

Legislation and You



**USW Legislative
Department**

April 2014

A Short Primer for USW Members

- The Role of Congress
- How a Bill Becomes Law
- Why it is Important for USW Members to be engaged in the Legislative Process

The Nation's Founders created a Tripartite System of Government

The federal government's powers are shared by three branches:

Legislative

Executive

Judicial

Although the three branches are coequal, the legislature takes the lead in formulating the structure and duties of the other two.

The Executive, Legislative, and Judicial branches are interwoven with the other so no branch can pass laws without the involvement of the other branches. This system is called *"checks and balances."*

The Role of Congress

- Congress is often viewed as a single entity; however, Congress is “**bicameral**” . meaning divided into two chambers:
 - The first branch is the House . they are elected every two years
 - The second branch is the Senate . they serve a 6 year term and elections of 1/3 of Senators take place every two years.
- There are 435 Members in the House
 - 193 Democrats and 242 Republicans
- There are 100 Senators (two from each state)
 - 53 Democrats and 47 Republicans

Leaders and Parties in Congress

- **Congress is a partisan body**
 - . **The majority party in the House and Senate controls:**
 - **Top leadership posts**
 - **Each chambers' agenda or activities**
 - **Majorities on committees and subcommittees and all other chairmanships**
 - . **There is a “new” Congress every two years**
 - **Every two years, Senators and Representatives elect their top leaders by secret ballot in their party caucuses**

Congressional Leadership

- House of Representatives
 - . **The Speaker of the House**
 - No other member of Congress possesses the visibility and authority of the Speaker of the House
 - The Speaker of the House is **second** in line behind the **Vice President** to succeed to the **Presidency**
 - Controls all aspects of the business of the House
 - . **Majority Leader and Minority Leader**
 - Majority party leads floor activity as determined by the Speaker . the minority party leads the opposition
 - . **Majority Whip and Minority Whip**
 - Both whips gather support among their caucus for upcoming votes

