

# HOW A BILL MOVES THROUGH THE TEXAS LEGISLATURE

## Learning Objectives: Students will


1. Analyze the steps a bill goes through in the Texas legislature to become a law.
2. Demonstrate problem solving skills by participating in a team activity to unscramble the steps in passing a bill into law.

**TEKS:** SS 7.15A, 7.15B, 7.21B, 7.23B; Govt G.8A, G.15A, G.20A-E, G.22A, G.22B

**Materials Needed:** Copies of the chart HOW A BILL MOVES THROUGH THE TEXAS LEGISLATURE for each student, two sets of the steps in passing a bill, scrambled in order. Background reading for the teacher: HOW A BILL BECOMES A LAW.

## Teaching Strategy:


1. Before teaching this lesson the teacher should read the background reading HOW A BILL BECOMES A LAW.
2. Distribute copies of the chart HOW A BILL MOVES THROUGH THE TEXAS LEGISLATURE to each student. Discuss the steps on the chart. Ask the following questions to check student understanding:
  - Is a bill sent to committee before or after first reading? *after*
  - Is the entire bill read at first reading? *no*
  - Who assigns bills to committee in the House? In the Senate? *Speaker and Lt. Governor*
  - What two actions by a committee will kill a bill? *See the asterisks – may not report (known as pigeonholing) or report unfavorably*
  - How many times does the WHOLE House or WHOLE Senate vote on a bill? *two times in each house*
  - If you were a Senator, at which step would you filibuster a bill? *2nd reading*
  - Why is it more difficult to amend a bill at third reading? *needs more votes because the bill is about to leave that house and an amendment added at that step would not have had careful consideration*
  - If the Senate amends a bill sent to it by the House, where does it go? *back to the House to ask concurrence with the amendment*
  - If the House does not like the Senate's amendment, where can the bill be sent? *conference committee*
  - Can the Governor amend a bill and sent it back to the legislature? *no*
  - How can the legislature overcome a Governor's veto? *2/3 vote in each house*

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3. Divide the class into two teams. Have each team designate a captain. Give each captain a set of the scrambled steps in passing a bill. Instruct students that they are to unscramble the steps, but that the steps cannot touch the floor or a desk – they must be held in someone’s hand at all times. **The bill begins in the Senate, so the first step is FIRST READING IN THE SENATE.** This will require students to read the chart “backwards.” When a team believes it has correctly unscrambled the steps, they are to line up, holding the steps in order in front of them. Some students may need to hold more than one step.



**Extension for AP/GT:**

Extension activity: During a legislative session, have students select a bill and track its progress through the legislature. Information on bills may be found at <http://www.capitol.state.tx.us>





## How a Bill Becomes a Law

### Introducing a Bill

A representative or senator gets an idea for a bill by listening to the people he or she represents and then working to solve their problem. Other ideas for legislation come from interest groups, lobbyists, and local or state government institutions or agencies. A bill may also grow out of the recommendations of an interim committee study conducted when the legislature is not in session. The idea is researched to determine what state law needs to be changed or created to best solve that problem. A bill is then written by the legislator, often with legal assistance from the Texas Legislative Council, a legislative agency which provides bill drafting services, research assistance, computer support, and other services for legislators.

Once a bill has been written, it is introduced by a member of the House or Senate in the member's own chamber. Sometimes, similar bills about a particular issue are introduced in both houses at the same time by a representative and senator working together. However, any bill increasing taxes or raising money for use by the state must start in the House of Representatives.

House members and senators can introduce bills on any subject during the first 60 calendar days of a regular session. After 60 days, the introduction of any bill other than a local bill or a bill related to an emergency declared by the Governor requires the consent of at least four-fifths of the members present and voting in the House or four-fifths of the membership in the Senate.

After a bill has been introduced, a short description of the bill, called a caption, is read aloud while the chamber is in session so that all of the members are aware of the bill and its subject. This is called the first reading, and it is the point in the process where the presiding officer assigns the bill to a committee. This assignment is announced on the chamber floor during the first reading of the bill.

### The Committee Process

The chair of each committee decides when the committee will meet and which bills will be considered. The House rules permit a House committee or subcommittee to meet: (1) in a public hearing where testimony is heard and where official action may be taken on bills, resolutions, or other matters; (2) in a formal meeting where the members may discuss and take official action without hearing public testimony; or (3) in a work session for discussion of matters before the committee without taking formal action. In the Senate, testimony may be heard and official action may be taken at any meeting of a Senate committee or subcommittee. Public testimony is almost always solicited on bills, allowing citizens the opportunity to present arguments on different sides of an issue.



