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The Legislative Branches powers are enumerated in Article I of the United States Constitution. But their main power is to make laws as identified in Sections One and Seven. How do they do this? How does the Senate and the House of Representatives pass laws for the entire nation? Using the Families First Coronavirus Response Act and C-SPAN videos as an example, students will identify and analyze the process of how a bill becomes a law. Students will be able to explain and order seven basic steps for how a bill becomes a law. Background Information: Have the students review the following background information about how a bill becomes a law. Students should be able to explain the following steps. Student can use the graphic linked below to review this. Graphic: 7 Steps: How A Bill Becomes A Law (Google Slide)1) Introduction of bill in either the House or Senate2) Work on bill in either in committees3) Debate on bill on the House or Senate floor4) Vote on the bill5) Send bill to other chamber6) Repeat process (steps 1-4)7) If bill has passed both houses, send to President to sign or vetoVocabulary Preview: After reviewing the background information, have students test their understanding of the following vocabulary words. You may print this out or you may assign it to each student individually using Google Classroom or Schoology or another classroom platform. This activity is divided into two pages. Activity: Vocabulary Drag and Drop (Google Slide)BillVetoHearingCommitteeChambers of the U.S. CongressHouse of RepresentativesSenateFloor DebateRoll Call VoteINTRODUCTION: Depending on the students' comfort level with this topic, choose one of the following two video clips to provide an explanation of the lawmaking process. Video Clip 1: Senator Boxer Explains How a Bill Becomes a Law (0:36)Video Clip 2: How a Bill Becomes a Law (9:55)After viewing the clips, review the 7 basic steps for how a bill becomes a law. Graphic: 7 Steps: How A Bill Becomes A Law (Google Slide)Then, have students complete the sorting activity linked below. Remember to make a copy of the sorting activity before assigning to each student. You will be able to post this assignment in Google Classroom, Schoology, or other platforms. Activity: Sorting the Steps in the Lawmaking process (Google Slide)Before moving on to the next step, have students pair up and tell each other the 7 steps in the correct order. Assign students to complete the How A Bill Becomes A Law H.R. 6201 Assignment linked below. Students will independently work through the Google Slides presentation, viewing video clips and accessing sites to answer questions within the presentation. Assignment: How A Bill Becomes A Law H.R. 6201 (Google Slides)Remember to make a copy of the document before assigning to each student. You will be able to post this assignment in Google Classroom, Schoology, or other platforms. Teachers can find the answer key to this assignment here. EXTENSION ACTIVITY: Students can create an infographic or comic of the process of How a Bill Becomes a Law, illustrating the 7 steps. Bill Chamber Of CongressCommitteeFloor DebateHearingHouse Of RepresentativesRoll Call VoteSenateVetoLegislative BranchMiddle SchoolA bill is a proposed law which is introduced into Parliament. Once a bill has been debated and then approved by each House of Parliament, and has received Royal Assent, it becomes law and is known as an act. Any Member of Parliament can introduce a bill. Some bills represent agreed government policy, and these are introduced into Parliament by ministers. Other bills are known as Private Members Bills. This guide is about bills which affect the general law of the land. Special Parliamentary procedures apply to bills which apply only to particular people or places, and the government may have little or no involvement in this type of legislation. Bills and acts are often referred to as primary legislation. An act may delegate power to a government minister to make regulations, orders or rules. These are known as secondary (or subordinate) legislation. Legislation can be found on legislation.gov.uk. The decision to legislate For each session of Parliament the government will have a legislative programme, which is a plan of the bills that it will ask Parliament to consider in that session (the period between elections is divided up into sessions, and each of those sessions usually lasts about a year). Other bills may be passed each session that are not part of the legislative programme. These may for example be emergency bills required to deal with a particular issue that has arisen, or they may be Private Members Bills, introduced by a member who is not a part of the government. If a government department has a proposal for a bill that it wants to be included in the legislative programme for a session, it must submit a bid for the bill to the Parliamentary Business and Legislation (PBL) Committee of the Cabinet. PBL Committee will consider all of the bids for that session and make a recommendation to Cabinet about the provisional content of the programme. In considering whether to recommend that a bill should be given a provisional slot, PBL Committee will consider factors such as the need for the bill (and whether a similar outcome can be achieved by secondary legislation