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GLOSSARY OF TERMS¹

Act of Congress

A bill or resolution adopted by both the House and the Senate and enacted into law. To become law, a bill or resolution may be signed by the President, may be approved by a two-thirds majority of both Chambers in the case of a Presidential veto, or may automatically become law if the President takes no action for 10 days (excluding Sundays) following submission of the bill or resolution.

Administration bill

Legislation proposed and strongly supported by the President. The term is frequently used to describe a major legislative initiative of the Administration.

Amendment tree

A method of visualizing the amendment process on a piece of legislation. First, imagine the bill as the trunk and amendments as branches. House and Senate rules permit only *first-degree* (an amendment to, or branch on, the bill) and *second-degree* (an amendment to the amendment or a branch on a branch) amendments. However, in the House, a substitute amendment is considered a first-degree amendment, so technically a total of four amendments can be pending at any given time (an amendment, an amendment to the amendment, a substitute amendment, and an amendment to the substitute).

In the Senate, *perfecting amendments* (those simply altering language of a bill or amendment) take precedence over *substitutes* (those both altering language and substituting new text). The amendment tree, then, can have many more branches. For instance, one Senator offers a perfecting amendment to the underlying bill, another Senator offers a second-degree substitute amendment to the first amendment, and at the same time a third Senator offers a second-degree perfecting amendment to the original amendment and a fourth offers a substitute to the second-degree perfecting amendment. (Sorting all this out is one of

¹ LexisNexis Congressional: Glossary of Terms (Website)
<http://www.lexisnexis.com/help/cu/CU.htm#glossary/Glossary.htm>
<http://www.lexisnexis.com/help/cu/Misc/Introduction.htm>

the reasons the Senate employs a Parliamentarian).

Amendments

Proposals made by a Member of Congress to modify a pending measure, whether in subcommittee, committee, or on the floor. Depending on one's political position, a common tactic to stop unacceptable legislation is to offer a [killer amendment](#). See also: [Amendment tree](#).

Appropriation

A bill providing funding for authorized federal programs. Appropriators are not required to fund programs at their authorized level. Rather, they view the amount authorized for the program as the maximum amount allowed to be appropriated. Chairs of Appropriations Subcommittees sometimes are referred to as the "College of Cardinals" because they exert such influence over spending for federal programs.

Authorization

A bill establishing, amending, or continuing a federal program. So called because it "authorizes" the expenditure of money, but does not actually provide it. For instance, a bill authorizing expenditures for the continuation of federal crop price support programs is an authorization bill.

Bill

Legislative proposal before Congress. Also known as "measure", "proposal", or "legislation".

Bill Clerk

An official of the House or Senate whose duties include receipt and processing of newly-introduced legislation.

Bill print

An official copy of a legislative proposal, produced by the Government Printing Office (GPO).

Budget process

Until 1974, the congressional budget process consisted of creating programs and funding them. In the 1970s, it became clear that there were conflicting priorities between the authorizing committees that created federal programs and the appropriating committees that funded them. The result was federal spending chaos and an ever-increasing federal deficit.

In an attempt to bring order to this problem, Congress

enacted the Congressional Budget and Impoundment Control Act (P.L. 93-344) in 1974. This law established a procedure to help organize the many policy and spending decisions Congress makes every year into a coordinated whole.

Think of the budget process as a blueprint for the federal program and spending priorities as seen by the Congress. It establishes the overall parameters under which decisions about [appropriations](#) and authorizations can occur.

The budget process is designed to help lawmakers focus on overall goals rather than the piecemeal decisions that characterized congressional spending decisions in the past. It begins with the release of the President's proposed budget early in the year, along with detailed justification materials prepared by Federal agencies which are submitted to the House and Senate appropriations subcommittees with jurisdiction over the funding for each agency. The President is required to submit his budget for the upcoming fiscal year to Congress on or before the first Monday in February. The Congressional Budget and Impoundment Control Act of 1974 requires Congress to adopt an annual budget resolution covering the upcoming fiscal year plus the four subsequent years before it enacts any appropriations. Congress is expected to adopt a budget resolution by April 15, but this deadline is frequently not met. The budget resolution establishes a target spending ceiling and revenue floor for the upcoming fiscal year. Further, the spending ceiling total is subdivided into separate functional category (or national priority) totals. The House and Senate Budget Committees have exclusive jurisdiction over budget resolutions and their enforcement.

The budget resolution follows the normal legislative process path up to the point where a bill would be sent to the President. Since the budget resolution is an internal congressional housekeeping measure, it does not go to the President for his signature and it is not considered binding on congressional decision-makers. Congress may adopt a later budget resolution that revises the previously adopted concurrent resolution. The budget resolution is adopted in the form of a [concurrent resolution](#) accompanied by a written report.

After Congress completes action on the concurrent resolution for a given fiscal year, it is generally not in order to consider legislation that does not conform to the constraints on spending and revenue set out in the

resolution. The concurrent resolution includes language that instructs the House and Senate committees to recommend changes to achieve the constraints established in the concurrent resolution, and specifies the amount of spending reductions or revenue changes the committee must attain, but does not identify specific changes to be made.

