

# Chapter 12: Congress in Action

## Section 4

### Lecture Notes

# AMERICAN GOVERNMENT

PEARSON

# ► Objectives

1. Describe how a bill is introduced in the Senate.
2. Compare the Senate's rules for debate with those in the House.
3. Describe the role of conference committees in the legislative process.
4. Evaluate the actions the President can take after both houses have passed a bill.

## ▶ Key Terms

- **filibuster:** a tactic by which a minority of Senators seeks to delay or block Senate action on a measure
- **cloture:** a Senate rule limiting debate
- **veto:** to refuse to sign
- **pocket veto:** if Congress adjourns its session within 10 days of submitting a bill to the President that the President does not sign, the bill dies

# ► Introduction

- What are the major differences in the lawmaking process in the House and the Senate?
  - The Senate has fewer rules limiting floor debate than the House.
  - The Senate also has the filibuster and the cloture rule, which allow the minority to block measures supported by the majority.
  - Finally, the Senate lacks the Rules Committee of the House.

# ▶ The Senate

- Senate standing committees deal with bills in a similar way as the House of Representatives.
- However, the rules for Senate floor proceedings are less formal and strict than those of the House.



# ► Debate in the Senate

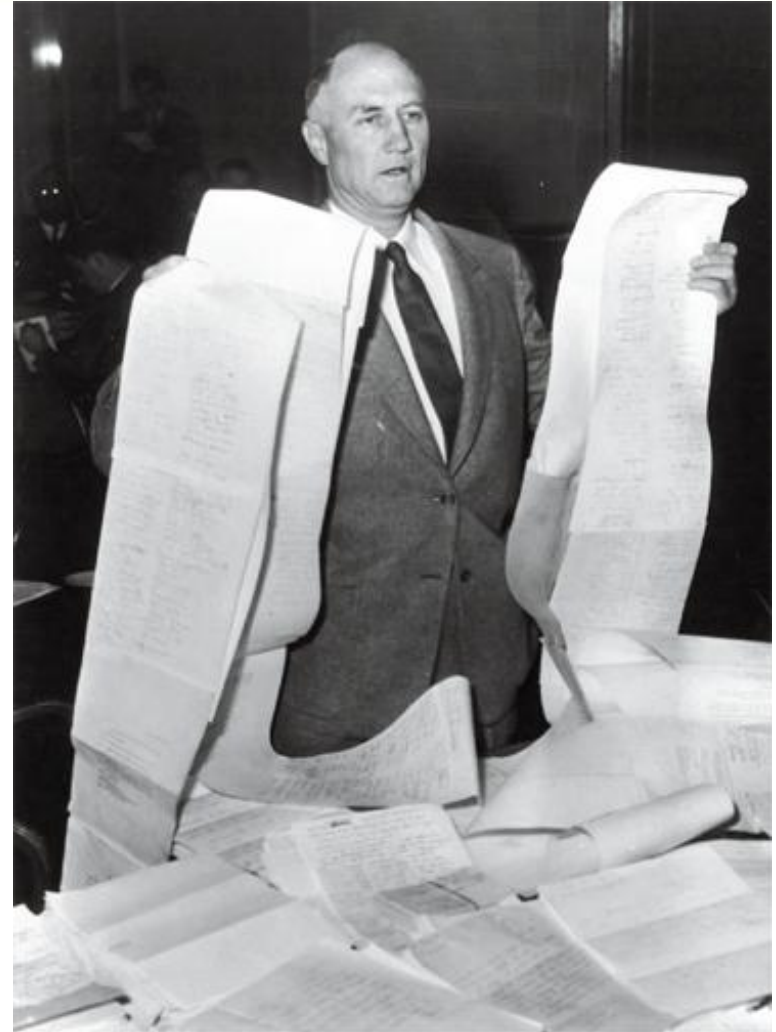
- There are few limits on floor debate in the Senate.
- In general, a senator can speak on the floor as long as he or she pleases about any topic that he or she wants to. However, no senator may speak more than twice on the same question on the same day.
- Many Senate bills are debated under a unanimous consent agreement that limits the amount of floor debate.

# ▶ The Filibuster

- A filibuster is a stalling tactic used by a minority of senators to talk a bill to death.
- Filibusterers try to take up so much floor time with speeches and other time-killing motions that the Senate has to drop or modify a bill to move forward.
- The Senate tries to beat filibusters by holding long daily sessions and enforcing strict rules to wear down talkers.

## ▶ The Filibuster, cont.

- Strom Thurmond, right, holds the record for a filibuster, holding the floor for 24 hours and 18 minutes.
- Today most filibusters are team efforts, with senators taking turns.
- More than 300 measures have been killed by filibusters.





# ► Cloture

- The Cloture rule was adopted in 1917 after a three week filibuster killed a measure related to World War I.
- Cloture allows debate to be limited by a special procedure that requires support by 60 senators.
- Only a third of the 600 attempts to invoke cloture have succeeded, so filibusters remain effective.
- Senators often oppose cloture to preserve free debate and the value of the filibuster.