### ***The Committee Process continued....***

A House committee or subcommittee holding a public hearing during a legislative session must post notice of the hearing at least five calendar days before the hearing during a regular session and at least 24 hours in advance during a special session. For a formal meeting or a work session, written notice must be posted and sent to each member of the committee two hours in advance of the meeting or an announcement must be filed with the journal clerk and read while the House is in session. A Senate committee or subcommittee must post notice of a meeting at least 24 hours before the meeting.

After considering a bill, a committee may choose to take no action or may issue a report on the bill. The committee report, expressing the committee's recommendations regarding action on a bill, includes a record of the committee's vote on the report, the text of the bill as reported by the committee, a detailed bill analysis, and a fiscal note or other impact statement, as necessary. The report is then printed, and a copy is distributed to every member of the House or Senate.

In the House, a copy of the committee report is sent to either the Committee on Calendars or the Committee on Local and Consent Calendars for placement on a calendar for consideration by the full House. In the Senate, local and noncontroversial bills are scheduled for Senate consideration by the Senate Administration Committee. All other bills in the Senate are placed on the regular order of business for consideration by the full Senate in the order in which the bills were reported from the Senate committee. A bill on the regular order of business may not be brought up for floor consideration unless the Senate sponsor of the bill has filed a written notice of intent to suspend the regular order of business for consideration of the bill.

### **Floor Action**

When a bill comes up for consideration by the full House or Senate, it receives its second reading. The bill is read, again by caption only, and then debated by the full membership of the chamber. Any member may offer an amendment, but it must be approved by a majority of the members present and voting to be adopted. The members then vote on whether to pass the bill. The bill is then considered by the full body again on third reading and final passage. A bill may be amended again on third reading, but amendments at this stage require a two-thirds majority for adoption. Although the Texas Constitution requires a bill to be read on three separate days in each House before it can have the force of law, this constitutional rule may be suspended by a four-fifths vote of the House in which the bill is pending. The Senate routinely suspends this constitutional provision in order to give a bill an immediate third reading after its second reading consideration. The House, however, rarely suspends this provision, and third reading of a bill in the House normally occurs on the day following its second reading consideration.



### ***Floor Action continued...***

In either House, a bill may be passed on a voice vote or a record vote. In the House, record votes are tallied by an electronic vote board controlled by buttons on each member's desk. In the Senate, record votes are taken by calling the roll of the members.

If a bill receives a majority vote on third reading, it is considered passed. When a bill is passed in the House where it originated, the bill is engrossed, and a new copy of the bill which incorporates all corrections and amendments is prepared and sent to the opposite chamber for consideration. In the second House, the bill follows basically the same steps it followed in the first House. When the bill is passed in the opposite House, it is returned to the originating chamber with any amendments that have been adopted simply attached to the bill.

If a bill is returned to the originating chamber without amendments, it is put in final form, signed by the Speaker and Lieutenant Governor, and sent to the Governor.

### **Action on the Other House's Amendments and Conference Committees**

If a bill is returned to the originating chamber with amendments, the originating chamber can either agree to the amendments or request a conference committee to work out differences between the House version and the Senate version. If the amendments are agreed to, the bill is put in final form, signed by the presiding officers, and sent to the Governor.

Conference committees are composed of five members from each House appointed by the presiding officers. Once the conference committee reaches agreement, a conference committee report is prepared and must be approved by at least three of the five conferees from each House. Conference committee reports are voted on in each House and must be approved or rejected without amendment. If approved by both Houses, the bill is signed by the presiding officers and sent to the Governor.

