

# HOW A BILL BECOMES A LAW: THE HOUSE

## TEXT SUMMARY

Congress considers thousands of bills and resolutions at each session. A **bill** is a proposed law that applies to the nation as a whole or to certain people or places. A **resolution** is a measure that one house passes but that does not have the force of

law. A **concurrent resolution** also lacks the force of law and deals with matters in which the House and Senate must act jointly. A **joint resolution** does have the force of law and deals with unusual or temporary matters. A bill or resolution usually deals with only one topic, but a **rider** regarding an unrelated matter may be included. A rider is a proposal with little

chance of passing on its own, so it is attached to a bill that probably will pass.

After a bill is introduced, it is read; the Speaker then sends it to the appropriate standing committee. Most work on bills is done in **subcommittees**, or small

groups within committees. The committee may then act on the bill or set it aside and ignore it. In the latter case, a **discharge petition**, approved by a House majority, may send a bill to the floor for debate.

Once out of committee, a bill is placed on a calendar, or schedule for debating bills. Before the bill is debated, the Rules Committee must approve it or it dies.

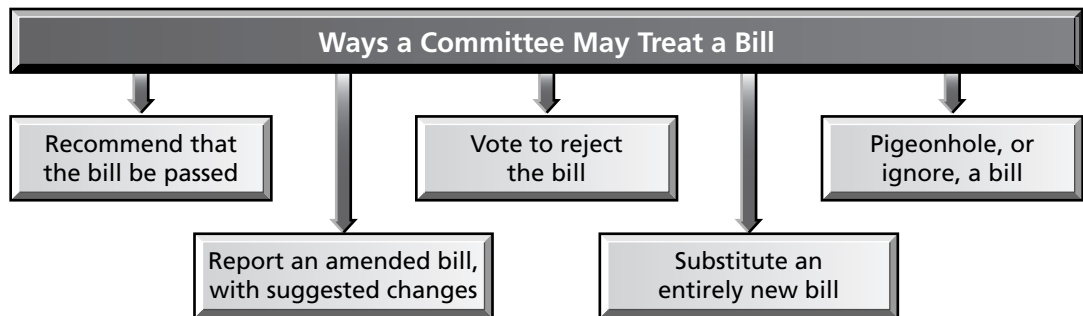
Once on the floor, the bill is read again. In the interest of speed, the entire House may debate it as a **Committee of the Whole**—one large committee that has less strict rules than does the House. For example, the **quorum**, the number of members required to do business, is smaller for a Committee of the Whole than for the House.

Finally, a vote takes place. If approved, the bill is **engrossed**, or printed in final form. It is read once more and if approved is sent to the Senate.

### THE BIG IDEA

A bill must move through reviews and committee hearings before it reaches the House floor; if passed, it moves to the Senate.

## GRAPHIC SUMMARY: Possible Committee Actions on a Bill



Most bills are pigeonholed and die in committee.

### REVIEW QUESTIONS

1. Why are some bills debated by a Committee of the Whole?

2. **Diagram Skills** How may a committee prevent a bill from advancing to the House for debate?