ARTICLE I: THE LEGISLATIVE BRANCH

How Laws Are Made

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How Laws Are Made: Background Information

Let's pretend that many people from Senator Jones' state want a law requiring seat belts on school buses. The Senator with help from the Senate staff, writes a bill to require seat belts. This first version of the bill is called a draft of the proposed law, and the Senator introduces the draft bill in the Senate.

It is then referred to the Transportation Committee, a small group of Senators that specializes in laws relating to that subject and studies them on behalf of the whole Senate. The committee studies this bill along with many others, and selects the best for further action. The committee may hold hearings where experts and other Senators speak publicly about how important seat belts are on school buses, how expensive it will be to put the seat belts on the buses, and how students do not like being strapped down for such a long time every day. The committee then meets and changes the draft bill until a majority of Senators on the committee is satisfied with the bill. A bill that does not get a majority vote of the committee would rarely get further action.

The committee bill is then sent to the Majority Leader and scheduled for debate in the Senate. Senators who think the bill is important will tell the leaders and ask for time to speak. When all the Senators have had a chance to speak, and any proposed changes to the bill have been voted on, the Senate will vote to do one of these things:

1) Pass the bill and send it to the House of Representatives;

2) Defeat the bill and have no new law on the subject;

3) Table the bill (refuse to do anything with this bill); or

4) Send the bill back to the committee for changes.

When the Senate votes, fifty-one of the one hundred Senators must vote one way or the other (this is called a quorum). A majority of the Senators voting must vote yes to pass a bill.

If the bill is passed by the Senate, it is sent to the House of Representatives, the other branch of Congress, which has 435 Members. The bill is then sent to the House Committee on Transportation, which studies the bill and may hold hearings just as the Senate did. The House committee must vote to report the bill to the House for debate. The quorum in the House of Representatives is 218 (one-half plus one) and at the end of the debate, if a majority of the quorum votes yes, the bill is sent to the President.

If the President signs the bill, it then becomes a law. It may also become a law after ten days if the President does not sign it. If the President rejects (vetoes) the bill, it still can become law if two-thirds of the Senate and two-thirds of the Representatives, voting separately, vote to pass the law (override the veto).

A bill may begin in either the Senate or the House of Representatives. So Representative Smith could introduce a bill of her own just as Senator Jones did. This bill would go through the same steps listed above, but would be studied, debated and passed in the House of Representatives before it would be considered in the Senate. All tax bills, however, must originate in the House of Representatives.
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How Laws Are Made: A Visual Representation
About Article I: The Legislative Branch
The United States Capitol: A Student Worksheet One

See if you can identify the basic parts of the U.S. Capitol. Locate and label the following on the outline of the Capitol that’s provided below:

- [ ] House of Representatives
- [ ] Senate
- [ ] Dome
- [ ] Statue of Freedom
- [ ] Original building section

The United States Capitol
(West Front of the Capitol)

What architectural feature of the U.S. Capitol is the most impressive to you? Why?
About Article I: The Legislative Branch
The United States Capitol: A Student Worksheet Two

Artists were our first visual historians. It is through their work that we know what the founders of our country and the early buildings that housed our government looked like. It’s your turn to be a visual historian.

Sketch the basic outline of the U. S. Capitol in the space below. Locate and label the following in your sketch:

☐ House of Representatives
☐ Senate
☐ Dome
☐ Statue of Freedom
☐ Original building section

You may use the internet, your memory, or any other resource to help you sketch the basic outline of the Capitol! As you do your research, see if you find other capitol buildings around the world that look like our U.S. Capitol!
How to Arrange a Tour Inside the U.S. Capitol

If you are a resident of the District of Columbia or are making arrangements for residents of the District of Columbia and would like to tour the inside of the United States Capitol you may contact the office of Congresswoman Eleanor Holmes Norton to arrange your tour. Below are two ways to go about arranging a tour of the Capitol Building through the Congresswoman’s office:

1. Contact Congresswoman Norton’s office and speak with Ms. Tai Brown, the Congresswoman’s Tour Coordinator.
   - Phone: 202-225-8050
   - Fax: 202-225-3002
   - tai.brown@mail.house.gov

   Ms. Brown will want to know:
   a. The date for which you would like the tour
   b. The time of day you would like the tour to begin
   c. Your Washington, D.C. address
   d. The telephone number where you can be reached most frequently
   e. The number of people in your class/group/family

2. Visit Congresswoman Norton’s website and enter your request there, on-line.
   - The web address is www.norton.house.gov.
   a. Once on the Congresswoman’s site look for the section called Explore D.C. Click here and you will go to a screen that lists all of the Federal buildings for which the Congresswoman can arrange tours. The U.S. Capitol is one of these.
   b. Find the U. S. Capitol among the list of options and click where it says click here.
   c. Clicking will take you to the U. S. Capitol Tour page.
   d. Look for the Capitol Tour Request Form. Complete the form as directed and submit it to:
      - Ms. Tai Brown via email or fax.
      - Fax: 202-225-3002 (fax)
      - tai.brown@mail.house.gov

The Congresswoman’s website has lots of information about the U.S. Capitol as well as the rules and regulations for visiting there. You should begin making arrangements for a U.S. Capitol tour several weeks before the date on which you would like to take a tour.