### **Governor's Action**

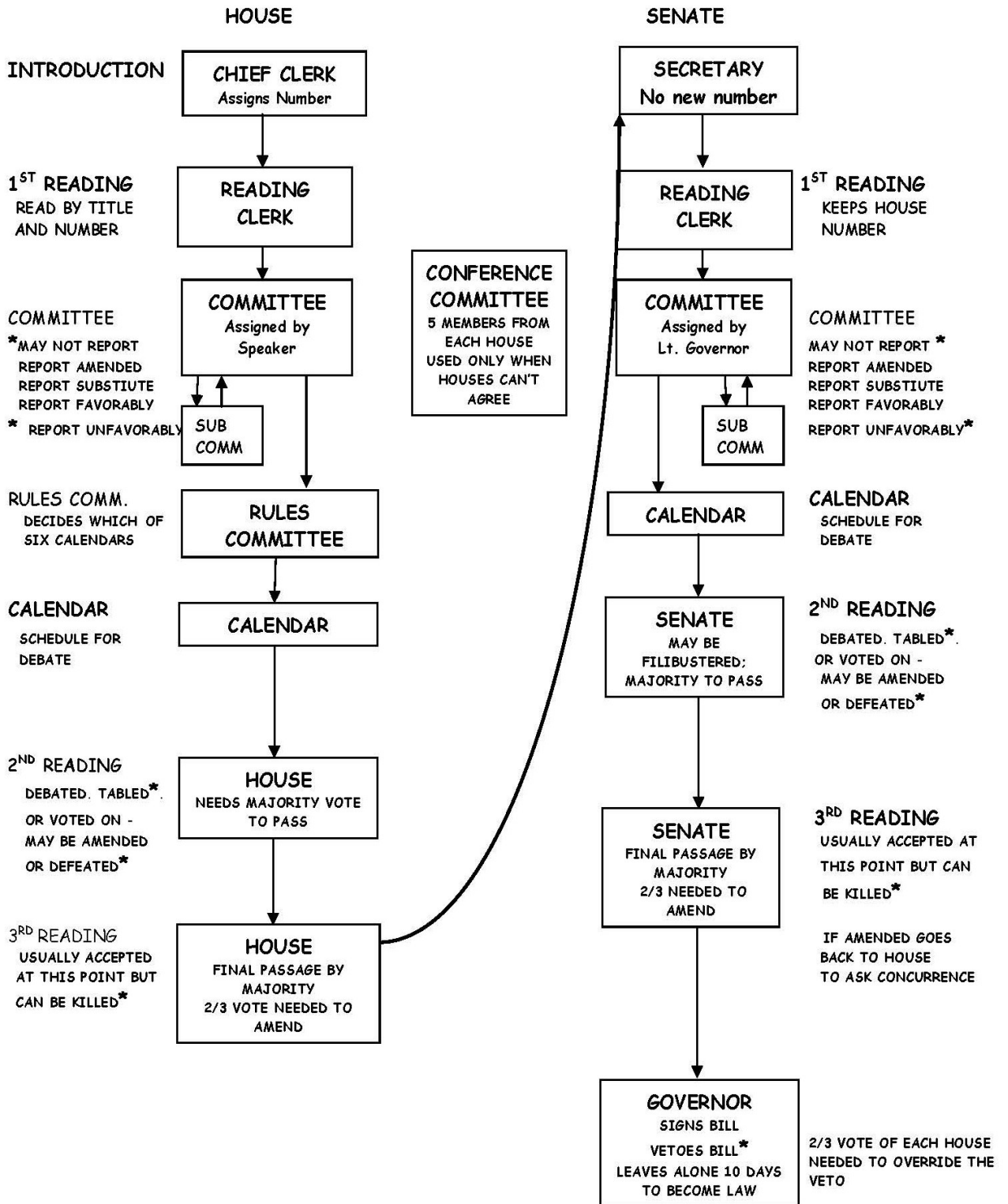
Upon receiving a bill, the Governor has 10 days in which to sign the bill, veto it, or allow it to become law without a signature. If the Governor vetoes the bill and the legislature is still in session, the bill is returned to the House in which it originated with an explanation of the Governor's objections. A two-thirds majority in each House is required to override the veto. If the Governor neither vetoes nor signs the bill within 10 days, the bill becomes a law. If a bill is sent to the Governor within 10 days of final adjournment, the Governor has until 20 days after final adjournment to sign the bill, veto it, or allow it to become law without a signature.

