

Module 3: Congress

Topic 3 Content: How a Bill Becomes a Law

Introduction



Glover Mint: The legislative branch of the government is responsible for writing the law. You may be wondering exactly how this process works. The legislative process is actually quite simple. To explain the details of how a bill becomes a law, we have our legislative analyst, Bill O'Law, joining live via satellite.

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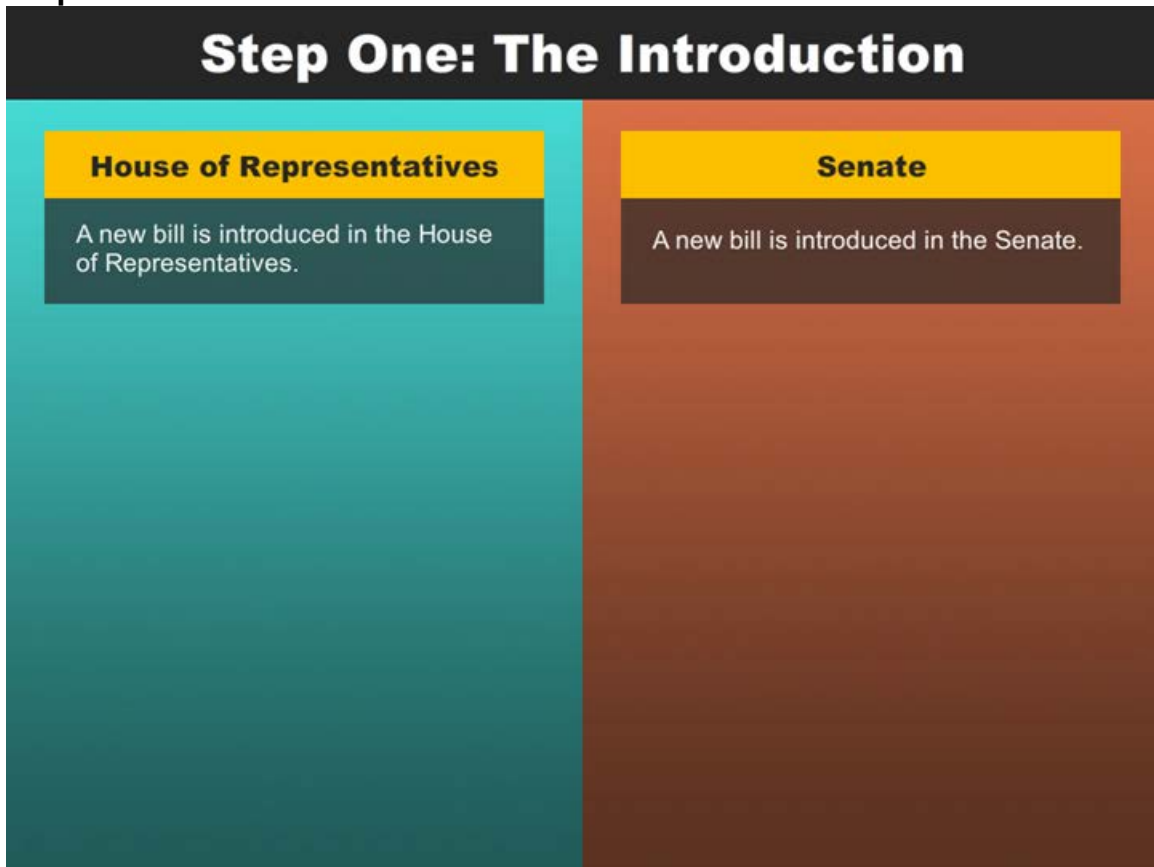
How a Bill Becomes a Law



Bill O'Law: Thank you, Glover. It would be my pleasure to explain our legislative process.