or without legislation), its relationship to the political priorities of the government, the progress that has been made in working up the proposals for the bill and whether the bill has been published in draft for consultation. Once the provisional programme has been agreed by Cabinet, PBL Committee will review it in the lead-up to the beginning of the session. About a month before the start of the session the Cabinet will finalise the programme. This will be announced in the Kings Speech at the state opening of Parliament, which begins the session. The policy contained in the bill will also need agreement from the appropriate policy committee of the Cabinet. Preparation of the bill If a bill is given a slot in the legislative programme, the department concerned will create a bill team to co-ordinate its preparation and passage through Parliament. This will consist of a bill manager and other officials working on the bill. The other key players in the department will be the officials with lead responsibility for the policies in the bill and the department's legal advisers. The policy officials will prepare policy instructions for the departmental lawyers. These instructions will in turn form the basis of instructions to the Office of the Parliamentary Counsel to draft the bill. Instructions to counsel will set out the background and relevant current law and explain the changes in the law to be brought about by the bill. There will usually be at least two counsel assigned to the bill, and larger bills may well have more drafters. They will analyse the instructions and may have questions that need to be answered before drafting can begin. Once the drafters feel they have a clear idea of the policy, they will send drafts to the relevant departmental lawyers. The lawyers will discuss the drafts with the relevant policy officials and send comments back. The first draft of a clause or set of clauses for a topic is rarely the final word on that topic, and the process of drafting and commenting on drafts will continue until the drafters and the department are happy that the right result has been achieved by the draft in the clearest possible way. Some provisions in a bill may require input from departments other than the one sponsoring the bill. If the provisions of the bill apply to Wales or extend to Scotland or Northern Ireland, it may also be necessary for the department or the drafter to consult the devolved administration in the relevant part of the UK. Provisions in a bill which relate to matters that have been devolved to Senedd Cymru, the Scottish Parliament or the Northern Ireland Assembly will usually need the consent of that body. Towards introduction Although a bill may have a slot in the legislative programme, it cannot be introduced until it has been specifically cleared for introduction by a meeting of PBL Committee. The committee will consider the final (or near-final) draft of the bill together with a range of other documents. Some of these, like the Explanatory Notes, will be published alongside the bill after introduction. Others, like the departments Parliamentary Handling Strategy and its assessment of the relationship between the bill and the European Convention on Human Rights, are for the committees consideration only. If PBL Committee is satisfied that the bill is ready and that other legal and procedural issues have been resolved, it will approve its introduction subject to any necessary minor and drafting changes. The committee may also decide whether the bill should start in the House of Commons or the House of Lords (see further below). Some bills are published in draft for consultation before introduction. The bill may then go through a process of pre-legislative scrutiny where it is considered by a Parliamentary committee or committees. The committee will take evidence and make recommendations to the government on the bill. These recommendations, together with the consultation responses from members of the public, may mean that elements of the bill are modified before introduction. Publication of a bill in draft still needs the agreement of PBL Committee, although it will normally be cleared by correspondence rather than at a meeting. Parliamentary Stages Most bills can begin either in the House of Commons or in the House of Lords. The government will make this decision based on the need to make sure each House has a balanced programme of legislation to consider each session. However, certain bills must start in the Commons, such as a bill whose main aim is the imposition of taxation (the annual Finance bill is an example of this). Bills of major constitutional importance also conventionally start in the Commons. Most bills will need to go through the following stages in each House before becoming law (what is said below applies to either House except where indicated). First reading This is a purely formal stage at which the title of the bill is read out. There is no debate on the bill. Second reading This is a debate on the main principles of the bill, held in the chamber. A government minister will open the debate by setting out the case for the bill and explaining its provisions. The opposition will respond and then other members are free to discuss it. The government will close the debate by responding to the points made. No amendments