

FEDERAL LEGISLATIVE PROCESS

A Resource From



EAF

Employers Association Forum

Legislative Process
How a Bill Becomes a Law – Senate

Bill Status	People Involved	Where
Bill is drafted	Senator, Representative, White House, State Legislatures, Organizations, Scholars, Constituents.	Office, library, home
Bill is introduced by Senator	Senator by way of the Parliamentarian	Senate Chamber
If no objection heard, bill is considered read twice, and referred to the appropriate committee.	Parliamentarian on behalf of Presiding Officer	Senate Chamber
Bill is entered on the Senate Journal	Journal Clerk	Senate Chamber
Bill is given a number	Bill Clerk	Bill Clerk's Office
Bill is entered into ledgers and the Legislative Information System and marked up for printing	Bill Clerk	Bill Clerk's Office
Bill is delivered to Government Printing Office	Bill Clerk	Messenger picks up
Printed Bill is made available in Senate and House document rooms, and electronically on the Legislative Information System and on www.senate.gov	Government Printing Office	Government Printing Office
Printed Bill is delivered to appropriate committee	Government Printing Office	
Committee Action (see attachment # 1)		
Bill is placed on the Legislative Calendar	Legislative Clerk	Senate Chamber
Unanimous consent requested to lay bill before the Senate	Majority Leader	Senate Chamber
If consent is granted, the Presiding Officer instructs the Legislative Clerk to report the title	Legislative Clerk on behalf of the Presiding Officer	Senate Chamber
Bill is debated and Amendment(s) are submitted or proposed	Senator	Senate Chamber
The Amending Process (see attachment # 2)		
The Presiding Officer instructs the Legislative Clerk to read the title a third and final time	Legislative Clerk on behalf of Presiding Officer	Senate Chamber
Call for a vote (See attachment # 3)	Senator	Senate Chamber
Bill voted on by roll call vote, voice vote, unanimous consent, or division	Senators	Senate Chamber
If bill is passed the final copy is prepared	Enrolling Clerk	Enrolling Clerk's office
Engrossed bill signed	Secretary of the Senate	Secretary of the Senate's office
Delivered to the House of Representatives	Enrolling Clerk	House of Representatives Chamber
House Action	updates on the status of th	House Chamber and House Committees
Bill is passed by the House of	House Reading Clerk	House Chamber

Bill Status	People Involved	Where
Representatives and delivered back to the Senate		
If not amended by House, bill is enrolled in the Senate	Enrolling Clerk	Senate Chamber
Enrolled bill is signed (see attachment # 5)	President Pro Tempore of the Senate and the Speaker of the House	U.S. Capitol
Bill is delivered to White House	Overseen by Secretary of the Senate	
The bill is signed into law or vetoed (see attachment # 6)	President of the United States	White House
OR bill is amended by House of Representatives	Representative	House Chamber
Amended bill is delivered to the Senate	House Reading Clerk	Senate Chamber
Senate may disagree to House Amendment and requests a conference	Senators	Senate Chamber
Conference Committee Action (see attachment # 4)		
If the bill is agreed to, it is enrolled (see attachment # 5)	Enrolling Clerk	
Enrolled bill is signed	President Pro Tempore of the Senate and Speaker of the House	U.S. Capitol
Bill is delivered to White House	Secretary of the Senate oversees delivery	
Bill is signed into law or vetoed (see attachment # 6)	President of the United States	White House

Attachment # 1 - Committee Action

Legislation is referred to a committee after introduction, according to its subject matter. Most commonly, a committee will further refer the legislation to one of its subcommittees. The subcommittee may request reports from government agencies or departments, hold hearings, mark up the bill (adopt revisions), and report the legislation to the full committee.

The full committee may take similar action, with or without prior subcommittee consideration, and report the legislation to its full chamber.

Committee Hearings - Regardless of the type of hearing, or whether a hearing is held in Washington or elsewhere, hearings share common aspects of planning and preparation. Senate standing committees and subcommittees are authorized to meet and to hold hearings when the Senate is in session, and when it has recessed or adjourned. To minimize conflicts with floor activities, a committee may not meet, without unanimous consent, on any day after the Senate has been in session for two hours, or after 2:00 p.m. when the Senate is in session.