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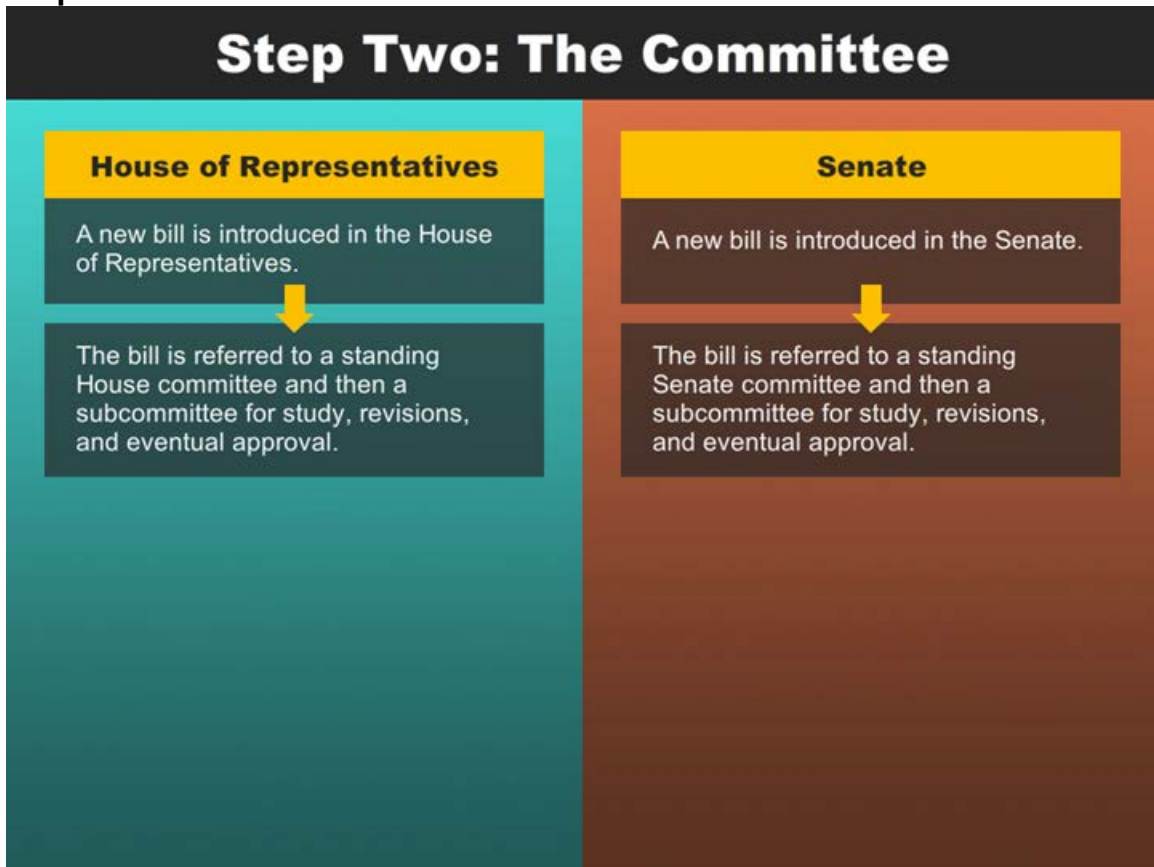
Step One: The Introduction



Bill O'Law: The first step of the process is when a bill is introduced in either the House or the Senate. Although an idea for a bill can originate from constituents, members of Congress, the President of the United States, or any other source, only a member of Congress has the power to introduce a bill to officially be considered for legislation.