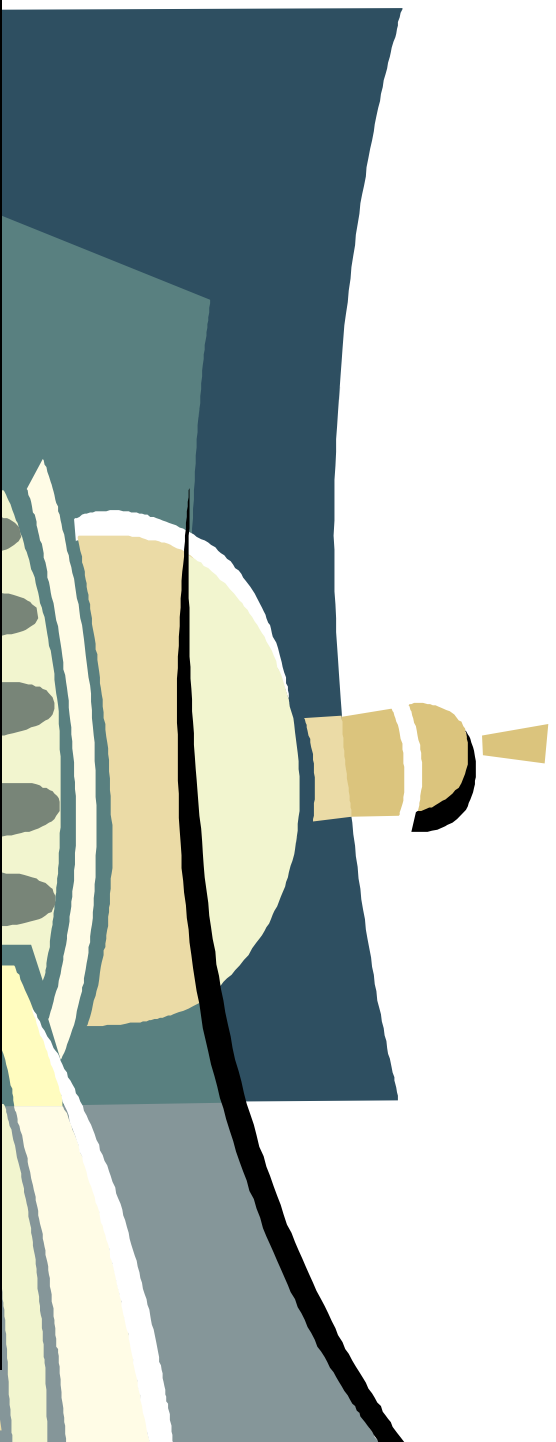
Adapted from Texas House of Representatives website.  
<http://www.house.state.tx.us/resources/bill2law.htm>