Senate Rule XXVI requires each committee (except Appropriations and Budget) to give at least one week's notice of the date, place, and subject of a hearing; however, a committee may hold a hearing with less than one week's notice if it determines that there is "good cause." These notices appear in the Daily Digest section of the Congressional Record.

While the Senate rule requires a one week public notice, a separate standing order of the Senate requires each Senate committee to notify the Daily Digest Office as soon as a hearing is scheduled [S.Res. 4, 95th Congress]. Hearings are generally open to the public, but can be closed by a committee roll-call vote in open session if the subject matter falls within specific categories enumerated in Senate rules.

Although a committee chair determines the agenda and selects witnesses, the minority typically works informally with the majority to invite witnesses representing its views. Senate rules allow the minority-party members of a committee (except Appropriations) to call witnesses of their choice on at least one day of a hearing. Witnesses before Senate committees generally must provide the committee with a copy of their written testimony at least one day before their oral testimony, with specifics set out in individual committee rules. It is common practice to request witnesses to limit their oral remarks to a brief summary of the written testimony.

A question-and-answer period generally follows a witness's testimony. Each committee determines the order in which Senators question witnesses. Although Senate rules do not restrict the length of time each Senator may question a witness, several committees have adopted such rules. Some committees also authorize committee staff to question witnesses.

Committee Markup - A markup is a meeting of the committee to debate and consider amendments to a measure under consideration. The markup determines whether the measure pending before a committee will be recommended to the full Senate, and whether it should be amended in any substantive way.

Procedures in markup for the most part reflect procedures used on the Senate floor, possibly modified by an individual committee's rules. The process begins when the chair of the committee schedules and sets the agenda for the markup. In leading a markup, the chair has broad discretion choosing the legislative vehicle and presenting it for consideration and amendment. The measure that is marked up may be one that was introduced in the Senate, or received from the House and referred to the committee. Alternatively the chair may choose to consider the text of a draft measure that has not been introduced, such as a subcommittee-reported version or a chairman's mark. In still other cases, the markup vehicle may be placed before the committee as an "amendment in the nature of a substitute" for the measure or text initially referred to it.

Reporting Legislation - When a committee concludes its markup, any committee member may move to order the measure reported to the Senate. A committee has several options for the form in which the measure is ordered reported. It may be reported with no changes, with amendments to various sections adopted in markup, or with one amendment in the nature of a substitute. In addition, a Senate committee is authorized to report an original bill that embodies a text decided upon in markup.

Senate rules require the physical presence of a majority of the committee in order to report a measure. Absent Senators may vote by proxy on reporting a measure unless a committee has adopted a rule to the contrary, but such proxy votes may not effect the outcome of a vote to report a measure, and proxies may not be counted to determine a quorum.

Following a committee's vote to order a measure reported, it is the duty of the committee's chairman to report the measure promptly to the Senate. When a committee reports a measure, it generally prepares an accompanying written report that describes the purposes and provisions of the measure. If a report is submitted, Senate rules and statutes

require the inclusion of such components as records of roll-call votes cast in committee, cost estimates, a statement of regulatory impact, and the specific changes the legislation would make to existing law. Committee members are also entitled to at least three days to prepare supplementary, minority, or additional views for inclusion in the report.

Attachment # 2 - The Amending Process

Floor consideration of a measure usually begins with opening statements by the floor managers, and often by other Senators. The managers usually are the chair and ranking minority member of the reporting committee or pertinent subcommittee.

The first amendments usually to be considered are those recommended by the reporting committee. If the committee has proposed many amendments, the manager often obtains unanimous consent that these amendments be adopted, but that all provisions of the measure as amended remain open to further amendment. After committee amendments are disposed of, amendments may be offered to any part of the measure in any order. If the committee recommends a substitute for the full text of the measure, the substitute normally remains open to amendment throughout its consideration.

The Senate may dispose of each amendment either by voting on it directly or by voting to table it. The motion to table cannot be debated; and, if the Senate agrees to it, the effect is the same as a vote to defeat the amendment. If the Senate defeats the motion, however, debate on the amendment may resume.