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Step Two: The Committee

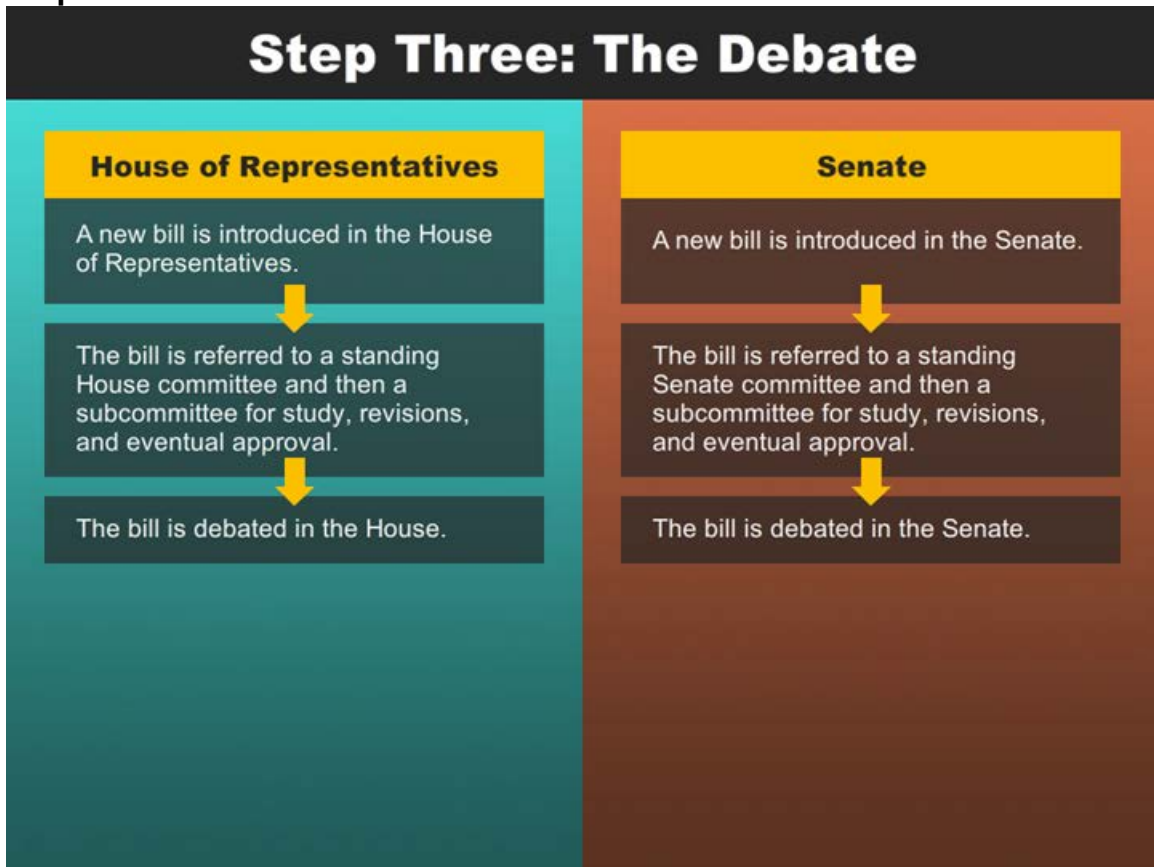


Bill O’Law: Once a bill has been introduced, it is referred to a standing committee of the chamber in which it originated. That means bills proposed in the House are assigned to House committees and bills originating in the Senate are assigned to Senate committees.

After reaching the standing committee, the bill will be assigned to a subcommittee for review. The subcommittee members will gather and analyze information related to the bill. The bill may go through several cycles of revision and approval before it moves on to next step.