# HOW A BILL MOVES THROUGH THE TEXAS LEGISLATURE

EXAMPLE SHOWS INTRODUCTION IN THE HOUSE - SENATE INTRODUCTION REVERSES THE ORDER

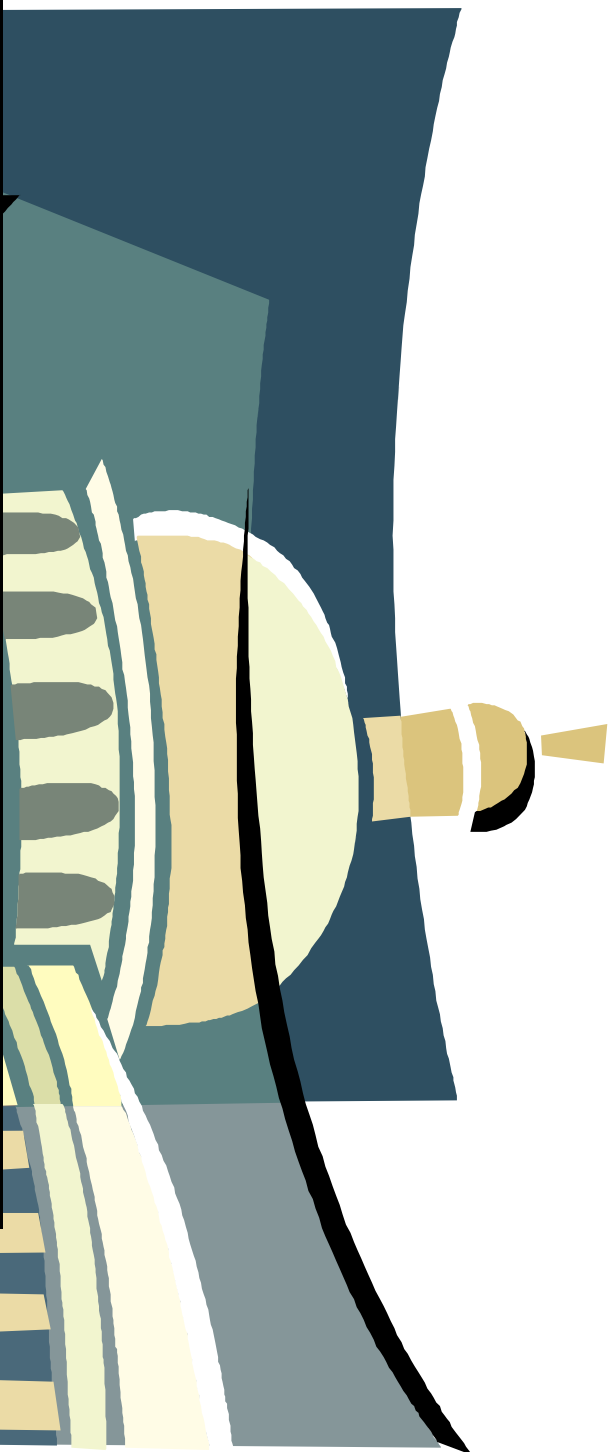
\*Place where a bill can die





