

## GLOSSARY OF TERMS

**Act**—Legislation which has passed both Houses of Congress, approved by the President, or passed over his veto, thus becoming law. Also used technically for a bill that has been passed by one House and engrossed.

**Adjournment**—Action taken by either House of Congress to end a legislative day, which can last longer than 24 hours. (See also *sine die*).

**Advice and Consent**—A process of Senate approval of executive and judicial appointments, and for treaties negotiated by the executive branch and signed by the President. Advice and consent of treaties requires approval by a two-thirds majority of Senators present and voting, while appointments require approval by a simple majority.

**Amendment**—A proposal by a Member (in committee or floor session of the respective Chamber) to alter the language or provisions of a bill or act. It is voted on in the same manner as a bill.

**Appropriation**—A formal approval to draw funds from the Treasury for specific purposes. This may occur through an annual appropriations act, an urgent or supplemental appropriations act, a continuing resolution, or on a permanent basis.

**Authorization**—A law creating or sustaining a program, delegating power to implement it, and outlining its funding. Following authorization, an appropriation actually draws funds from the Treasury.

**Bill**—Formally introduced legislation. Most legislative proposals are in the form of bills and are designated as H.R. (House of Representatives) or S. (Senate), depending on the House in which they originate, and are numbered consecutively in the order in which they are introduced during each Congress. Public bills deal with general questions and become Public Laws, or Acts, if approved by Congress and signed by the President. Private bills deal with individual matters such as claims against the Federal Government, immigration and naturalization cases, land titles, et cetera, and become private laws if approved and signed.

**Bipartisanship**—Cooperation between Members of both political parties in either or both Houses, or between the President and Members of Congress representing the other party in addressing a particular issue or proposal. Bipartisan action usually results when party leaders agree that an issue is of sufficient national importance as to preclude normal considerations of partisan advantage.

**Budget**—The President's annual proposal to Congress, submitted in January, outlining executive branch plans for Federal expenditures and revenue for the coming fiscal year. The budget is subject

to substantial revision and amendment as part of its consideration by Congress.

**Budget Authority**—Allows Federal agencies to incur a financial liability. The basic types of budget authority are appropriations, contract authority, and borrowing authority.

**Budget Resolution**—House and Senate guidelines, and later caps, on budget authority and outlays. The budget resolution is not submitted to the President for approval, as it is considered a matter of internal congressional rules. Bills that would exceed budget caps are subject to a point of order, although waivers have been granted regularly in both Houses of Congress.

**Calendar**—A list of bills, resolutions, or other matters to be considered before committees or on the floor of either House of Congress.

**HOUSE LEGISLATION IS PLACED ON ONE OF FIVE CALENDARS:**

*Consent Calendar*—Members of the House may place on the Consent Calendar any bill appearing on the Union or House Calendar. Customarily, these bills, action on which can be halted by a few Members, are noncontroversial and are normally called on the first and third Monday of each month.

*Discharge Calendar*—Calendar to which written motions to discharge bills from committees are referred when the necessary 218 (one-half of the full House membership) signatures have been obtained. Matters on the Discharge Calendar are considered on the second and fourth Monday of each month.

*House Calendar*—A list of public bills and joint resolutions, other than revenue measures and measures appropriating money directly or indirectly, awaiting action by the House.

*Private Calendar*—Private bills in the House dealing with individual matters (such as claims against the Government, immigration, and land titles) are put on this calendar. The Private Calendar is called on the first and third Tuesday of each month.

*Union Calendar*—Bills and joint resolutions that directly or indirectly appropriate money or raise revenue are placed on this House Calendar chronologically according to the date reported from committee.

**UNLIKE THE HOUSE, THE SENATE HAS ONLY TWO CALENDARS FOR MATTERS PENDING IN THE SENATE CHAMBER:**

*Senate Legislative Calendar*—Listing of bills, both public and private, which have been reported from committee, have been discharged from committee, or which have been placed directly without referral to committee.

*Senate Executive Calendar*—Listing of Presidential nominations to Federal Government positions and treaties, both of which under the Constitution require the approval of the Senate.

**Caucus**—Two types of congressional organizations are called caucuses: (1) a meeting of Democratic Party members in the House, which elects party leaders and makes decisions on legislative business. Congressional Republicans in each House of Congress and

Senate Democrats organize as conferences; (2) an informal grouping of Members organized to focus attention on, advocate action on, or represent mutual interests, policy proposals, or geographic areas. Caucuses in this instance may be organized by Members of either or both Houses and by either or both political parties.

**Cloture**—A parliamentary device used in the Senate (Rule 22) by which debate on a particular measure can be limited. The Senate otherwise has a tradition of unlimited debate. The action of 16 Senators is necessary to initiate a petition for cloture, and a vote of at least 60 Senators is required to invoke it.