# ► Conference Committees

- Checkpoint: What usually happens when House and Senate versions of a bill are not identical?
  - A conference committee is formed to iron out the differences and create a compromise bill.
  - The committee members are usually leading members of the standing committees that handled the bill in each house.

## ► Conference Committees, cont.

- It is rare for either house to reject a compromise bill approved by the conference committee.
- This rarity is due to the influence of the committee members and the fact that there is usually little time left in a session to consider the bill.



# ► The President Acts

- All bills that pass Congress are sent to the President, who can do one of four things:
  1. Sign the bill into law.
  2. Veto, or refuse to sign, the bill.
  3. Let the bill become law by not signing it within 10 days.



## ► The President Acts, cont.

4. Kill a bill by using a pocket veto. If Congress adjourns its session within 10 days of submitting a bill that the President has not signed, it dies by pocket veto.
  - Congress can override a veto with a 2/3 majority of each house, but this is rare.



# ▶ Review

- Members of Congress work hard to gather support and find cosponsors before they draft and submit a bill.
- Authors also tweak the wording of bills so that they will be steered to favorable committees.



# ▶ How a Bill Becomes a Law, Pt. 1

- A bill introduced in the House follows the 4 steps shown in the graphic and then moves on to the Senate.
- Bills are often referred to more than one standing committee for study and approval.

**1 H.R. 1 INTRODUCED IN HOUSE.**



**2 COMMITTEE ACTION**  
H.R. 1 referred to standing committee for study, hearings, revisions, and approval.



**3 RULES COMMITTEE**  
The Rules Committee sets conditions for debate and amendment on the floor.



**4 FLOOR ACTION**  
H.R. 1 debated, then passed or defeated. If passed, it goes to the Senate.



# ▶ The Rules Committee

- The House majority party often uses the Rules Committee to advance its agenda.
- This committee can restrict floor debate about a bill or even bypass standing committees and bring a bill directly to the floor for a vote.





# ▶ How a Bill Becomes a Law, Pt. 2

- A bill introduced in the Senate begins with steps 5-7 and then moves to the House.

– How does the lawmaking process for the Senate differ from that of the House?

**5** S. 1 INTRODUCED IN SENATE.



**6** COMMITTEE ACTION  
S. 1 referred to standing committee for study, hearings, revisions, and approval.

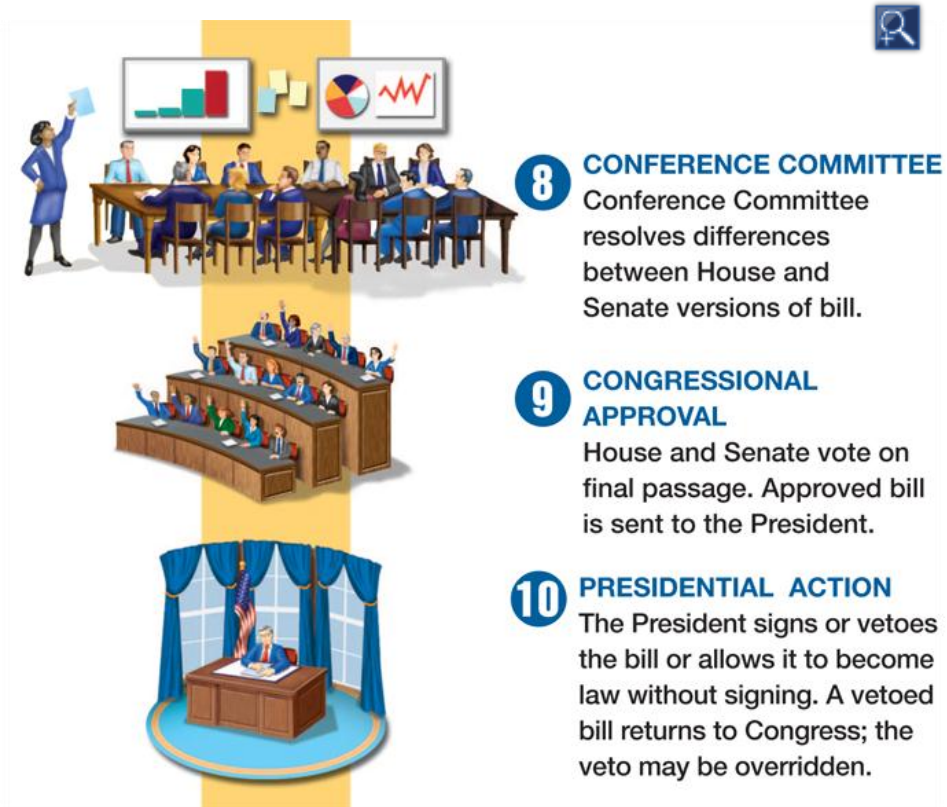


**7** FLOOR ACTION  
S. 1 debated, then passed or defeated.



## ▶ How a Bill Becomes a Law, Pt. 3

- Steps 8-9 are often not needed, as a bill approved by one house is often left unchanged by the second.
- The threat of a veto is often enough to block or force changes in a proposed bill.



## ► Review

- Now that you have learned about the major differences in the lawmaking process between the House and the Senate, go back and answer the Chapter Essential Question.
  - Can and should the lawmaking process be improved?