



## **NAACP WASHINGTON BUREAU FACT SHEET: *What happens to bills when the Congress ends?***

In the United States, a “Congress” or congressional term lasts two years. Most recently, the 109<sup>th</sup> Congress began on January 4, 2005, and adjourned on December 9, 2006. The 110<sup>th</sup> Congress began on January 4, 2007. Each *Congress* is comprised of two sessions; the *first session*, which encompasses the first year, and the *second session*, which is comprised of the second year.

At any point when Congress is in session, a sitting member of Congress may introduce legislation: members of the House of Representatives introduce bills in the House and Senators introduce bills in the Senate. This legislation can cover almost any issue conceivable. Once a bill has been introduced, it is alive and may be considered at any time during the Congress.

Once a Congress adjourns, however, at the end of its two-year cycle, all bills that have been introduced in either the House or the Senate that have not made it through the entire legislative process and signed into law are dead. This includes bills that may have passed both the House and the Senate but were never finalized and sent to the President for his signature; bills that passed one house (either the House or the Senate) but not the other; bills that were the subject of committee or subcommittee hearings but were never considered by either house; and bills that never got more action after being introduced.

Many bills that are not signed into law during a Congress are often re-introduced the following Congress. They are almost always given new numbers; sometimes the content or title of a bill might be changed when they are reintroduced. It is not uncommon for a bill to be reintroduced in four or five different Congresses (over a period of 8-10 years) before any action is taken on it. Oftentimes, bills are reintroduced and reintroduced until the main sponsor leaves Congress, when it may just die or be taken up by someone else.

**A very small number of bills introduced actually become law.**  
**In the 109<sup>th</sup> Congress, which ran from 2005 to 2006, more than 10,500 bills were introduced in the US House and Senate.**  
**Of these, 440 laws were enacted.**  
**This means that just over 2% of the bills introduced in the 109<sup>th</sup> Congress actually became law.**