The process of passing legislation that reflects the assumptions made in the concurrent resolution is called reconciliation. The [reconciliation](#) process is intended to bring existing law into conformity with the most recently adopted concurrent resolution. After both the House and Senate pass their versions of an appropriations bill, the bill is referred to a conference committee. Conference reports on appropriations may be accepted or rejected by either the House or the Senate, but they cannot be amended in either Chamber. If a conference report is rejected, the conferees negotiate further. Once the reconciliation bill passes both Chambers, it is sent to the President and is subject to the normal procedures governing Presidential action related to the enactment of a law.

By request

Appearing on the [bill print](#) in parentheses just after the sponsor's name, this phrase indicates that the [sponsor](#) is introducing the measure as a favor to someone not in Congress. Often the "someone" is the President, but it also could be an individual constituent, organization, or state government official. It sometimes means the sponsor does not fully agree with the bill.

Calendar

A list of business available for floor action. Both the House and Senate have their own calendars. The House has five calendars:

- Union
- House
- Private
- Corrections (which replaced the former Consent Calendar in the 104th Congress)
- Motions to Discharge Committees

[Appropriations](#), [authorizations](#), and revenue (tax or tariff) bills go on the *Union Calendar*, while other important legislation, usually that dealing with administrative or procedural matters, goes on the *House Calendar*.

The *Private Calendar* is for [private bills](#) and usually is called up only on the first Tuesday of the month. The *Corrections Calendar* is for measures correcting government programs and is called up at the Speaker's discretion on the second and fourth Tuesday of the month. The *Discharge Calendar* is used for [discharge petitions](#). Measures are not taken from a calendar in any particular order.

The Senate has only two calendars: the Calendar of Business (commonly referred to as the Legislative calendar) for all legislation and the Executive Calendar for treaties and nominations that require the Senate's advice and consent.

Congressional committees sometimes produce their own calendars but, unlike calendars in the full Chambers, these generally are lists of bills referred to the committee, with their disposition. The final calendar of a committee, in particular, is a useful tool for [legislative history](#) research.

Chairperson or Chair

Elected by their Chamber's majority party caucus, committee chairs usually are the most senior majority party member on the committee. The Chair sets the committee agenda and schedule in consultation with the majority members of the committee and the Chamber's party leadership. He or she runs (or "chairs") committee meetings, signs and files committee reports in the full Chamber, frequently acts as a reported bill's *primary* (floor manager) during floor debate, is responsible for the management of committee funds and staff, and often serves as a member of the conference committee on any bill over which the committee has jurisdiction.

Subcommittee chairs are elected by party caucus and have authority to set subcommittee agendas and schedules independent of the committee chair. The chair of a subcommittee that considered a particular bill is frequently appointed a conferee on that bill.

Chamber

Congress is made up of two Chambers: the House and the Senate. Originally referred to the two rooms of the Capitol in which the House of Representatives and the Senate met.

Christmas tree legislation

Any bill "adorned" like a Christmas tree with unrelated amendments. Generally occurs when the Senate takes up a

relatively minor House-passed bill and “trims” it with any number of non-germane amendments. Frequently occurs at the end of a Congress, but recently supplanted by omnibus reconciliation legislation.

Clean bill

A bill, changed so thoroughly in the markup process that differentiating the amendments by typeface would produce an unintelligible [bill print](#), may be introduced as a new “clean” bill and given a new number in the sequential numbering order. A clean bill often is introduced by the subcommittee or committee chair within days of the markup action.

Cloture

The only procedure by which the Senate can vote to place a time limit on consideration of a bill or other matter, thereby overcoming a [filibuster](#). The two-step procedure begins with the filing of a petition for cloture signed by 16 Senators. A vote on cloture occurs two days after the petition is filed, and is considered successful if approved by three-fifths of the full Senate (60 votes, assuming that there are no vacancies). After cloture has been invoked, no more than 30 hours of debate may occur, no Senator may speak for more than one hour, and no amendments may be proposed unless they are relevant and were filed on the day between the presentation of the cloture petition and the cloture vote.

Clustered votes

A situation in the House when recorded votes are demanded on several measures that have been debated under the [suspension of the rules](#) procedure. The Speaker or presiding officer announces that any recorded votes requested on the measures will be postponed to a later hour (or even a later day). When the time for the votes arrives, the bills are taken up in sequence without further debate. Members are permitted 15 minutes to vote on the first bill and five minutes to vote on each of the remaining bills.

Code of Federal Regulations

The Code of Federal Regulations (CFR) is the codification of the general and permanent rules published in the Federal Register by the executive departments and agencies of the Federal Government. It is divided into 50 titles that represent broad areas subject to Federal regulation. Each volume of the CFR is updated once each calendar year and is issued on a quarterly basis.

Collation

The total number of pages in a publication.

