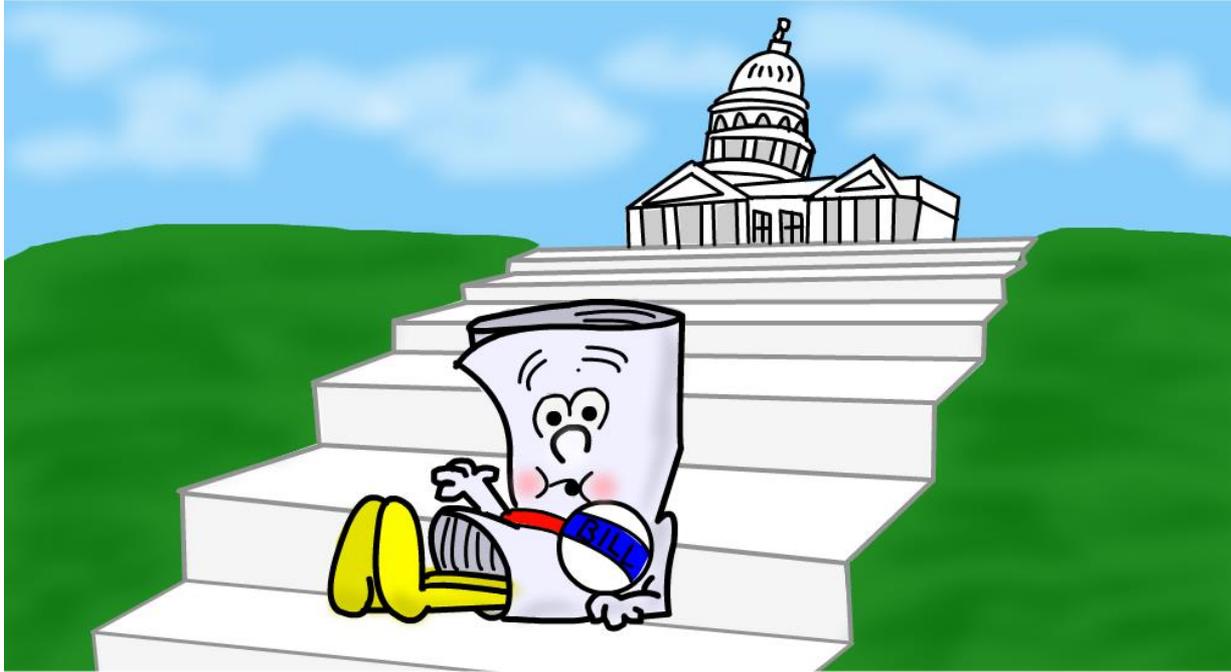


Basic Government Processes



Heather Sachs, National Down Syndrome Congress

Ricki Sabia, National Down Syndrome Congress

Agenda

- Branches of government
- The legislative branch
- Leadership & Committees
- Budget & Appropriations
- How a bill becomes a law
- State & local governments





3 BRANCHES of GOVERNMENT



 **Constitution**
(provides a separation of powers)



Legislative
(makes laws)



Congress



Senate

100 elected senators total;
2 senators per state



House of Representatives

435 elected representatives total; representatives based on each state's population



Executive
(carries out laws)



President



Vice President



Cabinet

Nominated by the president and must be approved by the Senate (with at least 51 votes)



Judicial
(evaluates laws)



Supreme Court

9 justices nominated by the president and must be approved by the Senate (with at least 51 votes)



Other Federal Courts

The U.S. Congress

- Bicameral – 2 chambers
- Senate
 - 100 members
 - 2 per state
 - 6 year term
- House
 - 435
 - 2 year term
 - Tied to population of state



Congressional Duties

- Make the laws
- Represent their constituents



Powers of Congress

- Taxes
- Money
- Regulate trade
- Declare war
- Military & national guard
- Post office
- Run all federal property



Elastic Clause and Constitutional Amendments

- Elastic clause confers the power to “make all laws which shall be necessary and proper for carrying into execution the foregoing powers” -- expands the powers of Congress, especially when national laws come into conflict with state laws
- Congress also has power to enforce the key civil rights amendments 13 (slavery), 14 (due process, equal protection of the law) and 15 (voting rights)

Congressional Leadership - House, 116th Congress

Majority (Democrat)

- Speaker – Nancy Pelosi (D-CA)
- Majority Leader – Steny Hoyer (D-MD)
- Majority Whip – James Clyburn (D-SC)
- Ass't Speaker – Ben Ray Lujan (D-NM)
- Caucus Chairman – Hakeem Jeffries (D-NY)
- Campaign Committee Chair – Cheri Bustos (D-IL)