While an amendment is pending, Senators may propose amendments to it (called second-degree amendments) and to the part of the measure the amendment would change. The Senate votes on each of these amendments before it votes on the first-degree amendment (the amendment to the measure). Many additional complications exist. When a complete substitute for a measure is pending, for example, Senators can propose six or more first- and second-degree amendments to the substitute and the measure before any votes must occur.

If an amendment is considered under a time limitation, Senators may make no motions or points of order, or propose other amendments, until all the time for debating the amendment has been used or yielded back. Sometimes, however, the Senate unanimously consents to lay aside pending amendments temporarily in order to consider another amendment to the measure.

The amending process continues until the Senate orders the bill engrossed and read a third time, which precludes further amendment. Then the Senate votes on final passage.

Attachment # 3 - Voting

Article. I, sec. 5, paragraph 3 of the Constitution provides that one-fifth of those present (11 Senators, if no more than a quorum is present) can order the yeas and nays - also known as a rollcall vote or a recorded vote. If a Senator asks for the yeas and nays on a pending question, and the Senate orders them, it does not mean that a vote will occur immediately. Instead ordering the yeas and nays means that whenever the vote does occur, it will be by roll call and will be recorded in the Journal. Otherwise, votes can be taken by voice vote, unanimous consent, or division.

Attachment # 4 - Conference Committees

A bill cannot become a law of the land until it has been approved in identical form by both houses of Congress. Once the Senate amends and agrees to a bill that the House already has passed -- or the House amends and passes a Senate bill -- the two houses may begin to resolve their legislative differences by way of a conference committee or through an exchange of amendments between the houses.

If the Senate does not accept the House's position, one of the chambers may propose creation of a conference committee to negotiate and resolve the matters in disagreement between the two chambers. Typically, the Senate gets to conference with the House by adopting this standard motion: "Mr. President, I move that the Senate insist on its amendment(s) (or "disagree to the House amendment(s)" to the Senate-passed measure), request a conference with the House on the disagreeing votes thereon, and that the Chair be authorized to appoint conferees." This triple motion rolled into one -- to insist (or disagree), request, and appoint -- is commonly agreed to by unanimous consent. The presiding officer formally appoints the Senate's conferees. (The Speaker names the House conferees.) Conferees are traditionally drawn from the committee of jurisdiction, but conferees representing other Senate interests may also be appointed.

There are no formal rules that outline how conference meetings are to be organized. Routinely, the principals from each chamber or their respective staffs conduct pre-conference meetings so as to expedite the bargaining process when the conference formally convenes. Informal practice also determines who will be the overall conference chair (each chamber has its own leader in conference). Rotation of the chairmanship between the chambers is usually the practice when

matched pairs of panels (the tax or appropriations panels, for example) convene in conference regularly. For standing committees that seldom meet in conference, the choice of who will chair the conference is generally resolved by the conference leaders from each chamber. The decision on when and where to meet and for how long are a few prerogatives of the chair, who consults on these matters with his or her counterpart from the other body.

Once the two chambers go to conference, the respective House and Senate conferees bargain and negotiate to resolve the matters in bicameral disagreement. Resolution is embodied in a conference report, signed by a majority of Senate conferees and House conferees. The conference report must be agreed to by both chambers before it is cleared for presidential consideration. In the Senate, conference reports are usually brought up by unanimous consent at a time agreed to by the party leaders and floor managers. Because conference reports are privileged, if any Senator objects to the unanimous consent request, a nondebatable motion can be made to take up the conference report. Approval of the conference report itself is subject to extended debate, but conference reports are not open to amendment.

Almost all of the most important measures are sent to conference, but these are only a minority of the bills that the two houses pass each year.

Attachment # 5 - Enrollment

After the Senate and House resolve all their disagreements concerning a bill or joint resolution, all the original papers are transmitted to the enrolling clerk of the originating chamber, who has the measure printed on parchment, certified by the chief officer of the originating chamber, and signed by the Speaker of the House and by either the Vice President (who is the President of the Senate) or the authorized presiding officer of the Senate. The enrolled bill then goes to the President for his approval or veto.