Collegial

In a collegial organization, decision-making is decentralized, involving equals who coalesce into temporary groups in order to reach a particular goal. In Congress, that goal is public policy. Collegial power flows in all directions in a collegial organization. Identifying features of a collegial organization include compromise and negotiation; characteristics seen in the publications resulting from the process.

Committee of the Whole House on the State of the Union or Committee of the Whole

This is the House in another, more efficient, form, where much of the actual work on legislation occurs. Every Member of the House is a member of the Committee of the Whole House on the State of the Union. The House as the Committee of the Whole operates under less restrictive rules, designed to speed up consideration of legislation. For example, 100 members constitute a [quorum](#) in the Committee of the Whole, rather than the 218 Member quorum in the House, and the length of debate is fixed by the Committee on Rules.

Committees

The workhorses of Congress, where much of the detailed legislative work occurs. Committees and their subcommittees examine measures during [hearings](#) and modify, accept, or reject them during [markup](#). A member serves on more than one committee and on several subcommittees within each of those committees. Committee jurisdictions are established by the [rules](#) of the Chamber. For example, the rules of the House require tax bills be referred to the Ways & Means committee and bills on farm crops to the Agriculture Committee. The rules of the Senate require tax bills be sent to the Finance Committee and farm bills to the Agriculture, Nutrition & Forestry Committee. On occasion, [special and select](#) committees are established to investigate specific questions.

Check the rules of the House and the Senate in LexisNexis® Congressional for listings of the committees' jurisdictions. A list of all committees can also be found in the Committee segment of LexisNexis Congressional.

Committee rules

Each committee approves its own rules of procedure during the first months of a Congress. These often are published individually in the Congressional Record on or shortly after the date they are approved and are published collectively as either a House or Senate document.

Companion bills

Comparable bills introduced in both Chambers at the same time with substantially similar language. Designation of bills as “companions” generally indicates some cooperation between their [sponsors](#).

Conference

Selected Members of the House and Senate who meet to resolve differences between two versions of a bill. Members of the conference often are referred to as “managers” or “conferees”.

Confirmation process

Begins when the President nominates an individual to an executive or judicial branch position requiring Senate confirmation. Nominations are referred to the committee of jurisdiction—for example, judicial nominations to the Judiciary Committee or diplomatic nominations to the Foreign Relations Committee—which then holds hearings, considers, and reports or rejects them. If reported, the nominations are placed on the [calendar](#) and considered by the Senate at a time of the leadership’s choosing.

If the Senate approves them (i.e., gives its “advice and consent”), the nominations are said to be confirmed. Policy and political considerations affect the timing of Senate consideration of nominations.

Congressional Record

The official transcript of debates of the House and the Senate, printed and distributed by the GPO and available on LexisNexis Congressional in the daily edition. The *Record* is divided into four parts and paginated as follows in the daily edition:

- The debate and other floor action of the House and of the Senate are paginated separately, with page numbers beginning with “H” (as in H8793) for House debate and “S” (as in S3987) for Senate debate.

- Material not spoken on the floor may appear in the Extension of Remarks (paged as in E2347) section that appears in the *Record* after the Senate and House floor debate sections. If a member speaking on the floor requests permission “to revise and extend my remarks”, those revisions appear in the Extension of Remarks portion of the Record.
- The fourth portion of the *Record*, known as the Daily Digest (paged as in D739), contains a brief synopsis of floor action in both the House and Senate and in all the committees that met on that day. The Daily Digest is especially useful for identifying each day’s floor amendments and their disposition.

Cosponsor

A Senator or Representative who joins the sponsor introducing legislation to show support for the measure. Cosponsors’ names are listed in parentheses after the sponsor’s name on a [bill print](#) and in the *Congressional Record*.

“Dear Colleague” letter

A short letter sent by a bill’s sponsor to other Members of the Chamber describing the legislative proposal and soliciting cosponsors. So called because the letter begins with the salutation “*Dear Colleague*”.

Discharge petition

Method for forcing a committee to act on a bill. In the House, a Member offers a motion on the floor “to discharge the committee from further consideration of the bill”. The Clerk of the House then draws up a discharge petition, and if a majority of the House (218 Members) signs it, the petition is placed on the discharge calendar. If the committee has not acted within seven days after the petition is placed on the calendar, any Member can call up the discharge motion which, if approved by the House, leads the way for a motion to bring up the bill itself. The difficulty of obtaining 218 signatures, which are made public, is one reason why this procedure is infrequently used in the House.

The motion “to discharge a committee from consideration” is subject to [filibuster](#) in the Senate. This potential for obstruction of all legislative business is one reason that the Senate almost never uses the discharge petition as a way to force a bill from committee to the floor.

Discretionary spending

Non-entitlement spending over which Congress has control, or discretion. Discretionary spending (budget authority and

outlays) is controlled in annual appropriations acts and is often divided into three categories: defense, international, and domestic.

Entitlement

A program that must provide specified benefits to all eligible persons who seek them. Entitlement programs, such as Social Security or Medicare, can be changed only through legislation, not through cuts in [appropriations](#).

