



NATIONAL ♦ INDIAN ♦ HEALTH ♦ BOARD

1st Annual National Tribal Health Appropriation Summit

March 6, 2008

Washington, D.C.

How a Bill Becomes a Law

Laws may be initiated in either chamber of Congress, the House of Representatives or the Senate.

If a law were initiated in the U.S. House of Representatives, it would go through the following steps:

1.

When a Representative has an idea for a new law, s/he becomes the sponsor of that bill and introduces it by giving it to the clerk of the House or by placing it in a box, called the hopper. The clerk assigns a legislative number to the bill, with H.R. for bills introduced in the House and S. for bills introduced in the Senate. The Government Printing Office (GPO) then prints the bill and distributes copies to each representative.



2.

Next, the bill is assigned to a committee (the House has 22 standing committees, each with jurisdiction over bills in certain areas) by the Speaker of the House so that it can be studied.

The standing committee (or often a subcommittee) studies the bill and hears testimony from experts and people interested in the bill. The committee then may release the bill with a recommendation to pass it, or revise the bill and release it, or lay it aside so that the House cannot vote on it. Releasing the bill is called reporting it out, while laying it aside is called tabling.

3.

If the bill is released, it then goes on a calendar (a list of bills awaiting action). Here the House Rules Committee may call for the bill to be voted on quickly, limit the debate, or limit or prohibit amendments. Undisputed bills may be passed by unanimous consent, or by a two-thirds vote if members agree to suspend the rules.

4.

The bill now goes to the floor of the House for consideration and begins with a complete reading of the bill (sometimes this is the only

complete reading). A third reading (title only) occurs after any amendments have been added. If the bill passes by simple majority (218 of 435), the bill moves to the Senate.

5. In order to be introduced in the Senate, a senator must be recognized as the presiding officer and announce the introduction of the bill. Sometimes, when a bill has passed in one house, it becomes known as an act; however, this term usually means a bill that has been passed by both houses and becomes law.

6. Just as in the House, the bill then is assigned to a committee. It is assigned to one of the Senate's 16 standing committees by the presiding officer. The Senate committee studies and either releases or tables the bill just like the House standing committee.

7. Once released, the bill goes to the Senate floor for consideration. Bills are voted on in the Senate based on the order they come from the committee; however, an urgent bill may be pushed ahead by leaders of the majority party. When the Senate considers the bill, they can vote on it indefinitely. When there is no more debate, the bill is voted on. A simple majority (51 of 100) passes the bill.

8. The bill now moves onto a conference committee, which is made up of members from each House. The committee works out any differences between the House and Senate versions of the bill. The revised bill is sent back to both houses for their final approval. Once approved, the bill is printed by the Government Printing Office (GPO) in a process called enrolling. The clerk from the introducing house certifies the final version.

9. The enrolled bill is now signed by the Speaker of the House and then the vice president. Finally, it is sent for presidential consideration. The president has ten days to sign or veto the enrolled bill. If the president vetoes the bill, it can still become a law if two-thirds of the Senate and two-thirds of the House then vote in favor of the bill.

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How the Federal Appropriations Process Works

Every year, the Federal government passes a series of Appropriation bills that provide funding for all the departments, agencies and programs operated by the Federal government for the upcoming fiscal year (FY).

The Annual Funding Cycle



The Federal appropriations cycle traditionally begins with the release of the President's "budget request" to Congress, which occurs the first week of February. This budget request includes a breakdown of the funding levels that the President and his Administration would like for specific programs in the upcoming fiscal year. The President's funding levels are "suggestions" to Congress, and the appropriations bills passed by Congress determine the actual funding levels for the next year.

Currently, Congress is focusing on funding levels for FY 2009. The Federal fiscal year begins October 1 of the previous year; thus, FY 2009 will begin on October 1, 2008. In theory, all appropriations bills should be completed by Congress by September 30th so that they can take effect on October 1st. However, as occurred for the FY 2007 process, Congress does not always finish its work by the September 30th deadline, and often passes a "Continuing Resolution" or "CR" to fund the government at the previous year's funding level until the current year's appropriations bill can be completed.