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Step Three: The Debate

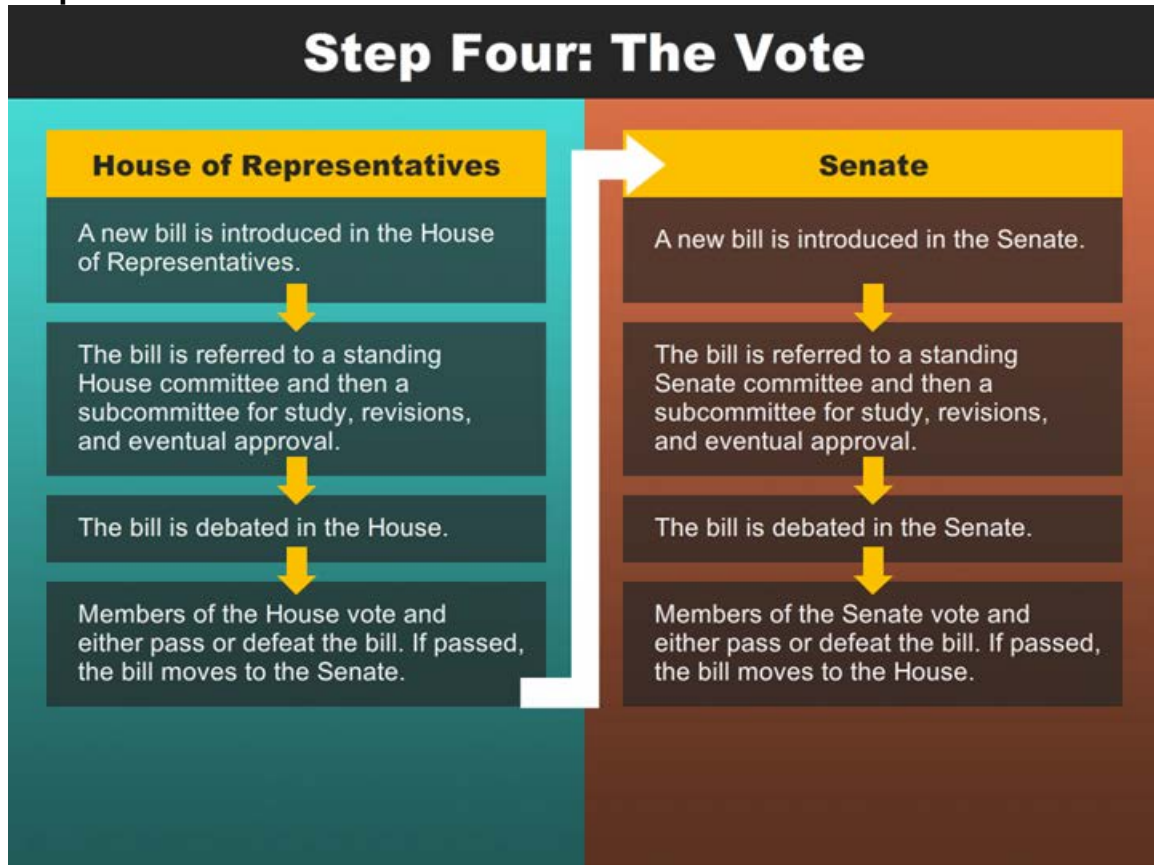


Bill O'Law: After the bill has been revised and approved by the subcommittee, it is debated on the floor of the house in which originated. The Speaker of the House oversees the debates in the House of Representatives and the Vice President oversees the debates in the Senate. In the absence of the Vice President, the president pro tempore assumes the Vice President's responsibility.

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Step Four: The Vote



Bill O'Law: Members of the House vote on bills that originate in the House. If the House passes the bill, it is then introduced in the Senate. The bill will then repeat these four steps in the Senate. If the Senate approves the bill, then the bill is sent to the President.

Members of the Senate vote on bills that originate in the Senate. If the Senate passes the bill, it is then introduced in the House. The bill will then be subjected to these same four steps in the House. If the House approves the bill, then the bill is sent to the President.