can be made to the text of the bill at this stage, although members may give an idea of the changes they will be proposing at later stages. At the end of the debate the House will vote on the bill. If the vote is lost by the government, the bill cannot proceed any further, though it is rare for a government bill to be defeated at this stage. Committee stage This is a line-by-line consideration of the detail of the bill. In the Commons this process may be carried out by a specially convened committee of MPs (a Public Bill Committee) that reflects the political composition of the House as a whole. Alternatively committee stage may be taken in the chamber (in which case it is called Committee of the Whole House). In the Lords the committee stage will take place in the chamber or a committee room in the Palace of Westminster, either way any peer can participate. A Public Bill Committee in the Commons can take oral and written evidence on the bill. In either House the committee will decide whether each clause of the bill should remain in it, and will consider any amendments tabled by the government or other members. The amendments tabled may propose changes to the existing provisions of the bill or may involve adding wholly new material. However, there are limits to what can be added to a particular bill, as the amendments must be sufficiently close to its subject matter when introduced. Government amendments to bills (in committee or at other stages; see below) may be changes to make sure the bill works as intended, may give effect to new policy or may be concessionary amendments to ease the handling of the bill. Amendments in the last category will respond to points made at an earlier stage or will have been tabled to avoid a government defeat at the stage in question. Unless the amendments are purely technical in their effect, they will need the agreement of PBL Committee before they can be tabled, and substantial changes in policy will need policy clearance too. Report stage In both Houses this stage takes place in the chamber. Only amendments are discussed, so if none are tabled this will be a purely formal stage. As in committee the amendments may change what is in the bill already or may involve new provisions being added. Report stage is also referred to as Consideration in the Commons. Third reading In the Commons this is another general discussion of the bill which invariably takes place immediately after report. No amendments are possible. In the Lords, third reading will take place on a later day, and tidying up amendments can be tabled. Later stages Both Houses must agree on the text of a bill before it can become an act. This means that if the bill is amended in the second House, it must return to the first House for those amendments to be considered. The first House can reject the amendments, make changes to them or suggest alternatives. A bill may move backwards and forwards between the two Houses a number of times before agreement is reached, so this stage is often called ping pong. The time taken to go through all of these stages depends on the length of the bill, how controversial it is and whether it needs to be passed particularly quickly. An emergency bill may be passed in a matter of days, whereas a larger bill may be introduced at the beginning of the session and only passed at the end a year later. Royal Assent and beyond A bill that has been passed by both Houses becomes law once it has been given Royal Assent and this has been signified to Parliament. It will then become an act. Even then the act may not have any practical effect until later on. Most provisions in an act will either come into operation within a set period after Royal Assent (commonly two months later) or at a time fixed by the government. This gives the government and those people who are directly affected by the act time to plan accordingly. The government may need to fill in some of the details of the new scheme by making regulations or orders under powers contained in the act, for example to deal with procedural matters. Three to five years after a bill has been passed, the department responsible for the act resulting from it should review how it has worked in practice and submit an assessment of this to the relevant Commons departmental committee. The committee will then decide whether it wants to carry out a fuller post-legislative enquiry into the act. How does a bill become a law? Understanding this process is an essential component of grassroots advocacy and civic engagement. While the process can be quite complex, when boiled down there are seven basic steps that lead to a bill becoming a law. There are many things that can happen in the legislative process, so this list is simply a look at the basic level through which a bill can become a law. There needs to be an idea. The idea is written down by a member of Congress, either a senator or representative and is submitted as a bill. The bill will be introduced to the legislative body in which it was written (either the Senate or House of Representatives). Then, the speaker of the house and the president pro tempore (or vice president/lieutenant governor) can assign the bill to a committee. Once in committee, the chairman of the committee decides which bills will receive public hearings and which ones will not. Members of the