How Legislation Is Passed in the House of Representatives

Of the many bills introduced in the House each session, only a fraction are taken up in committee and only some of those make it to the floor for a vote. All revenue-raising legislation must originate in the House. A key difference in the legislative process between the two chambers is that majority leadership wields more legislative power in the House than in the Senate, where individual senators have more control throughout the process, especially on the floor. Here we outline the common stages of a public bill as it makes its way through the House, though the legislative process is unpredictable and often varies significantly from bill to bill. A public bill, which pertains to matters affecting the general public or classes of citizens, is the most common type of legislation that originates in the House.

1. INTRODUCING LEGISLATION

Any of the 435 members, as well as any non-voting members, can introduce a bill (or co-introduce it with a fellow member) in a wooden inbox on the side of the Rotunda on the day of the introduction in the House Chamber.

2. COMMITTEE WORK

A bill can be referred to any of the 20 standing committees. Each committee has jurisdiction over specific policy areas.

3. MARKUP SESSION

The formal process to advancing legislation is through a “markup” session where the subcommittee studies the legislation at魂ible. The subcommitteeChairman assigns a subcommittee to each bill. The committee votes to accept or reject its proposed amendments.

4. MARKUP VOTE

Prior to forwarding the bill to the full committee, the subcommittee will vote on how to report the bill to the full committee: favorably (with or without amendments); unfavorably (with or without amendments); or by a vote to table the entire bill. This vote may include dissenting opinions from minority members. If the bill is not adopted, it may be discarded. All amendments that can later be added to the bill will have a new number, while the old bill is discarded.

5. FINAL COMMITTEE ACTION CONTINUED

The (sub)committee could also vote to retain the bill to its appropriate subcommittee, unless the full committee votes to retain the bill at the full committee vote. If the subcommittee’s recommendation is not done, the full committee will vote on how to report the bill to the chamber.

6. COMMITTEE ACTION TO REPORT A BILL

If the committee votes to report the bill to the chamber, a committee report is written. This report describes the purpose and scope of the legislation and includes a recommendation to the House (report) that the bill has been “favorably” reported.

7. SCHEDULING FLOOR ACTION

Once a bill is reported back to the chamber and the full committee, it is placed on one of two legislative calendars. All regular legislation is considered under the Union calendar, while all public bills are placed on the Appropriations calendar.

8. PROCEDURAL RULES ADOPTED

Before the bill makes it to the floor for discussion, the House must first adopt the rules that govern how the bill will be considered. Such rules include how debate is allocated for the bill and whether amendments can be offered that rule that the body is charmed. Most often, leadership schedules a floor consideration of the bill to “fast track” the vote to a 30-minute rule, where floor amendments and requires a two-thirds majority vote for approval.

9. GENERAL DEBATE OPENS ON THE FLOOR

Affairs on the Union calendar must be considered in the “Committee of the Whole,” which includes members, but only needs a quorum of 100. The floor is open for general debate to discuss the bill and all other possible amendments. Debate time is limited to 30 minutes on each amendment.

10. AMENDING PROCESS

The Reading Clerk then reads the bill for amendment. The “second reading” is often done in a committee. A motion to “commit” is made when the second reading is finished. The Speaker then assigns a subcommittee to the bill, which is followed by further discussion on the bill.

11. FINAL PASSAGE

The House proceeds to vote on each amendment the committee adopted at its final markup (or adopted new amendments and those change the bill). The Speaker then assigns the bill to the House for final action. If the Speaker agrees, the bill is referred to the Senate for consideration and approval. By Todd Lindeman and Janie Boschma, POLITICO Pro DataPoint

Sources: U.S. House of Representatives and Congressional Research Service