**Committee**—Subsidiary organizations of both Houses of Congress established for the purpose of considering legislation, conducting investigations, or carrying out other assignments, as instructed by the parent Chamber. Committee memberships are determined by party leadership in each House, with the seniority (time in service) of a Member being generally a prominent factor in committee assignments. Congressional committees generally fall into one of four categories: (1) Standing committees—Permanent organizations within each House specializing in consideration of bills falling in particular subject areas. Most of these panels establish subcommittees or other subunits to handle some of the workload and conduct hearings. Membership on committees generally reflects party strength in each House; the majority party usually provides a majority of members, and a senior member of the majority party is usually elected chair. (2) Joint committees—Committees including membership from both Houses. Joint committees are usually established with a narrow jurisdiction and normally lack authority to report legislation to the floor of either House. (3) Select or special committees—Committees usually established for a limited time period to perform a particular function and without authority to report legislation to the floor of its Chamber. These panels may be organized by either House, to conduct an investigation or to make a study and recommendations about a particular problem. (4) Conference committees—Ad hoc committees composed of Members of both Houses who are appointed for the specific purpose of reconciling similar bills which have passed the House and Senate in different form.

**Committee of the Whole (Committee of the Whole House on the State of the Union)**—A practice widely used by the House of Representatives to expedite the consideration of legislation. Advantages include lower quorum requirements (100 Members, rather than 218) and streamlined procedures, including limitations on debate. All decisions taken in the Committee of the Whole require approval by the full House.

**Conference**—Republican Members' organization in the House and Senate and Democratic Members' organization in the Senate. (See also caucus).

**Confirmation**—Action by the Senate approving Presidential nominees for the executive branch, regulatory commissions, and certain other positions.

**Contempt of Congress**—Willful obstruction of the legislative process. Persons cited for contempt of Congress by either House or

one of their committees are subject to prosecution in Federal courts.

**Continuing Resolution**—A joint appropriations measure providing emergency funding for agencies whose regular appropriations bill has not been passed.

**Discharge Petition**—Process in the House of Representatives by which a bill may be brought to the floor 30 days after referral to a committee (or 7 days in the case of the Rules Committee) by majority vote, despite the failure of the relevant committee to report it.

**Filibuster**—Under the Rules of the Senate and as a matter of tradition, debate on any measure or matter is generally unlimited. A filibuster is typically characterized by individual Senators or groups of Senators speaking at extended length against a pending measure, often with the objective of frustrating action on the pending legislative proposals.

**Five-Minute Rule**—Under House Rules, a measure considered in the Committee of the Whole is governed by the 5-minute Rule. A Member offering an amendment is recognized to speak in favor of it for 5 minutes; another Member can claim 5 minutes of time to speak against the amendment. Pro forma amendments may be offered to extend debate time in additional 5-minute blocks.

**Germaneness**—A House requirement that amendments to a bill must relate to the subject matter under consideration.

**Gerrymandering**—Drawing of district lines to maximize the electoral advantage of a political party or faction. The term was first used in 1812, when Elbridge Gerry was Governor of Massachusetts, to characterize the State redistricting plan.

**Hearing**—A meeting or session of a committee of Congress—usually open to the public—to obtain information and opinions on proposed legislation, to conduct an investigation, or oversee a program.

**Joint Meeting**—A meeting of both Houses of Congress, in which each Chamber recesses to meet for an occasion or ceremony, usually in the House Chamber. The Members of each Chamber agree by unanimous consent agreements to meet, but without formally adjourning the legislative session for the day. Foreign dignitaries visiting the Capitol frequently address joint meetings of the Congress.

**Joint Session**—A meeting of both Houses of Congress, customarily held in the House Chamber. Joint sessions are held for necessary administrative and official purposes: e.g., the purpose of counting electoral votes, attending inaugurations, and to hear presidential State of the Union messages. In recent years, concurrent resolutions have been passed to set the time and place for joint sessions. Before attending a joint session, each Chamber first adjourns its legislative session.

**Lame Duck Session**—A session of Congress meeting after elections have been held, but before the newly elected Congress has convened.

**Legislative Day**—A formal meeting of a House of Congress which begins with the call to order and opening of business and ends with adjournment. A legislative day may cover a period of several calen-

dar days, with the House recessing at the end of each calendar day, rather than adjourning.

**Markup**—The process in which congressional committees and subcommittees amend and rewrite proposed legislation in order to prepare it for consideration on the floor.

**Memorial**—A petition to Congress from State legislatures, usually requesting some sort of legislation, or expressing the sense of the State legislature on a particular question.

**Nomination**—Two distinct uses of this term are: (1) the process by which candidates for an elected office gain political party approval and status as the party nominee on the general election ballot; (2) appointments to office by the President that are subject to Senate confirmation.

**One-Hour Rule**—The rule stipulating debate limits in the House of Representatives. Measures brought up for consideration in the House are debated for 1 hour, with the majority supporters of the bill customarily yielding half of the debate time to the opposing party.

**One-Minute Speech**—By custom (and not by rule of the House), Members may be recognized at the beginning of a daily session, after the Chaplain's prayer, the Pledge of Allegiance, and the approval of the Journal for the previous day's session. Members address the House on subjects of their choice for not more than 1 minute each.

