A very small number of bills introduced actually become law. In the 109th Congress, which ran from 2005 to 2005, over 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 109th Congress actually became law.

There are four types of proposals that can be introduced in either the House or the Senate; a bill, a joint resolution, a concurrent resolution or a simple resolution.

A BILL is the type used in most legislation; in order to become law, a bill must go through the entire legislative process and be signed by the President to become law. Upon introduction in the House, a bill is given a number with the letters “H.R.” in front, which stand for “House of Representatives” (i.e., H.R. 4040). In the Senate, a bill is given a number with the letter “S.” in front to signify that it is a Senate bill (i.e., S. 4040).

JOINT RESOLUTIONS may originate in either the House or the Senate; they are very similar to bills in that they are subject to the same legislative process, with the exception of a joint resolution that proposes an amendment to the Constitution. Joint Resolutions to amend the Constitution that receive approval by two thirds of the House and Senate are then sent to individual states for ratification; Joint Resolutions that become laws must be signed by the President. A Joint Resolution originating in the House of Representatives is designated “H.J.Res.” followed by its individual number; in the Senate it is designated “S.J.Res.” followed by its individual number.

CONCURRENT RESOLUTIONS usually deal with matters affecting the operations of both the House and the Senate. While concurrent resolutions need to be passed by both the House and the Senate, they do not require the President’s signature. A concurrent resolution originating in the House of Representatives is designated “H.Con.Res.” followed by its individual number; in the Senate it is designated “S.Con.Res.” followed by its individual number.

SIMPLE RESOLUTIONS relate to matters of the House or the Senate, need to be passed by only one body, and do not require the President’s signature. Simple resolutions deal with matters related only to the House or Senate, such as expressing the sense of the House or Senate that someone should be congratulated for a specific achievement, etc. Simple resolutions in the House are designated “H.Res.” followed by its individual number; simple resolutions in the Senate are designated “S.Res.” followed by its individual number.

A proposal can become law either as a stand-alone bill or as an amendment to a larger piece of legislation.
**How a Bill Becomes a Law**

A bill is introduced in either the House or the Senate.

Any member of Congress can introduce legislation on almost any subject if Congress is in session. The legislation will be recorded as having one original sponsor and an unlimited number of co-sponsors.

### Number and Referral

The legislation is given a number and is referred to the appropriate committee or committees, which may then refer the legislation to a sub-committee for consideration.

For definitions of the different kinds of bills, please see the back.

### Hearings May Be Held

Hearings may be held on the legislation. The first step is usually a public hearing, in which members of the committee hear differing views on the proposal. Bills may then be scheduled for a "mark-up," in which they may be amended and then sent to the full committee, where the hearing process may begin all over again. The legislation may again be amended during the full committee mark-up. A final vote is then taken on the legislation, and members of the committee may vote to defeat the legislation or move it forward.

### Floor Consideration

Upon committee approval, legislation can be scheduled for consideration by the full House or Senate. This can be a very simple or very complex process in both the House and the Senate. Once the bill has been debated and possibly amended, a final vote is taken.

### Sent to the Other Body

Once a bill has passed either the House or the Senate, it must then go to the other body for consideration. This usually means the same process: committee hearings, mark-ups, and then consideration by the full body. The final product may look similar to that which was passed by the other body, but oftentimes is very different.

### A Conference Committee

A conference committee is formed of select Members from the House and the Senate who are charged with hammering out the differences between the House and Senate versions of the bill.

### The Final Version

The final version of the bill as developed by the Conference Committee must then be approved of again by the full House and Senate.

**Presidential Action:** The bill is then sent to the President for his signature or veto. If he vetos the bill, Congress may still decide to make the bill law if two-thirds of both chambers vote to override the veto. If the President does not sign the bill within 10 days (a "pocket veto") and Congress is in session, it becomes law without his signature.