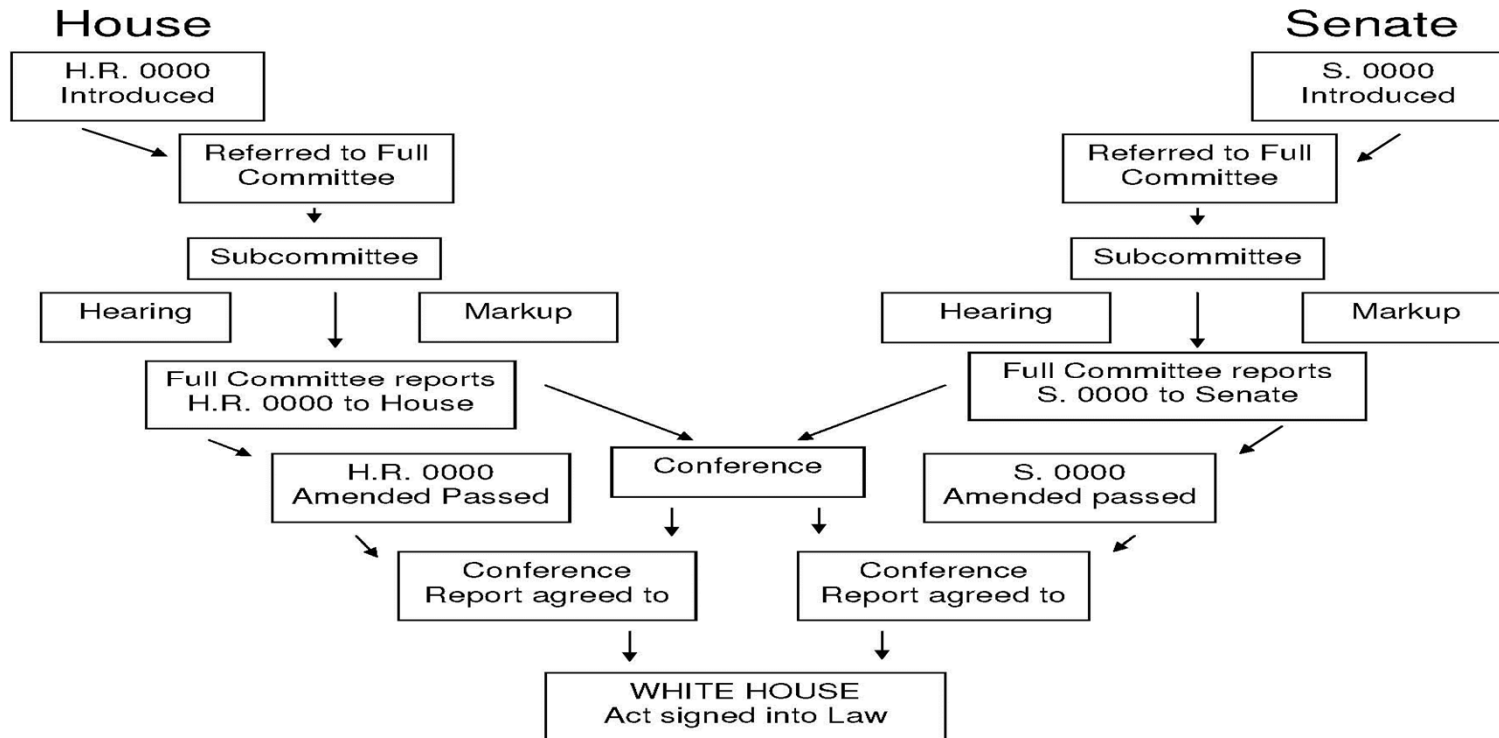
Congressional Leadership

- U. S. Senate . Unlike the House, the Senate's majority leader almost never presides in the Senate Chambers
 - . The Senate has three top presiding officers
 1. **President of the Senate**
 - . The Constitutional president of the Senate is the Vice President of the United States
 2. **President Pro Tempore**
 - . The President Pro Tempore presides in the Vice President's absence
 3. **Presiding Officer**
 - . A dozen or so majority senators, typically junior members, serve approximately half-hour stints each day as the presiding officer

Congressional Leadership

- U.S. Senate
 - . Majority Leader/Minority Leader
 - The Senate Majority Leader is the majority party's highest leader and sets the schedule
 - . Majority and Minority Whip
 - Like the House, the Whips of both parties are responsible for whipping each of their caucuses, meaning they try to ensure members vote the way the party wants.

How a Bill Becomes Law



How a Bill Becomes Law

- Only members of Congress can **introduce** legislation . a member who introduces a bill becomes its **sponsor**
 - This member may seek **cosponsors** to demonstrate wide support and they often ask outside groups to help urge other members to cosponsor their bill.
- Once a bill is introduced, it is referred to a **committee**

Just because a member of Congress introduces a bill, does not mean it automatically goes anywhere+. The majority of bills that are introduced die+in the committee or subcommittee to which it was referred at the end of the two year Congress, without ever being voted on.

How a Bill Becomes Law

- After Committee Referral
 - . **Bill goes to subcommittee** for study, amending and approval at **hearings** - if approved;
 - . **Bill goes to the full committee** where more hearings, and **amendments (“mark-ups”)** to the bill are made.
- Committee/Sub-Committee Pitfalls
 - . The Party in power (the **Majority**) always gets the playing field tipped in their favor and always have a much **larger ratio of members on each committee and subcommittee** than the Minority party. Therefore, bills brought before committees by minority members are often left to die.

How a Bill Becomes Law

- Bill can now be scheduled for a vote
 - . **In the Senate** it is now up to the Majority Leader to schedule a bill that has been voted out of Committee for the floor. meaning for a vote by the full Senate.
 - . In the Senate, any bill that is controversial is subject to a **filibuster** when it is brought to the floor for a vote. There is no filibuster in the House
- **Filibuster**
 - . A filibuster requires a **Super-Majority** (60 votes) to stop debate and allow the bill to come to the floor for a vote.

How a Bill Becomes Law

- **In the House** the bill has one more process before being scheduled for the floor
 - **Bill goes to the Rules Committee** where it is decided if amendments can be made and other rules for voting on the bill.
 - At that point it is up to the House Majority Leadership to decide when a bill goes to the House floor for a vote.

How a Bill Becomes Law

- **We're not done yet!**
 - . Once similar bills pass both the House and Senate . any differences between the two bills must be worked out
 - . **The bill now goes to a Conference Committee** made up of a small group of both House and Senate members to negotiate the deal
 - . Once agreement is reached, the compromise bill must again be voted on in both the House and Senate
 - . The bill is then sent to the President . who can sign it into law or **veto** it . Congress can then **override the veto** with a two-thirds vote in BOTH the House and the Senate.

Fighting for Our Rights

- **You have a right to be heard** - The concept of **grassroots lobbying** is as old as the Constitution itself. Protection for the citizen lobbyists can be found in the very first amendment of the Bill of Rights, where it is stated the "Congress shall make no law abridging the right of the people to peaceably assemble and to petition the government for a redress of grievances."
- **Money talks** - Yet, lobbying to redress grievances has become the means by which large and powerful interest groups influence Congress. Our voices must compete with:
 - Wealthy corporations, well-funded industry associations, and even countries - like China who can hire **influential lobbying firms**.
 - Lobbying also takes the form of **expensive media campaigns**.