STEPS IN PASSING A BILL

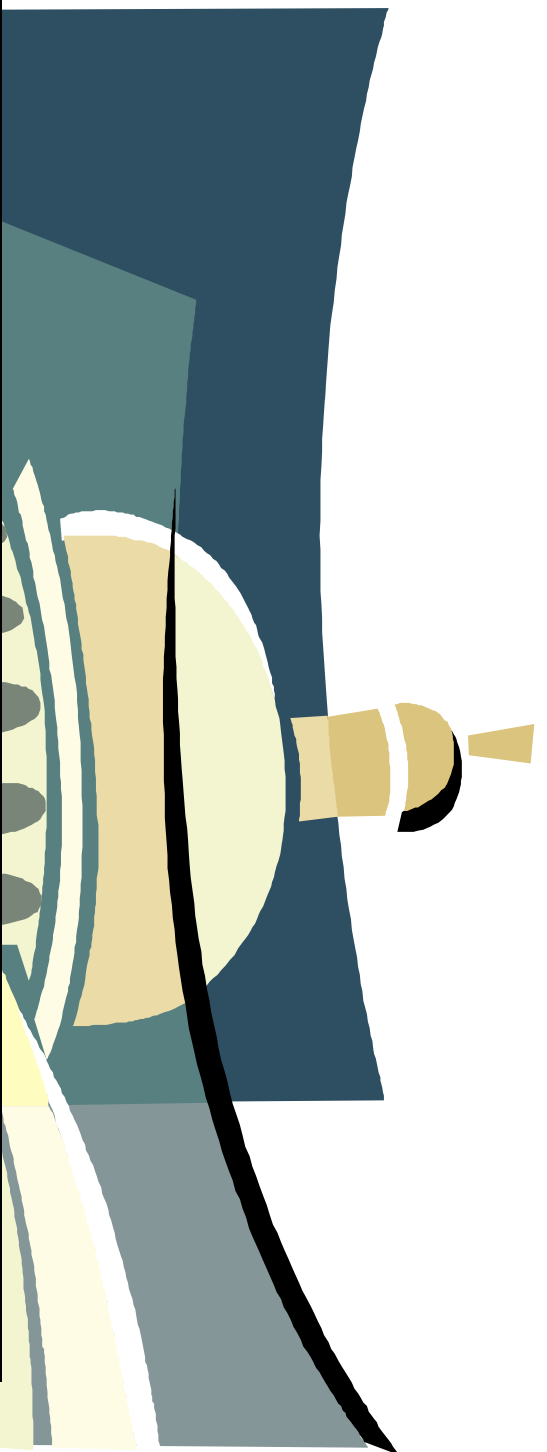
# First reading in the Senate



**STEPS IN PASSING A BILL**

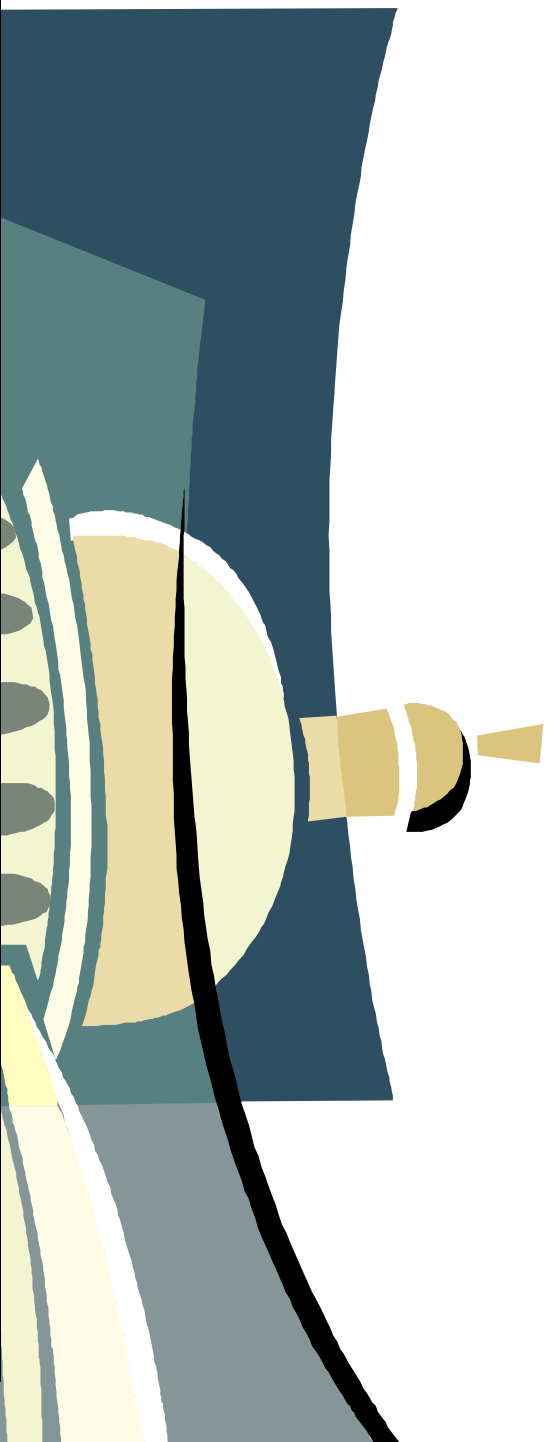
**Senate committee holds  
hearings, passes bill**