**Other Body**—The practices of the House and Senate prohibit direct reference in floor debate to actions taken in the other Chamber. Members typically refer to actions taken in "the other body," rather than to name the House or Senate expressly.

**Petition**—A request or plea sent to one or both Houses from an organization or private citizens' group asking support of particular legislation or favorable consideration of a matter. Petitions are referred to appropriate committees for action.

**Point of Order**—An objection by a Member of either House that a pending matter or proceeding is in violation of the rules.

**Political Action Committee (PAC)**—A group organized to promote its members' views on selected issues, usually through raising money that is contributed to the campaign funds of candidates who support the group's position.

**President Pro Tempore**—(Latin for *the time being*). The officer who presides over the Senate when its President (the Vice President of the United States) is absent. Tradition vests this office in the senior Senator of the majority party.

**Previous Question**—A motion in the House to cut off debate and force a vote on a pending measure.

**Public Law**—A bill or joint resolution (other than for amendments to the Constitution) passed by both Houses of Congress and approved by the President. Bills and joint resolutions vetoed by the President, but overridden by the Congress also become public law.

**Quorum**—The number of Members in each House necessary to conduct business (218 in the House, 51 in the Senate).

**Ratification**—Two uses of this term are: (1) the act of approval of a proposed constitutional amendment by the legislatures of the States; (2) the Senate process of advice and consent to treaties negotiated by the President.

**Reapportionment**—The process by which seats in the House of Representatives are reassigned among the States to reflect population changes following the decennial census.

**Recess**—An interruption in the session of the House or Senate of a less formal nature than an adjournment. Typically, the Senate recesses at the end of most daily sessions in order to move more quickly into legislative business when it convenes again. In the House, the Speaker is authorized to declare short-term recesses during the daily session, but the House typically adjourns at the end of each day's meeting.

**Redistricting**—The process within the States of redrawing legislative district boundaries to reflect population changes following the decennial census.

**Report**—The printed record of a committee's actions, including its votes, recommendations, and views on a bill or question of public policy or its findings and conclusions based on oversight inquiry, investigation, or other study.

**Resolution**—A proposal approved by either or both Houses which, except for joint resolutions signed by the President, does not have the force of law. Resolutions generally fall into one of three categories: (1) Simple resolutions, designated H. Res. or S. Res., deal with matters entirely within the prerogatives of the respective House. (2) Concurrent resolutions, designated H. Con. Res., or S. Con. Res., must be passed by both Houses, but are not presented for signature by the President. Concurrent resolutions generally are used to make or amend rules applicable to both Houses, or to express the sentiment of the two Houses. (3) Joint Resolutions, designated H.J. Res. or S.J. Res., require the approval of both Houses, and, with one exception, the signature of the President (just as a bill does), and have the force of law if approved. There is no real difference between a bill and a joint resolution. The latter is generally used in dealing with limited matters, such as a single appropriation for a specific purpose, or the declaration of war. Joint resolutions are also used to propose amendments to the Constitution, but these do not require the President's signature.

**Rider**—An unrelated amendment attached to a pending bill in order to improve its chances for passage. Requirements of germaneness limit the use of riders in House bills.

**Session**—The period during which Congress assembles and carries on its regular business. Each Congress generally has two regular sessions, based on the constitutional mandate that Congress assemble at least once each year. In addition, the President is empowered to call Congress into special session.

**Sine Die**—The final adjournment (*sine die* being translated from Latin literally as "without a day") used to conclude a session of Congress.

**Special Rule**—Also known as a "rule from the Rules Committee." Special rules are presented in the form of a House resolution

by the Rules Committee to make House consideration of a particular bill in order, to set time limits for debate, and to regulate which amendments, if any, may be offered during House or Committee of the Whole consideration of the measure. Special rules are agreed to by the House by majority vote.

**Stare Decisis**—Literally, “let the decision stand.” A principle of common law in which a court decision should not be overturned unless compelling reasons call for establishing new precedents.

**Statute Law**—Bills and joint resolutions (except for those proposing constitutional amendments), enacted by Congress and approved by the President (or his veto overridden).

**Suspension of the Rules**—A House procedure which expedites consideration of legislation by limiting debate on a bill and prohibiting amendments, but which also requires a two-thirds majority for passage.

**Tabling Motion**—A motion to stop action on a pending proposal and to lay it aside indefinitely. When the Senate or House agrees to a tabling motion, the measure which has been tabled is effectively defeated.

**Unanimous Consent**—A practice in the House and Senate to set aside a rule of procedure, so as to expedite proceedings. It is usually connected with noncontroversial matters.

**Unanimous Consent Agreement**—An agreement in the Senate, formulated by party leaders and other Senators, to regulate when important bills will be taken up on the floor and to limit debate on amendments. Sometimes referred to as a “time-limitation” agreement.

**Veto**—The constitutional procedure by which the President refuses to approve a bill or joint resolution and thus prevents its enactment into law. A regular veto occurs when the President returns the legislation to the originating House without approval. It can be overridden only by a two-thirds vote in each House. A pocket veto occurs after Congress has adjourned and is unable to override the President’s action.