Minority (Republican)

- Minority Leader – Kevin McCarthy (R-CA)
- Whip – Steve Scalise (R-LA)
- Conference Chair – Liz Cheney (R-WY)
- Policy Committee Chairman – Gary Palmer (R-AL)
- Congressional Committee Chair – Tom Emmer (R-MN)
- Conference Secretary – Jason Smith (R – MO)

Congressional Leadership - Senate

Majority (Republican)

- Majority Leader – Sen. Mitch McConnell (R-KY)
- Ass't Majority Leader – Sen. John Thune (R-SD)

Minority (Democrat)

- Minority Leader – Sen. Chuck Schumer (D-NY)
- Minority Whip – Sen. Dick Durbin (D-IL)



Who are these leaders and why are they important?

- Elected by members of their party at the beginning of each Congress
- Most senior and powerful party members/spokespeople
- Set the agenda (put items on and keep off agenda)
- Count and “whip” votes
- Make committee assignments
- Raise money and funnel into colleagues’ campaigns

ARE YOU A CONSTITUENT OF ANY LEADERS???

Key Committees - Senate

- Appropriations – funding for gov't programs
- Budget
- Finance – taxation, debt, Social Security (Medicaid, SSI, SSDI)
- Health, Education, Labor & Pensions (HELP)
- Veterans' Affairs

Key Committees - House

- Appropriations
- Budget
- Education & Labor (“Ed & Workforce”)
- Energy & Commerce (“E&C”)
- Veterans’ Affairs
- Ways & Means – tax-writing
- Rules – sets rules for bills that come to the floor

The Federal Budget

- Budget = plan for saving and spending money
- Appropriations = how the money will be spent (*laws may authorize a certain amount of funding, but it still must be appropriated*)
- Federal gov't makes a budget for every year (called “fiscal year”)
 - Fiscal year starts in October and ends in September (different from regular calendar year)

**See toolkit for self-advocates developed by
Autistic Self-Advocacy Network**

Follow the Money: The U.S. Budget and You

<https://autisticadvocacy.org/policy/toolkits/budget/>

The Budget Process

- President submits his budget proposal to Congress
 - Funding levels for federal agencies
 - Changes to mandatory programs (Medicaid, SSI, etc)
 - Changes to tax code
- House & Senate writes and votes on budget resolutions
- House and Senate budget committees pass bills
 - Typically must go to a conference committee to reach agreement
- Congress is not required to reach an agreement on budget amount
- President does not need to approve budget resolution
- Congress gets to make the final decision about the federal budget

The Appropriations Process

- After budget process completed (or stalled), House & Senate begin to determine how the \$ will be spent on things like education, health care, transportation, etc.
- Congress is “appropriating” money to different departments and programs
 - Need to pass 12 different appropriations bills (or an Omnibus bill)
- Spending decisions start in subcommittees and work through process (committee, floor vote, conference between chambers)
- Once both House and Senate reach agreement, final bill goes to the President for signature or veto

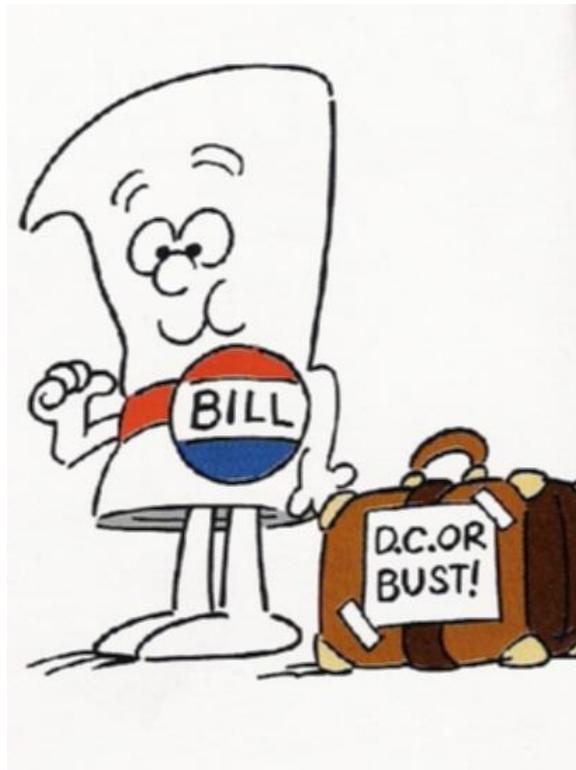
What if Congress can't agree on budget?

