

GLOSSARY OF LEGISLATIVE TERMS

Act – Legislation that has passed both chambers of Congress and become law.

Adjourn – To close a legislative day.

Amendment – A change in a bill or document by adding, substituting, or omitting portions.

Appropriations Bill – Legislation that provides funds for authorized programs.

Authorization Bill – Legislation establishing a program and setting funding limits.

Bill – Legislation introduced in either the House or Senate.

By Request – Phrase used when a member introduces a bill at the request of an executive agency or private organization but does not necessarily endorse the legislation.

Calendar – List and schedule of bills to be considered by a committee.

Caucus – Meeting of Republican or Democratic Members of Congress to determine policy and/or choose leaders.

Chair – Presiding officer.

Chamber – Place where the entire House or Senate meets to conduct business; also, the House of Representatives or the Senate itself.

Clean Bill – A bill that has been revised in mark-up. Amendments are assembled with unchanged language and the bill is referred to the floor with a new number.

Cloak Rooms – Small rooms on the House and Senate floor where members can rest and hold informal conferences.

Closed Hearing – Hearings closed to all but members, staff, and witnesses testifying; also called Executive Hearings.

Closed Rule – In the House, a prohibition against amendments not approved by the committee which brought the bill to the floor. The House must either accept or reject the bill “as is”.

Cloture – Method of limiting debate or ending a filibuster in the Senate. At least 60 Senators must vote in favor before cloture can be invoked.

Cosponsor – Member who joins in sponsoring legislation but who is not the principal sponsor or the one who introduced the legislation.

Commit – To refer a bill or matter to a committee.

Committee – A group of Members assigned to give special consideration to certain bills. See Joint Committee.

Committee of the Whole – A mechanism to expedite business in the House whereby the House itself becomes a committee, allowing for less rigid rules and a quorum of 100 instead of 218.

Companion Bills – Identical bills introduced separately in both the Senate and the House.

Concurrent Resolution – Legislative action used to express the position of the House or Senate. Does not have the force of law.

Conference Committee – Meeting between Representatives and Senators to resolve differences when two versions of a similar bill have been passed by the House and Senate.

Congressional Record – Official transcript of the proceedings in Congress.

Continuing Resolution – A resolution enacted to

allow specific Executive Branch agencies to continue operating even though funds have not been appropriated for them for the following fiscal year.

Discharge Petition – A petition for the purpose of removing a bill from the control of a committee. A discharge petition must be signed by a majority of Members in the House or Senate.

Engrossed Bill – Final copy of a bill passed by either the House or Senate with amendments. The bill is then delivered to the other chamber.

Enrolled Bill – Final copy of a bill that has passed both the House and Senate in identical form.

Extension of Remarks – When a Member of Congress inserts in the Congressional Record material not directly related to the debate underway.

Filibuster – Tactic used in the Senate whereby a minority intentionally delays a vote.

Final Passage – Adoption of a bill after all amendments have been voted on.

Fiscal Year – Accounting year. For the federal government, the fiscal year (FY) is October 1 to September 30 of the following calendar year.

Floor Manager – A Member who attempts to direct a bill through the debate and amendment process to a final vote.

General Consent – A unanimous silent vote. If there is no objection to the matter, it is resolved without a formal vote.

Germane – Having some relation to the bill in question. In the House all amendments must be germane.

Hearing – Committee sessions for hearing witnesses.

Hopper – Box on the desk of the Clerk of the House where sponsors submit their bills.

Joint Committee – Committee composed of Members of both the House and Senate.

Joint Resolution – Legislation similar to a bill that has the force of law if passed by both houses and signed by the President, generally used for special situations.

Lame Duck – Member of Congress (or the President) who has not been reelected but whose term has not yet expired.

Lobbying – The process of attempting to influence the passage, defeat, or content of legislation by individuals or a group other than Members of Congress.

Logrolling – Process whereby Members help each other get particular legislation passed. One Member will help another on one piece of legislation in return for similar help.

Main Motion – Motion that introduces the business or proposal to the assembly for action.

Majority Leader – Chief spokesperson and strategist for the majority party, elected by Members of the majority party.

Marking Up a Bill – Process, usually in committee, of analyzing a piece of legislation section by section and making changes.

Member (of Congress) – A U.S. Senator or U.S. Representative.

Minority Leader – Chief spokesperson and strategist for the minority party, elected by Members of the minority party.

Motion – Proposal presented to a legislative body for consideration.

Motion to Table – Proposal to postpone consideration of a matter in the Senate.

Omnibus Bill – Bill regarding a single subject that combines many different aspects of that subject.

Open Rule – In the House, permission to offer amendments to a particular bill during floor debate.

Override a Veto – A two-thirds majority vote by both the House and Senate to set aside a Presidential veto of legislation.

Petition – Plea by an individual or organization for a chamber to consider particular legislation.

Pocket Veto (An indirect veto) – When the President does not sign or veto legislation submitted to him/her by Congress within ten days of adjournment, the bill dies.

Point of Order – An objection that language, an amendment, or bill is in violation of a rule. Also used to force a quorum call.

President of the Senate – The Vice President of the United States is designated by the Constitution as the President of the Senate. The President of the Senate casts a vote only in the case of a tie.

Previous Question – In the House, a request to end all debate and force a vote.

Private Bill – Bill designed to benefit a certain individual or business.

President Pro Tempore – Senator who presides over the Senate in the absence of the Vice President of the U.S. The President **Pro Tem** is usually the longest-serving Member of the majority party.

Public Law – Designation used for legislation that has been passed by both chambers and signed by the President.

Quorum – The number of Senators or Representatives who must be present before a legislative body can conduct official business.

Quorum Call – In the Senate, a method of determining whether there is a quorum. Often used to suspend debate without adjourning.

Ranking Members – The Members of the majority and minority party on a committee next in seniority after the chair.

Recess – Temporary halt to proceedings, with a time set for proceedings to resume.

Record Vote – Vote in which Members of Congress indicate their vote orally for listing in the Congressional Record.

Rescission Bill – Legislation that revokes spending authority previously granted by Congress.

Resolution – A measure passed only in one house to express the sentiment of that chamber. A simple resolution does not have the force of law.

Rider – A measure added to another, often unrelated, bill with the purpose of one piece of legislation passing on the strength of another.

Roll Call Vote – In the House, an oral vote for which a record is kept.

Seniority – Length of unbroken service, often used to determine rank in committees.

Sine Die – Final adjournment at the end of a session. Bills under consideration but not enacted must be reintroduced in the next session.

Speaker – The presiding officer of the House, elected by Members of the House.

Sponsor – The Representative or Senator who introduces a measure.

Suspend the Rules – Procedural action in the House whereby a two-thirds majority can vote to bring a measure to a vote after forty minutes of debate.

Table a Bill – Motion to kill a bill by cutting off consideration of it. Such motions are not debatable.

Unanimous Consent – A procedure whereby a matter is considered agreed to if no Member on the floor objects. Unanimous Consent motions save time by eliminating the need for a vote.

Whip – Assistant leader for each party in each chamber who keeps other Members of the party

informed of the legislative agenda of the leader. Also tracks sentiment among party Members for certain legislation and tries to persuade Members to be present and vote for measures important to the leadership.

Yield – Permission granted by the Member who has the floor to another Member who wishes to make a comment or ask a question.

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