugurations or proposing constitutional amendments.

Bills and Resolutions, cont. GOVERNMENT

- Concurrent resolutions do not have the force of law. They are used when both the House and Senate want to state a position on an issue.
- Simple resolutions are used by each house to adopt or amend its rules.
- A rider is a provision tacked on to an unrelated bill, such as appropriations bill, that is more likely to be passed than the rider would be on its own.

First Reading

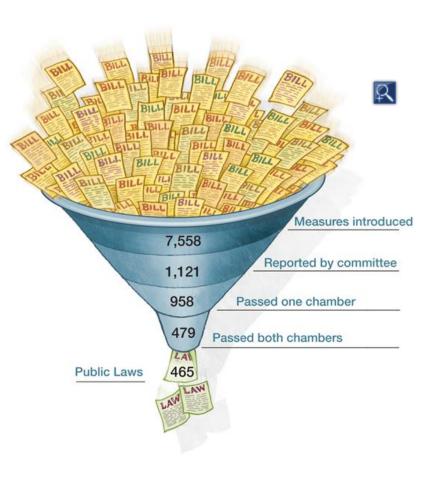
- Each bill is numbered by the clerk, given a short title summarizing its contents, and entered into the official record.
- After this first reading, the bill is assigned to a committee.
 - What does this cartoonist say about the political process?



"The only solution I can see is to hold a series of long and costly hearings in order to put off finding a solution."

The Bill in Committee

- Though not mentioned in the Constitution, committees play an essential role by filtering the many bills submitted to Congress.
- Most bills are pigeonholed. That is, they die in committee.



AMERICAN The Bill in Committee, cont. GOVERNMENT

- Checkpoint: What is a discharge petition?
 - A discharge petition lets House members force a bill that has stayed in committee 30 days onto the floor for debate.
 - Such a petition must be signed by a majority of House members.



A Committee at Work

- Committees refer bills to one of their subcommittees.
- Public hearings to gather data and hear testimony are held for key measures.
- Sometimes members of a subcommittee will take trips to research a bill.



Committee Actions

- A committee can:
 - Report a bill with a "do pass" recommendation.
 - Pigeonhole the bill and kill it.
 - Report an amended version of the bill.
 - Report the bill with a "do not pass" recommendation.
 - Report a committee bill as a substitute for a bill referred to it.

Congressional Staffers

- More than 2500 people serve congressional committees, offering expert advice on the content and politics associated with various bills.
- Their hard work includes research and presenting information on issues.



Scheduling Floor Debate

- A bill reported by a standing committee must be placed on one of five House calendars before it comes up for floor debate.
- The Rules Committee must then grant a rule to a bill, setting a time for it to appear on the floor.
 - By not granting a rule, the Committee can kill a bill.
 - Special rules can limit debate on a bill.

The Bill on the Floor

- Minor bills get a brief second reading and are passed or defeated.
- Major bills are addressed on the House floor by the Committee of the Whole, which consists of at least 100 members.
 - The House session is suspended as the Committee reads the bill section by section, debating and possibly amending each section.
 - The House then returns to session to adopt the completed bill.



- House members must have unanimous consent to speak for more than an hour.
- The Speaker can force a member to give up the floor.
- Any member can move for an up-or-down vote on an issue at any time.



Voting in the House

- Checkpoint: What are the four types of votes that the House can take?
 - Voice votes in which the Speaker counts the "yes" and "no" votes.
 - A standing vote, where those in favor and against are counted by the clerk.
 - A roll-call vote that goes member by member can be demanded by one fifth of the members present.
 - The rare teller vote has a teller count the votes for each party.

Voting in the House, cont. GOVERNMENT

- The House now uses a computerized voting system that shows instantly how each member has voted.
 - Members have 15 minutes to cast their votes or respond to quorum calls.
 - The Senate does not use electronic or teller votes.
- Once a bill is approved, it is printed and given a third and final reading before being sent to the other house.



- Now that you have learned about what steps a successful bill follow as it moves through the House, go back and answer the Chapter Essential Question.
 - Can and should the lawmaking process be improved?