Executive branch

Of the three branches of the federal government (judicial, legislative, and executive), the one responsible for executing, or implementing, the law. As head of the executive branch, the President delegates authority to implement the laws to the various federal agencies and departments; they act in his name.

Executive Orders

An order by the President that has the force of law. Executive Orders are compiled within the Code of Federal Regulations.

Federal Register

The official, publication reporting the regulatory actions of the executive branch. In addition to notices of rulemaking and final rulemakings, the *Register* may contain items from the President (such as [Executive Orders](#) and [Proclamations](#)), guidelines issued by an agency, legal notices, and other documents of general interest. The *Register* is published daily, Monday through Friday, except on Federal holidays, and is available on LexisNexis Congressional.

Filibuster

The Senate's tradition of unlimited debate sometimes results in the use of this delaying tactic, which occurs when a Senator takes the floor to speak, not necessarily limiting discussion to the subject at hand, and yielding the floor only to his supporters. This delaying tactic can occur even on a simple motion to proceed to consideration of a bill.

Filing the report

Filing of the bill text as approved along with a written explanation of the committee's actions (the report) to accompany the bill. Since the bill text as amended must be verified as accurate and the report must be written by

committee staff, there is a delay between [ordering a bill reported](#) and actual filing of the report. No further action on the bill can occur until the report is filed.

Final rules (Federal Register)

Federal agency final rules and regulations that have general applicability and legal effect. The Rules and Regulations section of the Federal Register also includes interim rules that are issued without prior notice and are effective immediately. An interim rule is usually issued in response to an emergency situation and is usually followed by a document that affirms the interim rule as a final rule and incorporates any changes made following the issuance of the interim rule.

Five-minute rule

A debate-limiting rule of the House. Under the rule, a [Member](#) offering an [amendment](#) is allowed to speak five minutes in its favor, and an opponent of the amendment is allowed to speak five minutes in opposition. Debate is then closed. In actual practice, debate can be extended when Members are recognized using tactics such as a motion “striking the last word” or “striking the requisite number of words”, amendments that are withdrawn after the Member has spoken.

Germane

In the House, amendments must clearly relate to the bill and cannot introduce new subject matter or expand the effect of the legislation. If they are not germane, they are subject to a [point of order](#). In the Senate, only amendments offered post-cloture are required to be germane.

Government Printing Office

The Government Printing Office (GPO) prints nearly all congressional documents, including the Congressional Record, as well as many documents of other Federal agencies, such as the Federal Register. Online services such as LexisNexis Congressional use computerized data produced by the GPO as part of its source document publication process.

Hearings

A meeting of a committee or subcommittee generally open to the public to take testimony to gather information and opinions on proposed legislation, to conduct an investigation, to provide oversight regarding the

performance of a government program, or to review a problem or issue within the committee's jurisdiction to determine whether there is need for a legislative solution.

Hierarchical

A system in which decisions are made by higher-ranking individuals in the organizations and announced to the lower-ranks. Power flows from the top of a hierarchical organization to the bottom.

Hold

A Senate custom permitting one or more Senators to block floor consideration of legislation or nominations by notifying the leadership of their request to hold off debate. Although the Senate can ignore the hold and proceed with consideration of the bill or nomination, it risks filibusters and other delaying maneuvers by the Senators who requested the hold.

Hold the bill at the desk

A maneuver reserving the right of action on a measure to the full Chamber, rather than to a committee. A bill held at the desk is available for immediate consideration. Since it is not referred to a committee, the bill has no [hearings](#) or committee [reports](#) accompanying it from that Chamber. A bill passed by one Chamber and referred to the second Chamber often is held at the desk in the second Chamber, particularly when the second Chamber already is working on similar legislation.

House Committee on Rules

The House Committee that reports the resolution, known as the rule for consideration, establishing the parameters of floor debate on a bill. A rule sets the number of hours for general debate on the bill and the number and type of floor amendments that can be offered. Some rules even specify which [amendments](#) will be allowed. The rule, which is reported in the form of a simple resolution (H.Res.), must be adopted by the House before debate on any specific piece of legislation can begin. Since the majority party is usually over-represented, the actions of the House Rules committee can be very partisan.

Impoundment

The traditional budget practice that allowed the President to refuse to spend the money [appropriated](#) by Congress. President Nixon's impoundment of funds appropriated for

programs with which he disagreed led to the enactment of the Budget Control and Impoundment Act of 1974 that established the Congressional budget process, removed impoundment authority from the President, and established procedures by which the President may propose that funds be rescinded.

Introductory statement

A statement by a bill's sponsor, usually printed in the Congressional Record at the time of a bill's introduction, discussing the bill's overall purpose. Also known as "introductory remarks".

Invoke cloture

Invoking cloture stops a [filibuster](#). The two-step procedure begins with the filing of a petition for cloture signed by 16 Senators. A vote on cloture occurs two days after the petition is filed. A successful cloture vote occurs when 60 Senators vote to invoke cloture, thus cutting off the filibuster. Just as there is no limit to the number of filibusters on procedural motions or amendments to a bill, there is no limit to the number of times cloture can be invoked on a single piece of legislation.