Attachment # 6 - Presidential Action

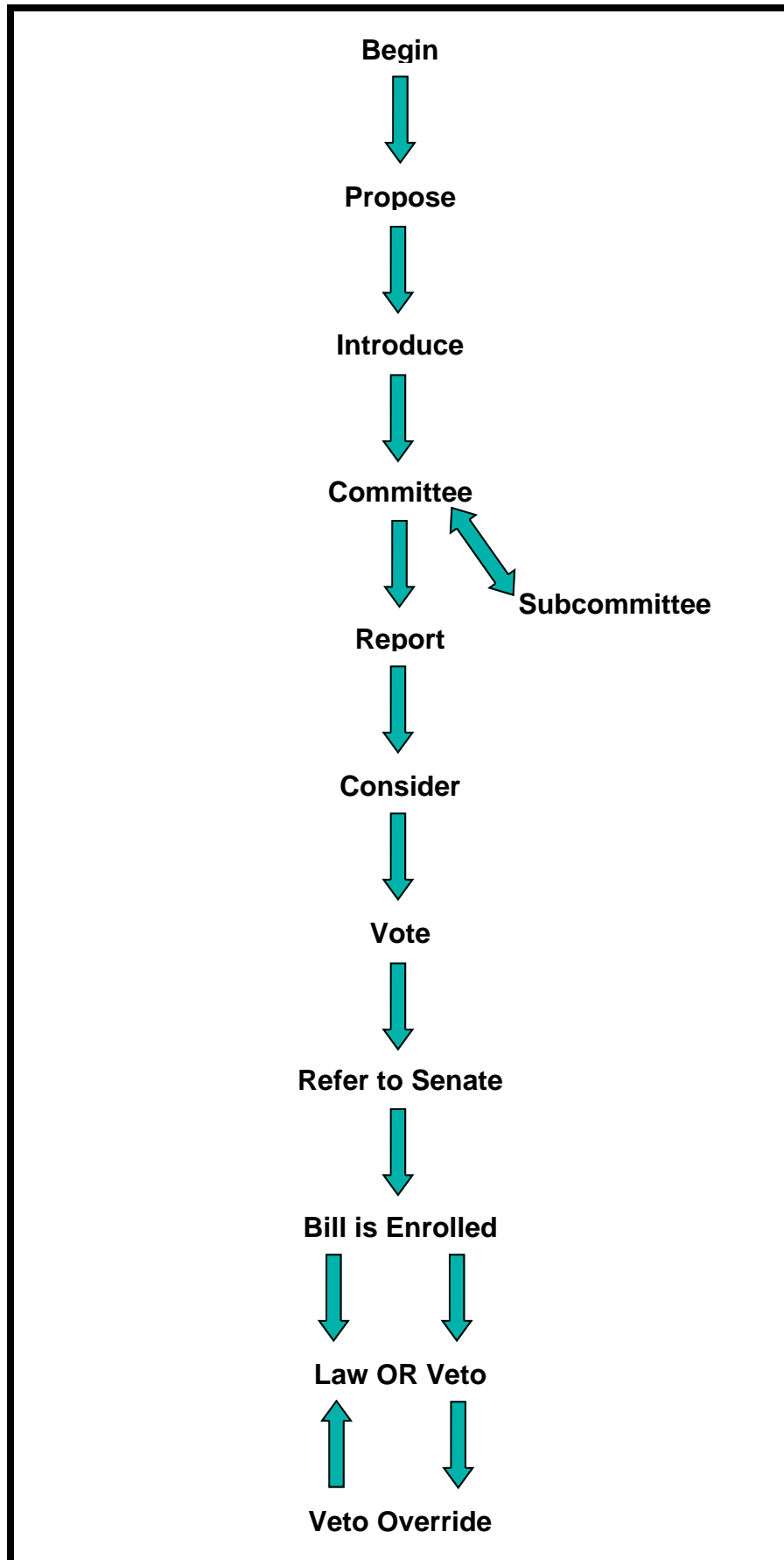
Pursuant to Article 1, section 7 of the Constitution, "Every Bill, which shall have passed the House of Representatives and the Senate, shall, before it become a Law, be presented to the President of the United States; . . . "

If the President approves and signs the measure within 10 days, it becomes law. The 10-day period begins on midnight of the day the President receives the measure, and Sundays are not counted. Thus, if the President were to receive an enrolled measure on Thursday, February 14th, the first day of the 10-day period would be Friday, February 15th; the last day would be Tuesday, February 26th.