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Conference Committee

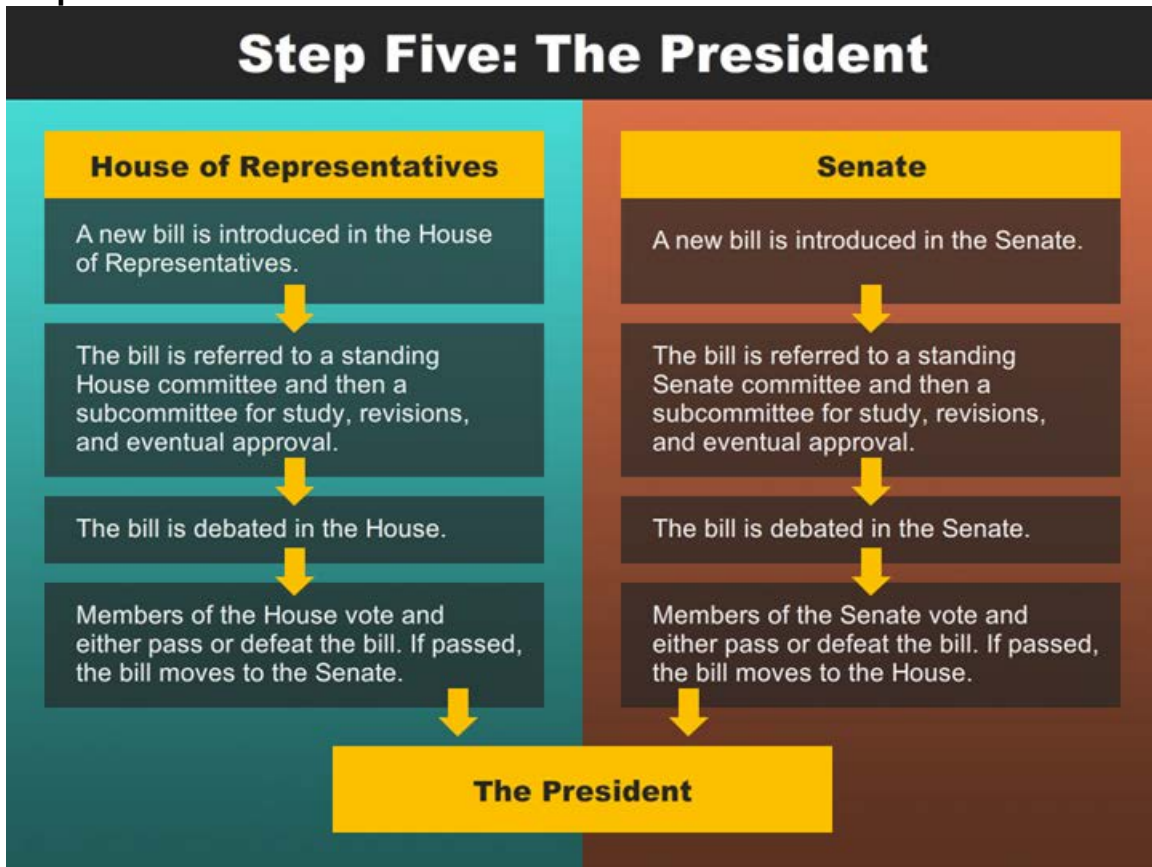


Bill O'Law: As I said, if both houses approve the bill it is sent to the President for approval. What happens if a bill that originated in the House is approved by the Senate, but with new amendments to the original bill? What if the Senate passes a bill that is similar to a bill passed in the House?

In situations like these, the bill is sent to a Conference Committee, which is a joint committee consisting of members of the House and the Senate. This occurs when two similar, but not identical, bills have been passed by both chambers. The Conference Committee works to negotiate a compromise on which both houses can agree. The newly revised bill is voted on in each house and then, pending the approval of both houses, it is sent to the President. If the Senate and the House of Representatives do not both approve the revised bill, it may kill the bill. The bill may also be sent back to the Conference Committee for additional revisions, which is more likely if the legislation is popular with both houses.

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Step Five: The President



Bill O'Law: When has the bill has been approved by both chambers of Congress, it will be sent to the President for final approval. This may occur with or without the involvement of the Conference Committee. The President may choose to sign the bill into law or veto the bill. Vetoed bills are returned to Congress. With the approval of two-thirds of each house, Congress may overturn a presidential veto. Thanks for having me, Glover and Demi.

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Ending of Episode



Glover Mint: Thank you, Bill. A bill does not need to originate in a certain chamber of Congress, but where the bill originates is denoted by an S. or H.R. That way, everyone knows where the bill began. This is WUSG News. Thanks for watching.