Joint Committee

A committee composed of an equal number of members of both the House and the Senate. A joint committee may be investigative or research-oriented. As of 1993, only four joint committees remain: Joint Economic, Joint Taxation, Joint Library, and Joint Printing. None has the authority to report legislation. Standing joint committees are permanent joint committees established by law. The law fixes the number of the majority and minority members from each house.

Joint Resolution

This is a resolution of both Chambers, generally used for limited matters, such as commemorative holidays. Designated as H.J.Res. in the House and S.J.Res. in the Senate, joint resolutions are signed by the President and have the force of law.

Joint resolutions also are used to propose an amendment to the Constitution. In this case, they must be agreed to by a two-thirds majority in each Chamber and by three-fourths of the states. The President does NOT sign this type of joint resolution.

Killer amendment

An objectionable [amendment](#) that is offered to a bill to diminish its chance of passage or invite a Presidential veto. In effect, the amendment kills the bill.

Leadership

(1) The Democratic and Republican party leaders in both [Chambers](#); (2) a Chamber's leaders, who are from the majority party and are responsible for running the Chamber and controlling legislative activity. The House leadership includes the Speaker of the House, the Majority Leader, the Majority Whip, certain [committee](#) chairs and other influential majority party Members of the House. The Senate leadership consists of the Majority Leader, the Majority Whip, certain committee chairs, other influential majority party Senators, and, when his party controls the Senate, the Vice President (in his Constitutional position as president of the Senate). A Chamber's leadership determines the overall legislative agenda, tone, and strategy of a particular congressional session.

Legislative day versus Calendar day

A legislative day extends from one adjournment to the next. The House normally ends its business at the end of a day and adjourns, so its legislative day generally corresponds to the calendar day. The Senate often recesses, rather than adjourns, at the end of the day in order to avoid certain required routine business that begins a new legislative day. Thus, the Senate's schedule can be made up of a handful of legislative days even when it has been meeting for several months.

Legislative history

Either (1) a chronological list of actions that have occurred on a measure or (2) a collection of documents produced as part of the bill's progress to enactment. A legislative history containing a compilation of documents may be used by attorneys and the courts to discern the intent of Congress on a particular provision of the law and can also be used by a researcher to identify proponents and opponents and their arguments for or against that same provision. Legislative histories for laws passed since 1969 are available on LexisNexis Congressional.

Legislative intent

What the Congress intended. Since legislation often is the product of compromise, the intent of legislative language is

not always obvious. Courts, and lawyers, often research the legislative history of a law to determine the legislature's intent behind a particular provision in the law.

Line numbering

Bill prints include line as well as page numbers. [Amendments](#) from the floor frequently are made in terms of "Page xx, line xx," enabling the members to locate the proposed change quickly.

Lobbyist

Anyone who seeks to influence Congress. The 1st Amendment to the Constitution protects the rights of people to petition the government for a redress of grievances, and many people do so through correspondence and personal visits. The term lobbyist, however, usually refers to an individual who performs this task on a full-time basis on behalf of an organized group (such as a labor union, a trade association, a professional organization, or a State or local government) with specified interests. A good lobbyist provides accurate information to the Congress about his organization's area of concern and often is invited to appear as a witness at committee or subcommittee hearings. Often, an organization's lobbyist serves on the governing body of its [political action committee \(PAC\)](#), helping determine the level of political contributions that will go to various congressional Members.

Markup

The business meeting of a committee or subcommittee to consider the provisions of the bill. So called because the committee or subcommittee "marks up" the bill with revisions or amendments before sending it on to the next stage.

Measure

A legislative proposal before Congress. Also known as a "proposal", "legislation", or a "bill".

Meeting notices (Federal Register)

Notices of open and closed Federal agency meetings. This section of the Federal Register also includes miscellaneous Federal agency notices, including notices of intent and suspension of meetings.

Member of Congress

An elected official representing a home state or district.

There are 435 Congressmen in the House of Representatives, serving a two-year term. There are 100 Senators in the Senate, serving a six-year term.

Morning hour/morning business

In the Senate, morning hour technically is the first two hours of a [legislative day](#), during which routine morning business, such as introduction of legislation, filing of committee reports, and leadership descriptions of upcoming business, is conducted. Morning business can be set aside or delayed by unanimous consent.

Motion to table

A Senator may request to place any pending business on the table. The motion is not debatable, and agreement to the motion ensures that the Chamber will take no further action on the matter.

Ordered a bill reported

The step in the legislative process taken by a committee after it has marked up and voted to approve a measure. The committee votes to order the bill reported to the full Chamber.

Override

Two-thirds of each Chamber must vote to override a veto in order for a bill to become law over the President's objection. Other than adjournment *sine die*, there is no deadline for overriding a Presidential veto.

Pagination

The assignment of numbers to the pages in a publication. Frequently the front matter of a publication is paginated using Roman numbers, while the main text is paginated using Arabic numerals.