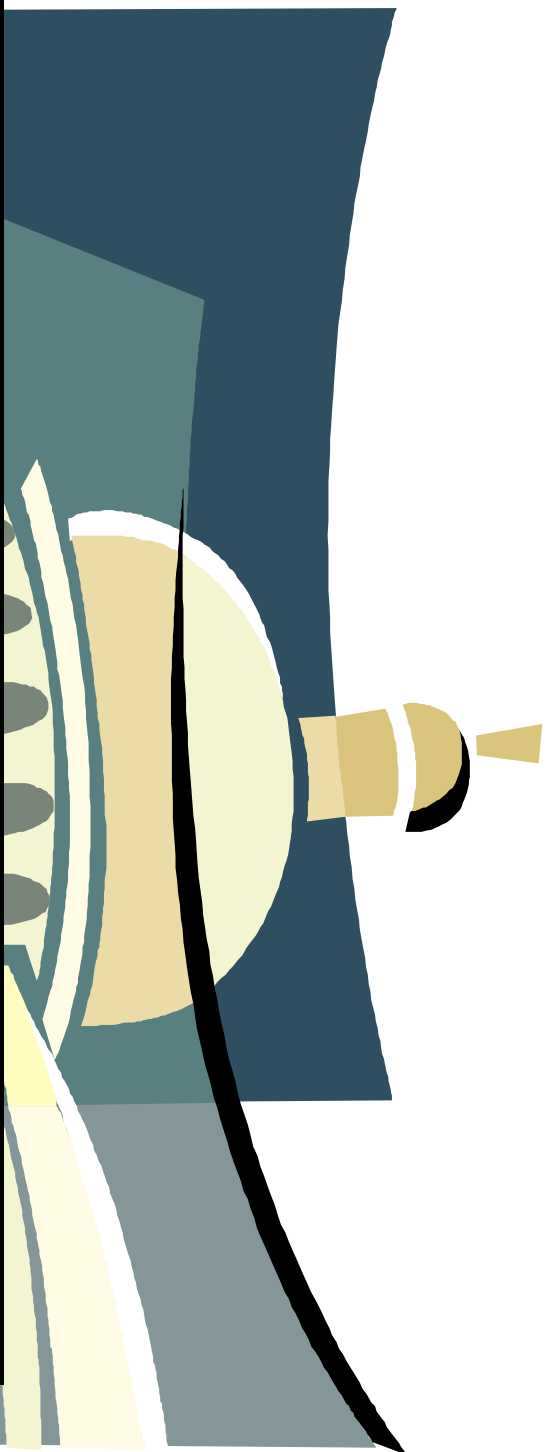
STEPS IN PASSING A BILL

# Bill placed on the Senate calendar



STEPS IN PASSING A BILL

**Second reading in the  
Senate – filibustered &  
passed**



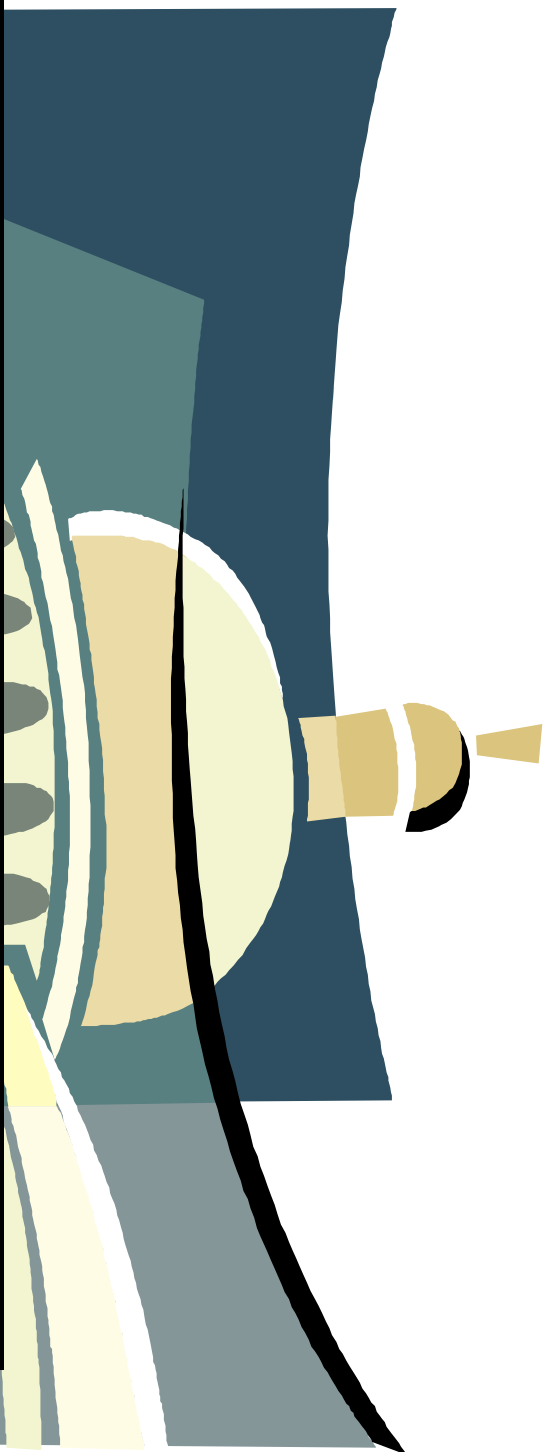
**STEPS IN PASSING A BILL**

**Third reading in the Senate –  
passes with an amendment**



STEPS IN PASSING A BILL

# First reading in the House



**STEPS IN PASSING A BILL**

**House committee holds  
hearings, sends bill to  
subcommittee**



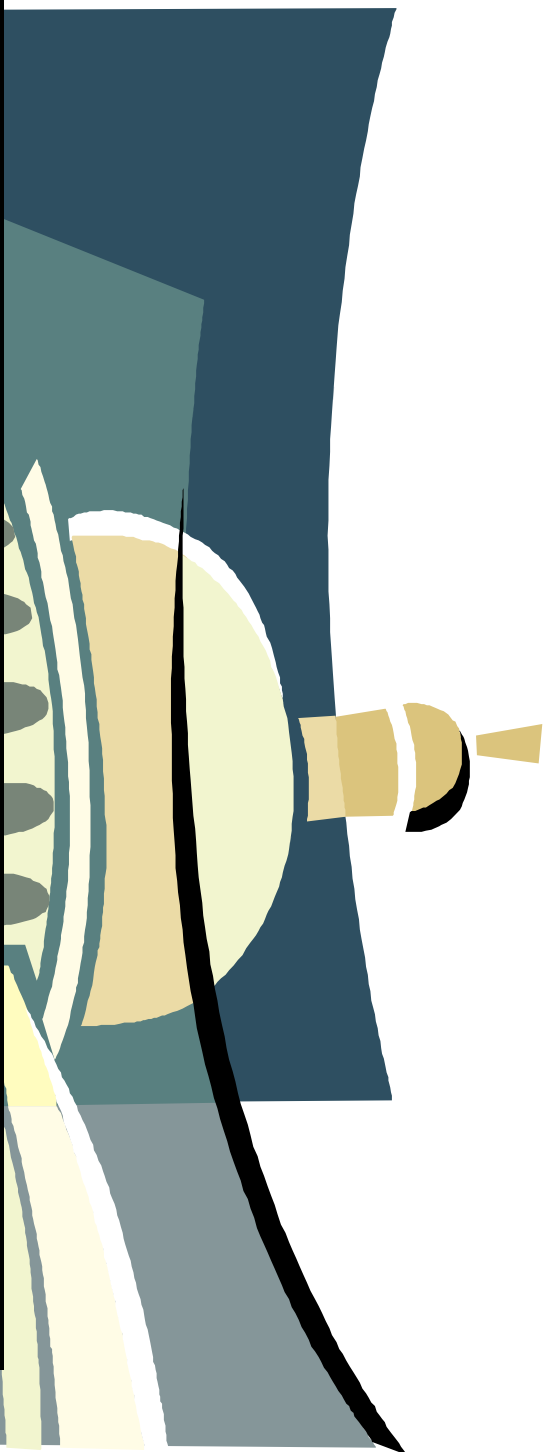
STEPS IN PASSING A BILL

**House subcommittee  
studies bill and reports  
favorably**



STEPS IN PASSING A BILL

**House committee  
recommends that the bill be  
passed**



**STEPS IN PASSING A BILL**

# **House Rules Committee puts bill on House calendar**





STEPS IN PASSING A BILL