- Budget bills must be signed by October 1 (for the following year) or else risk of government shutdown
- Without a budget, the government runs out of money
- When it runs out of money, it has to close. This is a SHUTDOWN.
 - Many gov't services stop in a shutdown
 - Most people who work for the federal government will not get paid
 - Some have to work without pay (“essential services” like air traffic controllers) while others are not allowed to come to work
- To make sure the gov't doesn't run out of money, Congress can pass a CONTINUING RESOLUTION (“CR”)
 - A CR says that gov't can keep paying the same amount for everything for a little while

How a Bill Becomes a Law

Schoolhouse Rock video:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2nKyihov9z8>

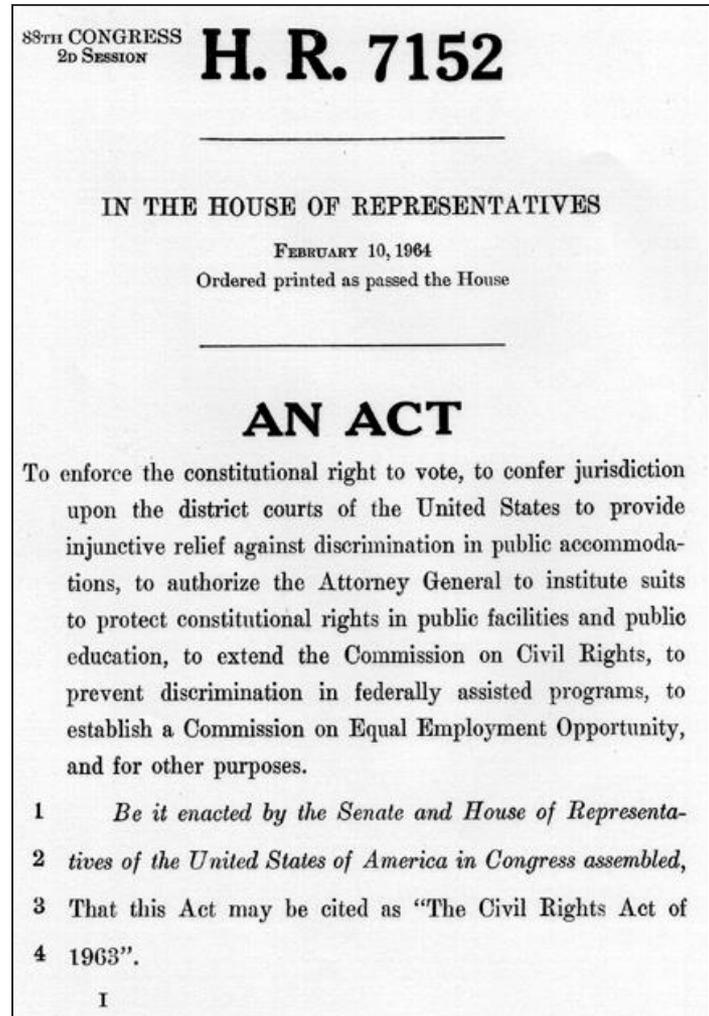


Step 1: An Idea

- Each “bill” starts out as an *idea*
- These ideas can come from *Congress*, private *citizens* or from the *White House* (i.e. The President)
- *Special Interest Groups* (groups of individuals who try to influence Congress) may also present ideas to Congress that may become bills.

Step 2: Introduction

- The idea is “drafted” (written) as a bill.
- The bill must be *introduced by a Senator or House Member.*
- Every bill is given a title and number when it is introduced – *H.R.1* or *S.1*



Step 3: Committee

- After it is introduced, each “bill” is then sent to the committee that seems most qualified to handle it.
- Committees and subcommittees research, revise and debate bills.
 - Hearings, briefings
- Choices:
 - Reject it immediately
 - Sit on it
 - Approve it
(with or without changes)



Step 4: Floor Debate

- Bill approved by committee goes to the “floor” to be voted on by the **full House of Representatives** or the **full Senate**.
- Members of Congress debate pros and cons
- Add amendments, riders (a completely unrelated item to the bill- Senate only)
- Filibuster (Senate only) – Senator ties to “talk a bill to death”