Pairing

In the House, a "gentleman's agreement" between two Members on opposite sides of an issue when one or both will be absent at the time of the vote. Pairing recognizes that one Member's vote would be canceled by the other's vote, if both were present and voting. A "live pair" occurs when one of the two Members in the pair agreement is present and votes. He (or she) then withdraws the vote, announcing his live pair with the absent colleague, and identifying how both would have voted.

Parliamentarian

Powerful employee of the House or the Senate who interprets the Chamber's rules and [precedents](#), advising the [presiding officer](#) or individual Members on questions of parliamentary procedure and the Chamber's [rules](#).

Placed on the calendar

Put on the list of legislation ready for consideration by the full [Chamber](#).

Pocket veto

If Congress adjourns before the expiration of the 10 days the President normally has to act on a bill, he cannot veto and return the bill to them. When he takes no action on a bill after Congress leaves, his inaction is considered a pocket veto and the bill cannot become law.

Point of order

An objection raised by a Member when an action violates the [rules](#) of the Chamber. Raising a point of order usually halts all debate until the chair rules on the point. Sometimes the chair will permit debate on the point of order before ruling on it, and rulings of the chair are subject to appeal, which is then resolved by a recorded vote. A point of order "*that a quorum is not present to conduct business*" is used to halt proceedings; at this point business cannot resume until a quorum of Members appears in the Chamber (*quorum call*) or the request for a quorum call is rescinded.

Political Action Committee (PAC)

An organization that raises and distributes campaign contributions to congressional or Presidential candidates. Trade associations, labor unions, and even Members of Congress can create a PAC.

Precedents

A prior interpretation of House or Senate rules that is referred to in subsequent, similar situations. The precedents of the Senate are compiled in the one-volume *Senate Procedure, Precedents and Practices*, which is published as a Senate Document. The House precedents are compiled in three different multi-volume sets known as *Hinds'* (or *Cannon's* or *Deschler-Brown's*) *Precedents of the House of Representatives* and are updated by an

irregular publication, *Procedure in the U.S. House of Representatives*, issued by the House Parliamentarian's office.

Presidential documents (Federal Register)

Presidential documents, including proclamations and Executive Orders submitted to the Federal Register for publication.

Presidential Message

Much of the President's official communication with Congress is accomplished in writing. He may submit a treaty to the Senate for ratification or a draft bill to Congress along with a letter requesting its enactment, or he may provide a required report to Congress on the operation of a program. The text of these Presidential messages sometimes can be found in the [Congressional Record](#) or the [Weekly Compilation of Presidential Documents](#). If the message is on an important issue or involves a major legislative proposal, the House or the Senate may order the message printed for wider distribution, in which case it will appear as a House Document (H. Doc.) or a Senate Document (S. Doc.). A Presidential message transmitting a treaty to the Senate is printed as a [Treaty Document](#), which will contain the text of the proposed treaty as well as any accompanying documentation or explanation.

Presiding Officer

The member presiding over floor debate. Officially, the Speaker is the presiding officer of the House and the Vice President is the presiding officer of the Senate, but normally they appoint other members to take on their duties.

Private bills or laws

A bill or law benefiting a single individual or organization.

Proclamation

A statement or announcement by the President that does not have the force of law. An example of a proclamation is the announcement by the President declaring the month of July "National Ice Cream Month".

Proposed rules (Federal Register)

Federal agency proposed changes to rules and regulations, including regulations contained in the Code of Federal Regulations. Notices to the public of proposed issuance of

rules are published in the Federal Register so that interested parties may comment prior to the issuance of a final rule. The Proposed Rules section of the Federal Register also includes advanced notices of proposed rulemaking and notices about previously published proposed rulemaking notices.

Public Interest Group

An organization of like-minded citizens interested in a particular issue or group of issues, so called because they believe they are acting in the public interest. Examples of public interest groups include many environmental organizations (such as the Sierra Club or Defenders of Wildlife) or other social-issue organizations (like the National Rifle Association, the National Abortion Rights Action League, or Mothers Against Drunk Driving). Public interest groups also employ [lobbyists](#) to present their case to Congress on issues of interest to them. A number of these groups publish annual “report cards” on Member activities.

Public laws

A law of general applicability to the country. Most measures enacted by Congress become public laws and are cited as P.L. followed by the number of the Congress and the number of the law.

Quorum

A majority of either Chamber. In the House as the House of Representatives, a quorum is 218 Members, but in the House as the Committee of the Whole, it is only 100 Members. In the Senate, a quorum is always a majority of the Senate, or 51 Members.

Ranking Member

The most senior minority party member of a committee or subcommittee.

Recommittal motion

A motion on the floor of the House to send the bill back to the committee that reported it or to another committee.

Reconciliation bill

Legislation revising program authorizations to achieve savings based on instructions in the congressional budget resolution. The budget resolution instructions to the authorizing committees are not mandatory; the committees can, and often do, report other changes that will bring them

within the overall budget ceilings. Reconciliation bills are the omnibus consolidation by the Budget Committee of all committees' savings and off-setting revenue raising proposals into one or more bills that then proceed through the legislative process.

