

U.S. Government

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

PAGE	TITLE
1	The Need for Government
2	Types of Government
3	Early U.S. Government
4	The Constitution
5	Congress: Our National Legislature
6	The Powers of Congress
7	What Congress Cannot Do
8	How a Bill Becomes a Law
9	How a Bill Becomes a Law (continued)
10	Special Interest Groups and Lobbyists
11	The Executive Branch
12	The Office of the Presidency
13	How We Elect Our President
14	The Powers and Duties of the President
15	The Federal Judicial System
16	The Role of the Supreme Court
17	Checks and Balances
18	Organization of State Government
19	Powers and Functions of State Government
20	Types of Local Government
21	The Role of Local Government
22	Our Rights as Citizens
23	Political Parties
24	The Importance of Voting
25	Elections
26	Taxes
27	Trial By Jury
28	U.S. Government Review

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McDonald Publishing Co.
12621 Western Avenue
Garden Grove, CA 92841
www.teachercreated.com

R561 • ©2000 McDonald Publishing Co.
Reprinted, 2022
ISBN: 978-1-55708-626-6
Printed in U.S.A.

How a Bill Becomes a Law

A bill is an idea for a law. Thousands of bills are introduced in Congress each year, but only a few become law. This is because the lawmaking process is long and complex, and at any point in the process a bill can be rejected and “killed.” Even if it clears both chambers of Congress, a bill can be vetoed by the President.

First a bill is introduced in either the Senate or the House of Representatives. A senator or representative sends the bill to the clerk of his or her particular chamber. The clerk gives the bill a number and title, and then it is sent to a committee to be studied. Both the Senate and the House have special committees that review proposed laws. These committees hold hearings and invite experts and others to voice their opinions on bills being considered. If the members of a committee think a bill has merit, they pass it on to their chamber to be debated, possibly amended, and voted on. If the committee sees no reason for the law, the bill dies. If the bill passes, it goes to the other chamber.

After a bill passes in both chambers, it must be sent to a conference committee. A conference committee is made up of members from both chambers who iron out differences between the House and Senate versions of the bill. When a final wording of the bill is agreed upon by both chambers, the bill is sent to the President for approval or rejection.

Decide if the statements below are true or false. Write T or F in each blank.

1. ____ Most bills make it through Congress and become laws.
2. ____ The first step in a bill becoming a law is when it is sent to the clerk of either the Senate or the House of Representatives.
3. ____ Once a bill is approved by both the Senate and the House of Representatives, the President must sign it.
4. ____ Congressional committees must pass along every bill to be debated and voted on by the other members of their respective houses.
5. ____ Committee hearings are held to get opinions from experts and others on a bill.
6. ____ A bill dies if it passes in one chamber of Congress but fails in the other.
7. ____ A conference committee is a group that considers a bill received from the clerk of either the Senate or the House of Representatives.
8. ____ The final step for a bill to become a law occurs when the bill is approved or rejected by the President.
9. Do you think the lawmaking process is too complicated? Should the process be simpler? Why or why not?

The Importance of Voting



Voting is a precious right that all citizens who meet certain qualifications have. Voting is also a privilege that citizens should not take lightly. Many people even consider voting a duty.

The requirements for voting are basically the same throughout the country. Voters must be at least 18 years old and United States citizens. They must live in the state, county, and precinct (voting district) in which they wish to vote. Usually they must also satisfy a residency requirement of a set number of days. This requirement prevents people from voting in one county or state and then traveling to another and voting a second time. People who are imprisoned or on probation for committing a felony (a serious crime) are not allowed to vote.

Even when people satisfy every requirement above, they can only vote if they are registered. Those who wish to vote for the first time must register at their local city hall, their county courthouse, or another location set up for registration. Cities and counties are divided into a number of precincts. Voters are given a registration card that shows the number of the precinct in which they live. Voters can only vote in their assigned precinct.

People who will be away from home at the time of an election can still vote. Upon their request, they are sent absentee ballots, which they mark and return to the Supervisor of Elections.

1. List three qualifications a person must meet in order to vote.

2. What do absentee ballots allow people to do?

3. Explain two reasons why it is important for people to vote.

4. In some nations, citizens are fined for failing to vote in an election. Do you think this is a good idea? Why or why not?
