

Chapter 12: Congress in Action

Section 3

Lecture Notes

The title 'AMERICAN GOVERNMENT' is centered on the page. 'AMERICAN' is written in a white, serif font with a thin black outline. 'GOVERNMENT' is written in a large, bold, yellow, sans-serif font with a thick black outline. The text is set against a background of a stylized American flag with blue stars and red and white stripes.

AMERICAN
GOVERNMENT

PEARSON

► Objectives

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.
4. Explain what happens to a bill on the House floor, and identify the final step in the passage of a bill in the House.

▶ Key Terms

- **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

▶ Introduction

- 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

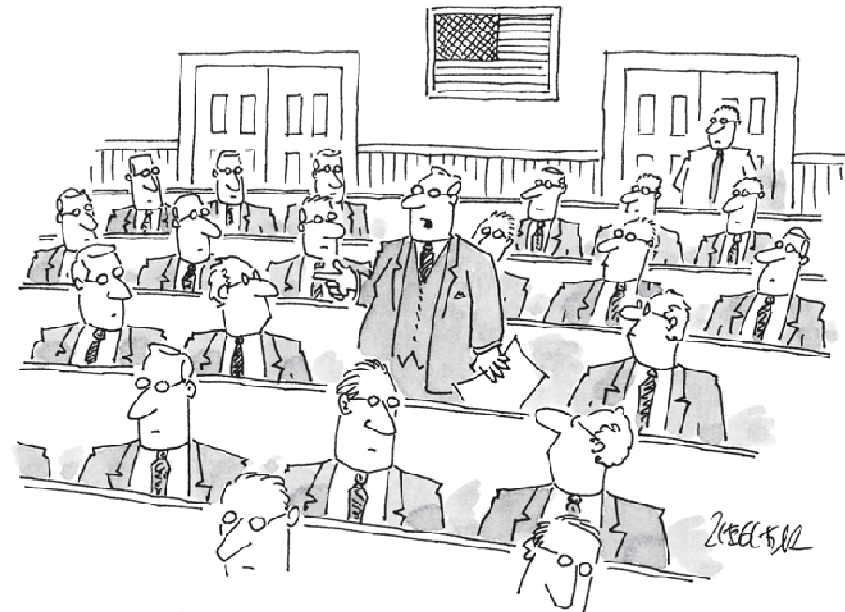
- Public bills are measures that apply to the nation as a whole.
- Private bills are measures that apply to certain persons or places.
- Joint resolutions are special measures that have the force of law. They are used to deal with unusual or temporary matters, such as funding inaugurations or proposing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

▶ Bills and Resolutions, cont.

- 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

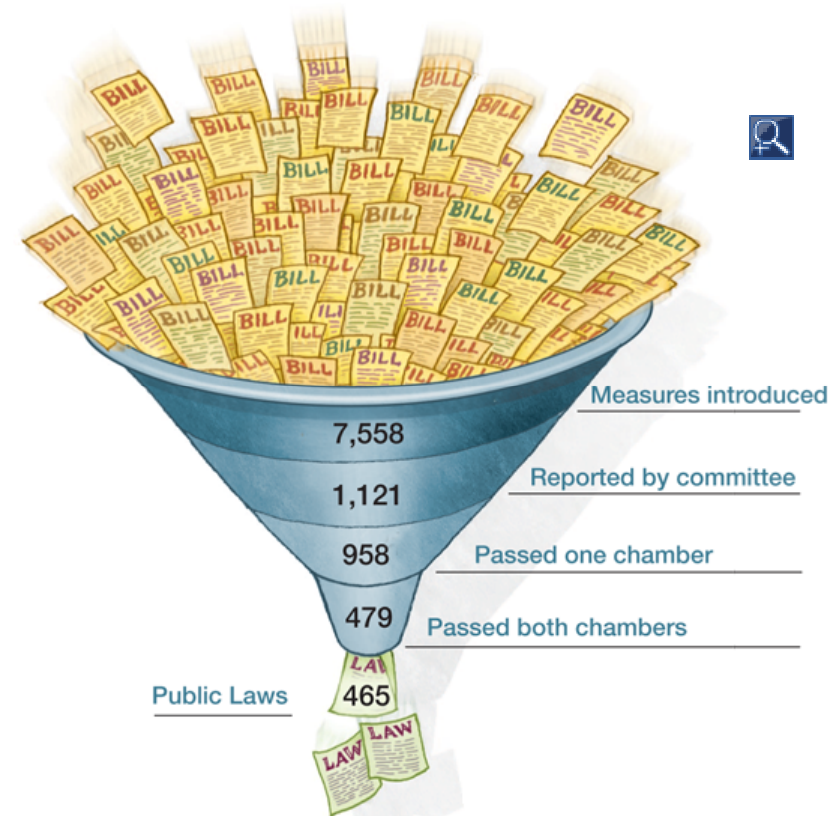
- Each bill is numbered by the clerk, given a short title summarizing its contents, and entered into the official record.
- After this first reading, the bill is assigned to a committee.
 - What does this cartoonist say about the political process?



"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.



▶ The Bill in Committee, cont.

- 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.

► Debate

- 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.

- 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.

▶ Review

- 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?