Recorded vote

A [vote](#) upon which each members stand is individually made known. In the Senate, this is accomplished through a roll call of the entire membership, to which each on the floor must answer “yea”, “nay” or, if he/she does not wish to vote, “present”. Since January 1973, the House has used an electronic voting system for recorded votes, including yea- and -nay votes formerly taken by roll calls.

When not required by the Constitution, a recorded vote can be obtained on question in the House on the demand of one-fifth (44 Members) of a quorum, or one-fourth (25 members) of a quorum in the Committee of the Whole.

Refer a bill to one or more committees

A bill usually is assigned, or referred, to the one [committee](#) that has jurisdiction over the subject involved. However, major bills, or bills consisting of several topics, may be assigned to more than one committee. Senate rules permit, although it infrequently uses, multiple referrals—referral to more than one committee. These can be:

- *Joint referral*: referral to more than one committee at the same time
- *Sequential referral*: referral first to one committee, then to a second when the first completes its work on the measure, and so on
- *Split referral*: referral of various parts of a bill to different committees at the same time

The House also uses multiple referrals (sequential and split referrals), although the 104th Congress abolished joint referrals. The 104th Congress changed House rules to permit the Speaker to designate a *committee of primary jurisdiction*, that is, a committee with primary responsibility for a measure, and expand the Speaker's authority to appoint ad hoc committees to consider a single piece of legislation. These changes were designed to increase the Speaker's power by making the committees more accountable to him and the majority party program.

Rider

In the Senate, an amendment that is unrelated (not germane) to the bill. Acceptable in the Senate, riders are subject to a [point of order](#) in the House and as such usually are not permitted.

Roll call vote

A [vote](#) where Members' names are called individually. Used in the Senate to buy time for last-minute negotiations, the roll is called (or read through name by name) up to three times by the clerk. A good clerk can speed up or delay the roll call by how fast or slow he or she reads the names. Due to its size, the House rarely uses roll call votes, instead relying on votes by electronic device.

Rules

Rules are the published parliamentary procedures under which both the House and the Senate operate. Nevertheless, there are rules and then there are rules. Both Chambers approve rules of procedure at the beginning of each Congress. They can be found in the [Congressional Record](#) for the date its rules are approved by a Chamber and are available in LexisNexis Congressional. There is also the House-only procedure of approving a simple resolution (or *H. Res.*) reported by the [House Committee on Rules](#) that sets the parameters for debate of a bill.

Section-by-section analysis

A summary of the contents of a bill organized by its sections. Often prepared by the bill's sponsor or (in the case of a reported bill) by committee staff, a section-by-section analysis is a good source of information on [legislative intent](#). A section-by-section analysis sometimes can be found in [introductory statements](#) in the [hearing](#) on the bill, the committee [report](#) on the bill, or in debate about the measure.

Sine die

(Latin, meaning *without a day*) Signals the completion of all legislative business and final adjournment. Congress adjourns *sine die* before an election.

Slip law

The first official print of the law. A slip law is printed by the GPO in pamphlet form for speedy distribution. It may

contain margin notes prepared by employees of the House and Senate indicating where provisions of the new law will appear or where the law in the *U.S. Code* is being amended by the slip law.

Special or Select Committee

A committee of limited duration and breadth, usually designed to investigate or oversee one particular aspect of public policy. Legislation is not referred to these committees, nor do they produce legislative proposals. However, they hold hearings and frequently issue informative staff studies. The Senate Special Committee on Aging and the House Select Committee on Intelligence are just two examples of this type of committee.

Special orders

Floor speeches by Members on topics unrelated to legislative business at hand. In the House, time is set aside for special order speeches after legislative business is concluded for the day. A Member must reserve time with the leadership in order to be recognized for purposes of speaking. In the Senate, special orders speeches may be scheduled during [morning business](#).

Sponsor

The principal Senator or Representative introducing a measure. The sponsor's name is listed before any other names on the bill print and in the daily list of measures introduced that appears in the Congressional Record.

Statement of the managers

The explanatory (non-bill text) portion of a conference report. It usually contains a discussion of the House and Senate passed versions of the bill and the conference agreement. This discussion is a good starting-point for research into the [legislative history](#) of a particular provision of a law.

Statutes at Large

The official compilation of public and private laws printed by the [Government Printing Office](#). The Statutes at Large is printed annually and the laws within it are arranged by order of passage.

Submitted for the hearing record

Statements and supporting material may be submitted for the hearing record by Members of Congress, witnesses, or

other interested parties. Submitted materials may be included along with the hearing transcript in the published hearing or may be referenced in the published hearing, but retained in committee files.

Substitute amendment

An amendment that completely replaces language in a bill with different language. Substitute amendments can be offered in subcommittee, committee, or on the floor. If accepted, the substitute “kills” the replaced text. A form of substitute amendment occurs when a motion is made to “*strike all after the enacting clause*” of a bill passed by the other Chamber “*and insert in lieu thereof*” the text of its own, already-approved legislation. The result of this is two versions of a bill under one bill number, and is the first step toward a [conference](#) to resolve the differences between the two versions.