**Second reading in the  
House, bill is passed with  
amendments**



STEPS IN PASSING A BILL

# Third reading in the House – bill passes



STEPS IN PASSING A BILL

**Bill goes back to the Senate  
to OK amendments; the  
Senate refuses**



STEPS IN PASSING A BILL

**Bill is sent to the  
Conference Committee**



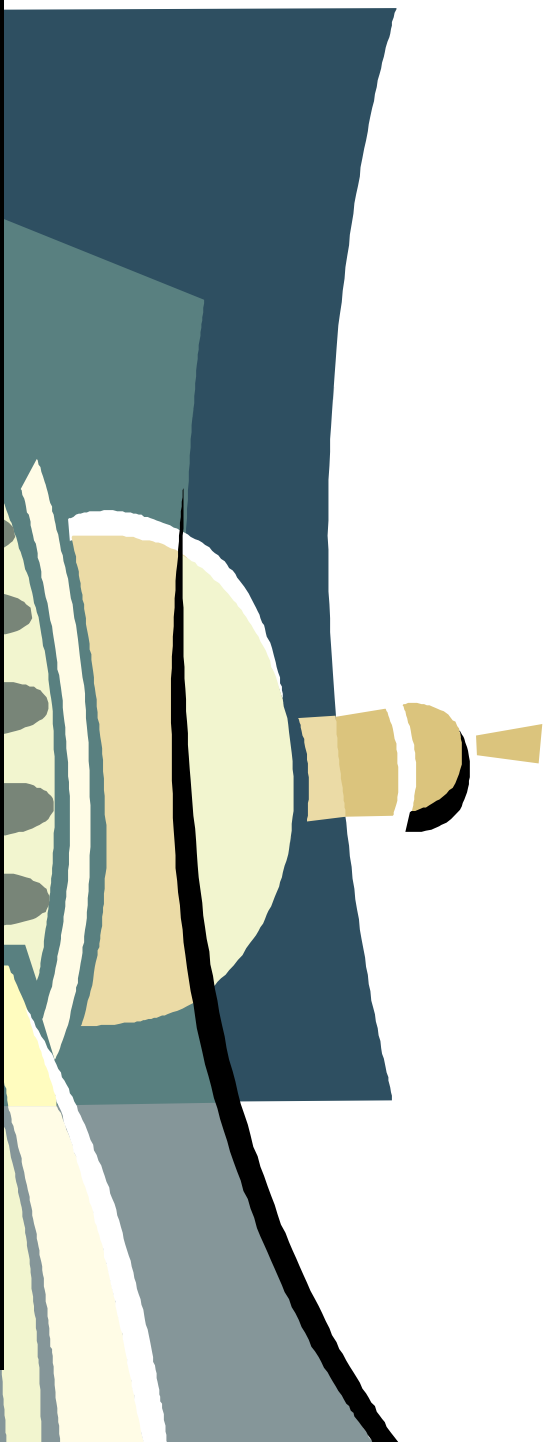
STEPS IN PASSING A BILL

**Conference Committee  
report is adopted by the  
Senate**



STEPS IN PASSING A BILL

**Conference Committee  
report is adopted by the  
House**



**STEPS IN PASSING A BILL**

**Bill sent to governor, who  
vetoes it**



STEPS IN PASSING A BILL

# Senate overrides the governor's veto





STEPS IN PASSING A BILL

# House overrides the governor's veto



STEPS IN PASSING A BILL

# THE BILL BECOMES LAW!