committee will research, discuss, and offer amendments (or changes) to the bill. The public will also have a chance to testify on the bill and its proposed amendments. The chairman can then decide whether to offer the bill and/or amendments for vote by the whole committee. If passed out of committee, the bill and any amendments also passed go back to the entire chamber. The new bill (with any passed amendments) goes back to its originating chamber (either the Senate or House of Representatives). If called upon by the presiding officer, the entire chamber can then offer amendments to the bill and vote on the passage of the bill and/or any new amendments. If successfully passed out by the chamber, the bill then goes to the other chamber. For example, bills that originate in the Senate are passed to the House of Representatives, and vice versa for bills that originate in the House of Representatives. Once in the opposite chamber, the bills go through a very similar process of committee assignment. The new committee then decides which of the remaining bills will be heard, and then begin the same process of research, discussion, amendments, etc. If the bill is voted upon and passed out of committee, it (with any new amendments that were also voted upon), it goes back to the full chamber. The full chamber can again propose new amendments and vote on the bill. If both the Senate and House of Representatives have voted to pass the bill, then they must work out any difference between the two versions. For example, if the second chamber passed the bill with any new amendments, then the first chamber must also pass those new amendments. Both chambers must vote out the exact same bill. If it passes, it goes to the president (federal level) or governor (state level). Finally, the president or governor then considers the bill. He or she can approve the bill and sign it into law, or veto the bill, stopping it from becoming a law. It is important to note most bills never become a law. There are several ways to stop a bill, and the vast majority will stop before it can become a law. And, if a bill is lucky enough to get to the final stages and become a law, it often looks very different from the time it was introduced. Many times, amendments are added to change the bill and the law actually passed looks quite different from the bill that was introduced. As you can see, this process is quite complex, which is why it is so important to have people like you ready as grassroots advocates. Your voice is incredibly important and may need to be called upon at any of these stages. Source: Congress is the lawmaking branch of the federal government. Learn how a bill becomes a law and how the process is different in the House of Representatives and in the Senate. Learn more about the U.S. Congress. How the House and Senates lawmaking procedures are different The Senate and the House have some procedural differences. While both are equal in how they function, only the House can initiate tax and revenue-related legislation. And only the Senate can draft legislation related to presidential nominations and treaties. While the House processes legislation through a majority vote, the Senate does so through deliberation and debate prior to voting. Learn more about the legislative process with this video from Congress.gov. LAST UPDATED: November 5, 2024 (Article I, Section 1, of the United States Constitution) How Are Laws Made? Laws begin as ideas. First, a representative sponsors a bill. The bill is then assigned to a committee for study. If released by the committee, the bill is put on a calendar to be voted on, debated or amended. If the bill passes by simple majority (218 of 435), the bill moves to the Senate. In the Senate, the bill is assigned to another committee and, if released, debated and voted on. Again, a simple majority (51 of 100) passes the bill. Finally, a conference committee made of House and Senate members works out any differences between the House and Senate versions of the bill. The resulting bill returns to the House and Senate for final approval. The Government Publishing Office prints the revised bill in a process called enrolling. The President has 10 days to sign or veto the enrolled bill. Bills in Congress become laws after going through many steps, including committees and debates. After passing both chambers, bills need either the President's signature or a two-thirds vote to override. Article I, Section 1 of the United States Constitution grants all legislative or law making powers to the U.S. Congress, which is made up of a Senate and House of Representatives. In addition to its legislative powers, the Senate has the power to advise and consent in matters of treaties negotiated with foreign nations and nominations to non-elected federal offices made by the President of the United States. Congress also has the legislative power to amend the Constitution, declare war, and approve all matters concerning the federal governments expenditures and operating budget. Finally, under the Necessary and Proper and Commerce Clauses of Section 8 of the Constitution, Congress exercises powers not explicitly enumerated elsewhere in the Constitution. Under these so-called implied powers, Congress is allowed, To make all laws which shall be necessary and proper for carrying into execution