If the President objects to a measure, he may veto it by returning it to its chamber of origin together with a statement of his objections, again within the same 10-day period. Unless both chambers subsequently vote by a 2/3 majority to override the veto, the measure does not become law.

If the President does not act on a measure-approving or vetoing it-within 10 days, the fate of the measure depends on whether Congress is in session. If Congress is in session, the bill becomes law without the President's approval. If Congress is not in session, the measure does not become law. Presidential inaction when Congress is not in session is known as a pocket veto. Congress has interpreted the use of the pocket veto to be limited to the final, so-called sine die adjournment of the originating chamber. The President's pocket veto authority is not definitively decided.

Legislative Process
How a Bill Becomes a Law – House of Representatives



Legislative Process

How a Bill Becomes a Law – House of Representatives

Beginning of a Bill

- An idea for a bill may come from anybody, however only Members of Congress can introduce a bill in Congress. Bills can be introduced at any time the House is in session.
- There are four basic types of legislation: bills; joint resolutions; concurrent resolutions; and simple resolutions.

A bill's type must be determined. A private bill affects a specific person or organization rather than the population at large. A public bill is one that affects the general public.

Proposal of a Bill

- After the idea for a bill is developed and the text of the bill is written, a Member of Congress must officially introduce the bill in Congress by becoming the bill's sponsor.
- Representatives usually sponsor bills that are important to them and their constituents.
- Representatives who sponsor bills will try to gain support for them, in hopes that they will become laws.

Two or more sponsors for the same bill are called co-sponsors.

Introduction of a Bill

- Bills can be introduced whenever the House is in session.
- In the House, bills are officially introduced by placing them in a special box known as the *hopper*, which is located at the rostrum, or Speaker's platform. In the Senate, a bill is introduced by placing it on the presiding officer's desk or by formally introducing it on the Senate Floor.
- In the House, a bill clerk assigns the bill a number. House bills begin with "H.R." Resolutions begin with "H. Res.," "H. Con. Res.," or "H. J. Res.," depending what type they are. Senate bills begin with "S."
- The first reading of a bill means the bill's title is read on the House Floor. The bill is then referred to a committee for markup.
- The Library of Congress then receives an electronic copy of the bill and posts the bill and its status on THOMAS, a public website.

Committee Action

- The bill is referred to the appropriate committee. The 19 House standing committees and 16 Senate committees each have jurisdiction over different areas of public policy, such as agriculture, education and the workforce, and international relations.
- The bill is placed on the committee's calendar.
- The committee debates on and marks up the proposed bill, and may or may not make changes to it.
- Committee members vote to accept or reject the changes made during the markup session.
- If a bill includes many amendments, the committee may decide to introduce a "*clean bill*" with a new number.
- The committee votes on the bill after it has been debated and/or amended.
- A committee may stop action, or "*table*" a bill it deems unwise or unnecessary.
- THOMAS, a Library of Congress website, posts the status of the bill and updates on major action taken on the bill. Each version of the text of a bill is posted on THOMAS, under Text of Legislation.
- If the bill is not tabled, it will be sent either to a subcommittee for intensive study, or reported back to the House Floor.

Subcommittee Action

- The bill is referred to a subcommittee, and placed on its calendar.
- The bill is carefully studied. The subcommittee may hold hearings to obtain the views of experts, supporters, and opponents.
- The bill is tabled when the subcommittee deems it unwise or unnecessary.
- If changes are needed, the subcommittee will meet to mark up the bill.
- Subcommittee members vote to accept or reject the changes.
- If the subcommittee accepts the bill, the bill is sent back to the full committee for approval or rejection.
- THOMAS, from the Library of Congress website, receives updates on the status of the bill from the subcommittee and posts the most recent major action on the bill.

The Bill is Reported

- The bill is released from the committee, along with a report explaining the provisions of the bill, and is thus ordered *reported*.
- The reported bill is put on one of five House calendars, the Union Calendar and the House Calendar being the most commonly used.
- The bill is sent to the House Floor for consideration.
- THOMAS, a Library of Congress website, receives updates on the status of the bill from the committee and posts the most recent major action.