Sunshine Act meetings (Federal Register)

Notices of meetings published under the Government in the Sunshine Act (P.L. 94-409), which requires that certain Federal agency meetings be open to the public.

Suspend the rules and pass

(also known as **suspension of the rules**) In the House, another shortcut designed to streamline consideration of legislation. Employed at the Speaker’s discretion and used generally only for minor or non-controversial measures, it has on occasion been used for complex or controversial bills. In the actual motion (“*I move to suspend the rules and pass H.R.*”), “rules” refers to the rules of procedure of the House. In effect, it asks that the House rules concerning consideration of this bill be relaxed. Debate under the suspension procedure is limited to 40 minutes, evenly divided between proponents and opponents. No [amendments](#) from the floor are allowed, although amendments to the bill can be included in the motion to suspend the rules (“*I move to suspend the rules... as amended*”). A two-thirds majority of those present and voting under this procedure is necessary for the bill to pass. If the suspension motion fails, the bill is returned to the [calendar](#) and is available for later consideration under regular House procedures.

Sustain

If either Chamber fails to garner enough votes to override a veto, it has sustained the veto, and the bill does not become

law.

Three-day rule

House rules require a [conference report](#) to “lay over” three days (that is, be available for study by House Members for three days) before it can be voted on. However, this rule can be overridden by [unanimous consent](#) in the House and often is, particularly when Congress is rushing to finish its work and adjourn.

Transcript

An official transcript of a legislative hearing contains not only the oral transcript of every member of the Committee and witness statements during the hearing, but also witnesses’ prepared statements and any material submitted by witnesses or other interested parties “for the hearing record”. Such material can be a good source of information about the issue or the problem the measure addresses. The transcript of an oversight hearing contains witness testimony and statements, as well as staff studies or other material describing the agency or program being studied. The transcript of an investigative hearing is similar to that of a court proceeding in that witnesses are sworn in and the proceeding is more adversarial than it is in oversight or legislative hearings.

Treaties

The Constitution gives power in the treaty-making process to both the President and the Senate. As chief executive, the President negotiates with foreign governments on treaties and other international agreements. A treaty is not effective until the two-thirds of the Senate gives its consent for the President to sign, or “ratify”, the treaty. The Senate’s consent may include amendments or interpretations about how the treaty should be implemented. These changes (or reservations) may result in further negotiation with the foreign government. The House has no power in the actual ratification process. The House can be involved in the implementation of a treaty should there be a need for an amendment to current U.S. law or if funding is needed to complete requirements of the treaty. Documents that are produced in the ratification process include [Treaty Documents](#) and [Executive Reports](#).

Unanimous consent agreement

The first step in Senate floor debate on a bill. The leadership negotiates an agreement establishing ground

rules for debate of a measure in the Senate and then makes a motion requesting unanimous consent that the agreement be accepted. It only takes a single Senator objecting to the motion to kill the agreement and halt further action on the bill.

Unanimous consent request

Any request made in this form (“*I ask unanimous consent that...*”) can be defeated by a single Member objecting to the request. Prior to 1995, some noncontroversial bills in the House were placed on the Consent Calendar (since abolished) and could be considered and quickly passed using this procedure.

Version

See [Versions of a Bill](#).

Veto

Article I, Section 7 of the Constitution grants the President authority to disapprove legislation passed by Congress. A bill that is disapproved, or vetoed, is returned to Congress with a [Presidential message](#) outlining the reasons for vetoing the bill. Congress then must decide whether to override or sustain the veto.

Votes

In parliamentary practice, a vote is called to decide a question or a motion, or to pass a piece of legislation to the next stage in the legislative process. There are different types of votes in both the House and the Senate, including:

- **Voice vote:** a vote in which the presiding officer puts forth the proposition and calls for the “ayes” and then the “nays”. Supporters shout “aye”, opponents shout “no”, and the chair announces the vote with the phrase “in the opinion of the chair, the ayes (or the noes) have it”. Before the chair announces the final results, a Member may ask for a division or record vote. In both Chambers, most questions are put to a voice vote first.
- **Division (standing) vote:** a vote in which those in the Chamber in favor of a proposition stand up and are counted by the chair, followed by those in opposition. In the Senate, division votes are unusual and are sometimes taken by Senators raising their hands instead of rising.
- **Record vote:** includes all votes in which the names of Members voting on each side are individually recorded and the cumulative totals of yeas and nays are compiled. In the House, record votes include both yea and nay and recorded votes. Since 1973, record votes in the House have normally taken

place by electronic device. Members vote with electronic voting cards, and their votes are displayed on an electronic board. The Senate refers to record votes as yea and nay votes or roll-call votes, and does not use an electronic voting system. Senators can ask for a roll-call vote at any time a question is pending without having to wait for a voice or division vote to take place first.

Voting record

A list of votes cast by a Member. A voting record is one of the best indications of a Member's general ideology and position on specific issues.

Weekly Compilation of Presidential Documents

A weekly publication that contains a wide range of Presidential documents, including speeches, executive orders, proclamations, etc.