the foregoing powers, and all other powers vested by this Constitution in the government of the United States, or in any department or officer thereof. Through these constitutionally-granted powers, Congress considers thousands of bills each session. Yet, only a small percentage ever reach the top of the president's desk for final approval or veto. Along their way to the White House, bills traverse a maze of committees and subcommittees, debates, and amendments in both chambers of Congress. The following is a simple explanation of the process required for a bill to become a law. Only a member of Congress (House or Senate) can introduce a bill for consideration. The Representative or Senator who introduces a bill becomes its sponsor. Other legislators who support the bill or work on its preparation can ask to be listed as co-sponsors. Important bills usually have several co-sponsors. Four basic types of legislation, all commonly referred to as bills or measures, are considered by Congress: Bills, Simple Resolutions, Joint Resolutions, and Concurrent Resolutions. A bill or resolution has officially been introduced when it has been assigned a number (H.R. # for House Bills or S. # for Senate Bills) and printed in the Congressional Record by the Government Printing Office. All bills and resolutions are referred to one or more House or Senate committees according to their specific rules. The appropriate committee or committees consider the bill in detail. For example, the powerful House Committee on Ways and Means and the Senate Appropriations Committee will consider a bill's potential impact on the federal budget. If the committee considering a bill approves it, it moves forward in the legislative process. Committees reject bills by simply not acting on them. Bills that fail to get committee action, as many do, are said to "die in committee." The committee sends some bills to a subcommittee for further study and public hearings. Just about anyone can present testimony at these hearings, including government officials, industry experts, and members of the public with an interest in the bill. Testimony can be given in person or in writing. Notice of these hearings, as well as instructions for presenting testimony, is officially published in the Federal Register. If the subcommittee decides to report (recommend) a bill back to the full committee for approval, they may make changes and amendments to it first. This process is called mark up. If the subcommittee votes not to report a bill to the full committee, the bill dies there. The full committee reviews the deliberations and recommendations of the subcommittee at this time. It may conduct further review, hold more public hearings, or simply vote on the report from the subcommittee. If the bill is to go forward, the full committee prepares and votes on its final recommendations to the House or Senate. Once a bill has successfully passed this stage, it is said to have been ordered reported or simply reported. Once a bill has been reported, its report is written and published. This report includes the purpose of the bill, its impact on existing laws, budgetary considerations, and any new taxes or tax increases the bill will require. This report also typically contains transcripts from public hearings on the bill as well as the opinions of the committee for and against the proposed bill. The bill is then placed on the legislative calendar of the House or Senate and scheduled (in chronological order) for floor action or debate before the full membership. The House has several legislative calendars. The Speaker of the House and House Majority Leader decide the order in which reported bills are debated. The Senate, having only 100 members and considering fewer bills, has only one legislative calendar. Debate for and against the bill proceeds before the full House and Senate according to strict rules of consideration and debate. Once debate has ended and any amendments to a bill have been approved, the full membership votes for or against the bill. Methods of voting include voice voting and roll-call voting. Bills approved by one chamber of Congress (House or Senate) are sent to the other chamber, which follows the same track of committee, debate, and vote. The other chamber may approve, reject, ignore, or amend the bill. If the second chamber changes a bill significantly, a conference committee made up of members of both chambers is formed. The conference committee then works to reconcile differences between the Senate and House versions of the bill. If the committee cannot agree, the bill dies. If the committee does agree on a compromise version of the bill, they prepare a report detailing the proposed changes. Both the House and Senate must approve this report or the bill is sent back to the conference committee for further work. Once both the House and Senate have approved the bill in identical form, it is enrolled and sent to the President of the United States. The President may sign the bill into law or take no action. If the President takes no action on a bill for ten days while Congress is in session, it automatically becomes law. If the President is opposed to the bill, they can veto it. If they take no action on the bill for ten days after Congress has adjourned their second session, the bill dies. This action is called a