The Bill is Considered on the House Floor

- A bill can come to the House Floor for consideration in a variety of ways. Many House bills are debated through a parliamentary device known as the Committee of the Whole, which is a mechanism that permits faster consideration.
- Floor action begins and Members debate the bill.
- The conduct of debate is dictated by the Rules of the House generally, and may also be governed by a special rule granted specifically for the bill under consideration.
- Following debate, the second reading of the bill begins in a section-by-section manner, during which amendments may be offered.
- At the conclusion of all amendment debate, the bill is read a third time.
- Next, the House is ready to vote on the bill.
- Current Floor Proceedings including major actions on bills are posted for public view on the website of the Clerk of the House.
- The THOMAS website by the Library of Congress receives an electronic copy of the debate as it appears in the Congressional Record, prepared by the Clerk of the House. The latest major action on a bill is posted on the THOMAS website.

The Bill is Put to a Vote

- The bill is read by title only and put to a vote.
- Members in attendance will vote to pass or not to pass the bill.
- Members most often vote electronically in the House Chamber using the Electronic Voting System. Members of the Senate cast their votes by non-electronic means.
- Roll Call votes cast by the U.S. House of Representatives are recorded in the House Journal, the Congressional Record, and posted on the website of the Clerk of the House.
- Members may vote "Yea" for approval, "Nay" for disapproval, or "Present" to record that they were in attendance but chose not to vote.
- If a majority of the House votes to pass the bill, the bill is then referred to the Senate to undergo a similar process of approval.
- The THOMAS website logs the Roll Number for a vote under "Bill Status."

The Bill is Referred to the Senate

- When a bill passes in the House, it must also pass in the Senate in order to become a law. The two houses of Congress make up the bicameral legislature, part of a system of checks and balances that ensures that laws are created democratically.
- Once the bill and its amendments has been officially passed by the House and certified by the Clerk, it is said to be "engrossed."
- In the Senate, the bill again may be sent to a committee for study or markup.
- Members may choose to ignore the bill and continue to work on their own legislation.
- Members may vote to pass or not to pass the bill.
- If the bill passes with different language, it must be sent for review to a conference committee, which is a committee made up of members from both the House and the Senate.
- Differences must be agreed upon before the bill is sent to the President for signature. At this point the bill is "enrolled."
- The THOMAS website logs the latest major action on the bill under "Bill Status."

The Bill is sent to the President

- When a bill passes in the House and Senate and is sent to the President for a signature, it is said to be enrolled.
- The President can take one of several possible actions:
 - ★ The president may take no action. If Congress is in session, the bill automatically becomes law after ten days.
 - ★ A pocket veto occurs when the president takes no action and Congress has adjourned its session. In this case, the bill dies and does not become a law.
 - ★ The president may decide that the bill is unwise or unnecessary and veto the bill.
 - ★ The president may sign the bill, and the bill becomes law.
- The THOMAS website indicates when a bill is sent to the President and whether it becomes law.

The Bill Becomes a Law

- If the President signs the bill, or takes no action while Congress is in session, then the bill becomes a law.
- If Congress overrides a presidential veto, the bill becomes a law.
- New public and private laws are prepared and published by the Office of the Federal Register (OFR) of the National Archives and Records Administration (NARA).
- THOMAS lists public laws by law number.

The Bill is Vetoed

- If the President decides a bill is unwise or unnecessary, the President does not sign the bill, but issues an official statement of objections to the bill called a *veto*.
- The President can veto a bill indirectly by withholding approval of the bill until Congress has adjourned *sine die*. This informal way of preventing a bill from becoming a law is called a pocket veto.
- When the President issues a veto, the bill returns to its House of origin.
- Objections to the veto are read and debated on the House Floor.
- If there are enough objections in the House to the presidential veto, a vote is taken to *override*, or overrule, the veto.
- If the House does not vote on a veto override, the bill is stalled and does not become a law.
- A tally of presidential vetoes and pocket vetoes is available on the Clerk's website in Historical Highlights.

The Veto is Overridden

- If enough Members object to the presidential veto, a vote is taken to *override*, or overrule the veto.
- A two-thirds vote or greater is needed in both the House and the Senate to override the President's veto. If two-thirds of both houses of Congress vote successfully to override the veto, the bill becomes a law.
- If the House and Senate do not override the veto, the bill "dies" and does not become a law.

★ LEGISLATIVE PROCESS ★