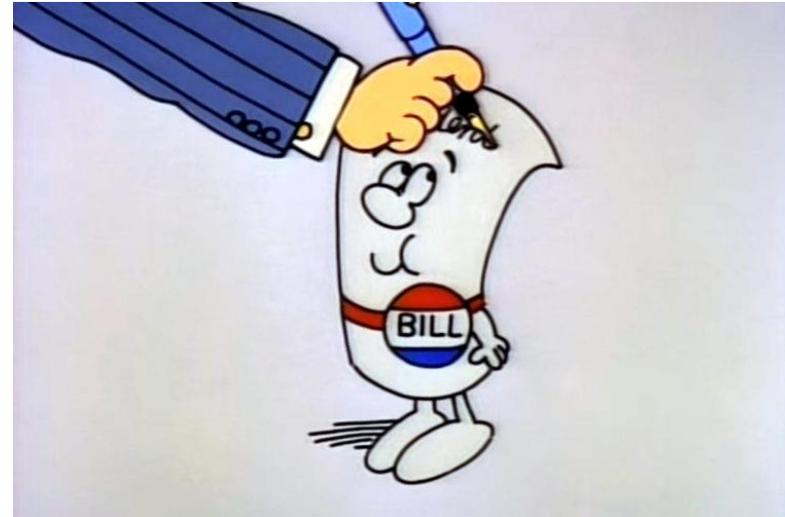
Step 5: Vote

- A simple **majority vote** is all that is needed to pass a bill.
- If either chamber refuses to pass it, the bill dies.
- Bills passed in each chamber must be identical
- If different versions are passed in each chamber, the bill goes to a “conference committee” which results in a compromise bill



Step 6: Presidential Action

- Approval:
 - Sign bill into law
 - Do nothing: approval after 10 days if Congress in session
- Rejection:
 - Veto
 - Do nothing: “Pocket veto” after 10 days
- Note: 2/3 of Congress can override a veto!



State Governments

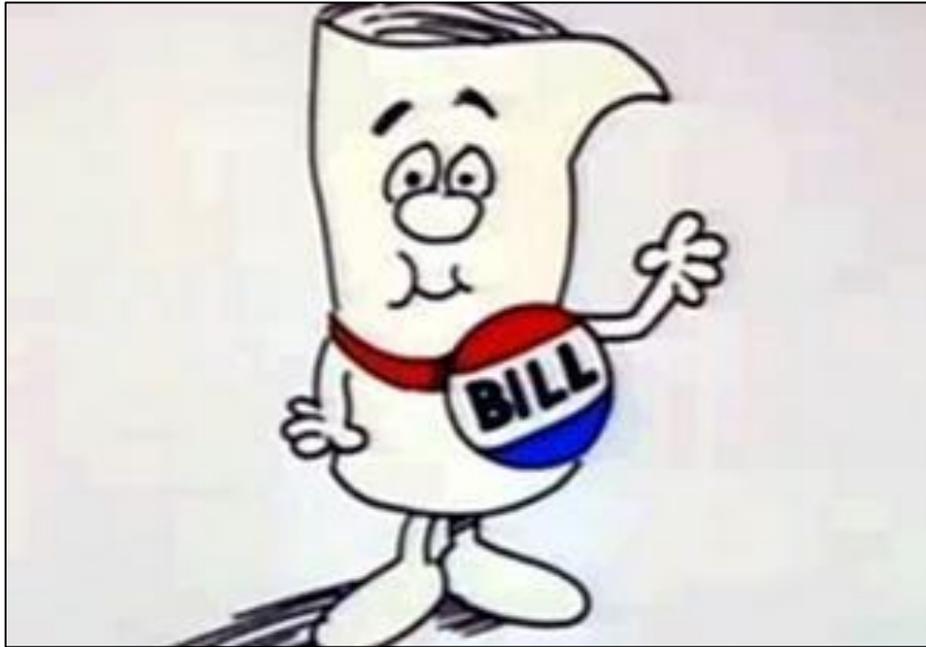
- The primary responsibilities of state governments are:
 - education
 - public health
 - transportation
 - economic development
 - criminal justice
 - the licensing and regulation of professions (teachers, social workers, doctors, lawyers, barbers/stylists, architects, etc.)
- Governors are the chief executive officers of the states

State Legislatures

- Most states are bicameral (2 chambers)
- Mostly part-time; session length varies (30 days – 12 months – 2 years)
- Most meet annually; some meet bi-annually
- Process varies by state but generally similar to federal process

Local Governments

- Public administration of towns, cities, counties & districts
- Get their authority from the state constitution
- Primary responsibilities
 - City utilities
 - Libraries
 - Fire departments
 - Local law enforcement
 - Parks
- Local governments have some or all of the following decision-making positions:
 - Elected executive: mayor, village president
 - Elected council or commission: city council, school board, county board.
 - Appointed manager: city manager, school superintendent.



Thank you!

Heather Sachs – heather@ndscenter.org

Ricki Sabia – ricki@ndscenter.org