Following a recent restructuring, both the House and Senate now have 12 Appropriations Subcommittees. Each subcommittee oversees a specific funding bill. Once the President releases his budget request for the upcoming fiscal year, the House and Senate Budget Committees each pass a "Budget Resolution" or budget outline for the coming year. The spending levels outlined in the Budget Resolution are utilized by the House and Senate Appropriations Committee Chairs, who then decide upon annual spending levels for the Federal government for the next year. (The House and Senate may begin the Appropriations process with different overall spending levels for the next fiscal year).

The overall funding level for discretionary spending is then divided among the subcommittees, and each Appropriations Subcommittee Chair is given their respective "Allocation" for the fiscal year.

Once each Appropriation Subcommittee Chair has received the "allocation" or spending limit for his/her respective funding bill, the bill can be introduced and considered by the Subcommittee. Each funding bill is "marked up" or amended and approved by the Members on the Subcommittee before it moves to the full Appropriations Committee for consideration. Amendments may be offered during Subcommittee and/or full Committee "markups."

Report Language is Key

After the full Appropriations Committee approves a funding bill, the revised legislation is printed along with a report that accompanies the bill. The Appropriations Report includes language or directives that suggest Federal departments or agencies to take specific actions. With more extreme language, Congress may even dictate a specific activity or prohibit an agency from performing certain work.



The appropriations bill will then proceed to the House or Senate floor, when amendments may be offered before the bill is approved or rejected by all members of the respective chamber.

After the House and Senate finalize their respective bills, these bills proceed to a "Conference Committee" where negotiations iron out the differences between the House and Senate version of the bill. Once the full House and Senate approve the "Conference" version of each funding bill, the final legislation is forwarded to the President to be signed into law.

Yearly Time Line

House and Senate Appropriations Subcommittees typically begin marking up their funding bills in late spring (May/June), with hopes to progress the bill to the full Appropriations Committees in the summer (June/July). Each chamber hopes to approve its bill before the August Congressional recess so that Members may proceed with the House/Senate Conference Committee negotiations when they return to the Hill in September, with hopes to finalize the bill before the next Fiscal Year begins on October 1.



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Flow Chart of Federal Appropriations Process

August-October

Formulation of President's Budget

February

President Submits Budget to Congress

Early May:
Budget committees
in markup

House Budget Committee
Formulates Budget Resolution

Senate Budget Committee
Formulates Budget Resolution

House Floor

Senate Floor

June:
Conference committee
reports out the budget

Budget Resolution Conference Committee
Reports out the Concurrent Resolution on the Budget

July:
Reconciliation and
appropriation bills

House Floor Vote

Senate Floor Vote

- Concurrent Resolution is Non-Statutory/ Not signed by the President
- Spending Allocations and reconciliation instructions (optional) sent to Committee of Jurisdiction

House Authorizing Committees complete changes in law to comply with the Budget Resolution – Budget Reconciliation

House Appropriations Committee reports appropriations measures that comply with Budget Resolution (1 year target)

Senate Appropriations Committee completes spending changes to comply with the Budget Resolutions (1 year target)

Senate Authorizing Committees complete changes in law to complete with Budget Resolution- Budget Reconciliation

House Authorizing Committees' recommendation submitted to House Budget Committee

House: 12 Separate Appropriation Bills

Senate: 12 Separate Appropriation Bills

Senate Authorizing Committees' recommendations submitted to the Senate Budget Committee

September:
Reconciliation and Approp. reports

House Vote on Reconciliation

12 Conference Votes

Senate Vote on Reconciliation

12 **House** Votes on the Conference Report

12 **Senate** Votes on Conference Report

President signs into law or may veto 12 Appropriation Conference Reports

Budget Reconciliation Conference Committee
Sub-Conference are held by Authorizing Committee

House votes on reconciliation bill

Senate votes on reconciliation bill

President signs or veto reconciliation bill