Fighting for Working Families

- “ **The measure of our influence is in the strength of our voice.**
 - “ **We can fight the power of money when we organize at the grassroots level and our best weapon is a well-informed and active membership**
 - “ **Rapid Response, Women of Steel, SOAR, and involvement in Political Action are the key to our power.**
 - “ **Lawmakers need to be accountable for their votes and you are important because you live and vote in your legislator’s district – USW members can “put the heat on” better than any Washington lobbyist!**

How to Lobby

- “ **Lobbying is simply another word for educating. Your goal is to get a commitment from the legislator. To be effective you have to do three things:**
 - “ **Prepare**
 - “ **Persuade**
 - “ **Persist**
- “ **To be more effective, you need to be:**
 - “ **Polite and Professional**

How to Lobby

“ Preparation:

- “ Know your legislator, their background, their record
- “ Learn your issue - you don't have to be an expert, just know why this matters to you & your local. If you don't know the answer to a question, get back to them later.
- “ Understand your opponents' arguments against you
- “ For group meetings, talk beforehand - decide who will cover what part of the issue – designate someone to open the meeting – someone to take notes.
- “ Be prepared to keep the meeting on track if someone – including the legislator – changes the subject!

How to Lobby

● Persuasion

- Personalize it – how does this affect you and your family, your community? Get stories from your members that pertain to the issue
- Collect facts supporting your argument and present them in a fact sheet, share letters of opposition and concerns from members
- Really listen to what the Legislator or their staff are saying, “we understand,” “we’ve always supported labor” are not definitive statements – try to get a commitment.
- Be polite and positive and give your argument in a friendly manner – don’t be confrontational.



How to Lobby

“ Persistence:

- “ Write a thank you note or email and establish a relationship with the staff who handle the issue.
- “ Follow up if you do not get a commitment.
- “ Every time there is more information on your issue, share it with the staff.
- “ Let your Rapid Response Coordinator, the USW Washington office or your staff know about the results of your meeting.
- “ Keep your eye on the members votes on all your issues – at the end of two years they will need to be re-elected!



Tools You Can Use

Sample Letter Format

Date

Honorable John Doe
House of Representatives
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Representative Doe:

I am writing to urge you to support/oppose H.R._____/S. _____, a bill to _____. This bill will be considered soon by the Committee *(or on the floor of the House/Senate)*.

Passage/defeat of this legislation is important to me as a member *(or spouse of a member)* of the USW. When this bill comes up for consideration. I urge you to vote for/against it because *(in your own words, state the reasons for your position, share experience on the matter, and relate personal experiences that are relevant)*.

I would appreciate your support of this position, and would like to know your views on the issue and how you intend to vote on this bill.

Thank you for taking time to consider my views.

Sincerely,

Harry Smith
111 Main Street
Any town. ST 12345
(010) 987-6543

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Tools You Can Use

TIPS FOR AN EFFECTIVE LETTER

Your Representative and Senators can only represent you IF you keep them informed on your views. Here are some tips to help you write an effective letter:

1 . Address it Properly

Representative

Honorable _____
_____ House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

Senator

Honorable _____
_____ Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

2 . Identify Yourself

Be sure to mention the state, congressional or legislative district, city or county in which you are a voter. Mention your local union affiliation as well.

3 . Be Specific

When writing about legislation, use the bill number (H.R. 10., S. 10 or the title - OSHA Reform Bill, etc.) if you know them. If not, briefly describe the issue that concerns you.

4 . Be Timely

Write when the issue is current, not after a key vote has been taken.

5 . Explain Your Position

As a worker, a taxpayer, or a consumer; say in your own words how the bill or amendment will affect you. Don't forget that a bill can change as it moves through the legislative process. So, urge your legislator to oppose crippling amendments or support strengthening ones.

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Tools You Can Use

Key Websites

- **Thomas** (Search for bills, look-up votes and access the Congressional record): <http://thomas.loc.gov>
- **U.S. House of Representatives** (Look-up your Representative, access biographical, and contact information): www.house.gov
- **U.S. Senate** (Look-up your Senator, view Senate schedule, access biographical, and contact information): www.senate.gov
- **Office of the Clerk** (View House schedule, House leadership and historical information): <http://clerk.house.gov/>
- **Open Secrets** (See how money flows in Washington, D.C.): www.opensecrets.org/
- **Congress.org** (Follow the daily happenings on Capitol Hill): www.congress.org/
- **Roll Call** (the newspaper of Capitol Hill): www.rollcall.com/
- **C-Span** (Watch live floor debates and committee hearings): www.c-span.org/
- **United Steelworkers** (Stay up-to-date on your Union's actions): www.usw.org/
- **AFL-CIO** (Labor federation website and congressional voting records): www.aflcio.org/



Tools You Can Use

Cell Phone Apps

Information about Congress & Congressional Members

iPhone

Call Congress . Free
Congress 411 . Free
Follow Congress . Free
Real Time Congress . Free

Android

Congress . Free
Congress 112 - Free

Blackberry

Quick Congress - Free

News about Congress

iPhone

C-SPAN Radio . Free
The Hill
CQ Roll Call . Free
Politico . Free
National Journal - Free

Android

CQ Roll Call . Free
Politico . Free
The Hill . Free

Blackberry

C-SPAN Radio . Free
CQ Roll Call . Free
Politico - Free