pocket veto. Congress can attempt to override a presidential veto of a bill and force it into law, but doing so requires a majority vote by the House and Senate. Under Article I, Section 7 of the U.S. Constitution, overriding a presidential veto requires both the House and Senate to approve the override measure by two-thirds, asupermajority vote, of the members present. Assuming that all 100 members of the Senate and all 435 members of the House are present for the vote, the override measure would need 67 votes in the Senate and 290 votes in the House. Sullivan, John V. "How Our Laws Are Made." U.S. Government Printing Office, 2007. Most commonly, Bills are introduced in the House of Commons. To start the process to become a law, Bills have to be formally introduced in what is known as the first reading. This involves reading the title of the Bill in the House of Commons. It can happen at any time during the Parliamentary Session and does not usually include debate about the contents of the Bill. Following this, the Bill will be published for the first time. The next stage is the second reading, which is the first opportunity for MPs to debate the main principles of the Bill. The debate will be started by the Government minister, spokesperson or MP responsible for the Bill. The Opposition spokesperson will then respond with their views on the Bill. This will continue the debate, with MPs able to give their views on the new Bill and what they think might be missing. At the end of the debate, the Commons will vote on whether the Bill should proceed to the next stage. If a Bill passes the second reading, it will then go to the Committee stage. This involves a line-by-line examination of the Bill. Most Bills will be dealt with in a Public Bill Committee. The Committee can hear evidence from experts and interest groups from outside Parliament. The chair of the committee will decide what changes (sometimes called amendments) to the Bill will be discussed. Every part (or clause) in the Bill must be agreed to, changed or removed during this stage. Some parts (clauses) will not be debated. Some Bills can be fast tracked through the House of Commons. This means that they will receive less consideration and less debate. This happened recently with the Coronavirus Act and led to organisations like BIFHR raising serious concerns about the Bill not being properly considered (scrutinised) before becoming a law. Once a Bill has completed the committee stage, it goes through the report stage. At this point the Bill can be debated by the House of Commons and any further changes can be proposed. If a Bill is particularly complicated or long, this stage of debate could last for several days. All MPs can suggest any amendments or new parts that they think should be added. After the report stage, the House of Commons has the final debate on the Bill. This is known as the third reading and usually happens immediately after the report stage. This debate is usually shorter than the previous debates and is limited to the current content of the Bill. Any amendments (or changes) cannot be made to a Bill in the Commons at this stage. At the end of the debate, the House of Commons (made up of elected MPs) will vote on whether to approve the Bill. If they do, the Bill will then go to the House of Lords to be scrutinised and debated. In the House of Lords, the Bill will go through the same stages as it does in the House of Commons. The Lords will have various opportunities to debate the Bill, add any changes (or amendments) and vote on whether the Bill should continue. The third reading in the House of Lords provides the opportunity for the Lords to tidy up a Bill, making sure that the eventual law is effective and workable - without loopholes. Unlike in the House of Commons, changes can be made at the third reading in the House of Lords but only if the issue has not been fully considered or voted on previously. Usually, these changes are used to clarify specific parts of the Bill. The House of Lords can have a powerful impact on Bills from the House of Commons. In the last year in Parliament, they voted against the Government (also referred to as defeating the Government) 129 times. Interventions from the House of Lords in recent weeks have led to important changes in some recent laws. Following campaigning from the RNIB about the disproportionate impact on disabled people, the House of Lords inserted a clause into the Elections Bill which requires the Electoral Commission to consult groups representing the interests of people affected when creating new guidance. The House of Lords also removed a clause from the Police, Crime, Sentencing and Courts Bill which would have allowed suspicion-less stop and search after groups like Liberty campaigned that this would exacerbate discriminatory over-policing of people of colour. If there are no amendments to the Bill in the Lords, it will be sent to the monarch for Royal Assent. If there are amendments, the Bill will be sent back to the House of Commons to consider the changes made by the House of Lords. If a Bill is started in the House of Lords, it will go through all of these stages but in reverse.

How a bill becomes a law simple steps. Where is your bill in the 7 steps of how a bill becomes a law. How a bill becomes a law. How a bill becomes a law 8 steps.