

An Advocate's Dictionary

A

Act

Legislation (or a bill) that has been passed by both the House and the Senate and then signed by the President.

Administration—White House

The Executive Branch under a particular president, "The Obama Administration"

Advocacy

Advocacy is defined as the support or defense of a cause and the act of pleading on behalf of another person.

Amendment

A proposal to change or an actual change to a piece of legislation or existing law

Appropriations Bill

Provides the legal authority needed to spend or obligate U.S. funds from the Treasury. There are up to 12 annual individual appropriations bills, which together fund the entire federal government, and must all be enacted prior to the start of a new fiscal year, designated as October 1.

Authorization Bill

Provides the authority for a program or agency to exist and determines its policy. It also can recommend spending levels to carry out the defined policy or program, but these levels are not binding. Authorizations may be annual, multi-year, or permanent. Expiring programs generally require re-authorizations. House and Senate rules require that authorization be in place before final funding decisions are made.

B

Bill

A legislative proposal that becomes law if it passes both the House and Senate in identical fashion and receives Presidential approval. Bills are introduced as "HR" in the House, and "S" in the Senate with consecutive numbering in each respective chamber. Besides bills, joint resolutions are the only other type of legislation that becomes law [H] Res. or [S] Res.].

Budget Authority

Authority provided by law for the Federal Government to enter into obligations that will result in budget outlays.

Budget Outlay

The actual money spent by the Federal government when they send out Social Security Checks, pay its workers, build new roads or any other activity that requires the government to spend money.

Budget Resolution

The annual decision made by Congress to set spending and revenue levels, providing a voluntary framework within which Congress agrees to limit subsequent funding bills. It also may instruct committees to change current law in order to reduce spending.

C

Capitol Hill

The area encompassing the U.S. Capitol, and the House and Senate office buildings (aka, the Hill).

Casework

Intermediary work, primarily handled in the district/state offices, performed by Members of Congress for constituents who may have problems, or "cases," with the federal government (e.g., Medicare, Social Security).

Caucus

An informal group of Members sharing an interest in the same policy issues (e.g. the House Kidney Caucus).

CBO Score

"Score" or "CBO Score" generally refers to a cost estimate conducted by the nonpartisan Congressional Budget Office (CBO).

Chairman

The Presiding Officer of a committee and/or a subcommittee—a Member of the majority party in the chamber.

Chamber

"Chamber" refers to the two bodies that make up Congress, the House and Senate.

Chief of Staff

The second highest ranking person in the office after the Member; responsible for overall office operations and evaluating political outcomes of various legislative actions.

Christmas Tree

A Christmas Tree bill is used to describe a bill that is one of the few legislative vehicles that might move and actually pass in Congress at a particular time (usually before the end of the year or a congressional recess) to which various and numerous Members of Congress try to attach their favored piece of legislation. These attached pieces of legislation are akin to ornaments on the Christmas tree.

Cloture

The formal Senate procedure used to end a filibuster. It can take up to three days

and requires 60 votes. If cloture wins, 30 additional hours of debate are allowed prior to voting, but they are rarely used. If cloture fails, debate would continue without limits. Instead, the bill is usually set aside.

Colloquy

A pre-scripted floor dialogue between the chairman of a committee and another Member of Congress.

Committee of the Whole

The entire House meeting in the form of a committee.

Committee Report

A formal report prepared by a House or Senate Committee to explain the content of a bill being reported. Committee Reports are optional in the Senate, but mandatory in the House. They contain minority and majority views of Committee Members, a cost impact analysis, and compare the bill to current law.

Companion Bill

A companion bill is similar or may be identical to one introduced in the other house of Congress.

Concurrent Resolution

Used to take action or express opinion on behalf of both the House and Senate; it does not make or become law. It fixes Congressional adjournment dates and sets the annual Congressional budget.

Conferee

A Member of Congress named to represent his/her chamber in negotiations with the other chamber. Formally known as “managers,” the conferees meet in conference committee to negotiate a compromise between the House and Senate versions of a bill.

Conference

A formal meeting or series of meetings, between House and Senate members to reconcile differences between House and Senate passed measures. A Conference is held by a Conference Committee consisting of both Democrats and Republicans (referred to as “conferees” or “managers”) who

sit on the committees with jurisdiction over the legislation that needs to be reconciled into a single uniform measure.

Conference Committee

A temporary panel of House and Senate negotiators. A conference committee is created to resolve differences between versions of similar House and Senate bills.

Conference Report

Refers to the final compromise version of a bill proposed by House and Senate conferees. It also contains the “statement of managers,” a section-by-section explanation of the final agreement.

Congressional Budget Office (CBO)

The agency that, at the request of Congress, conducts non-partisan economic analysis and research and evaluates proposed bills and amendments, assessing their potential cost.

Congressional District

A geographical area within a state from which a Member of the House of Representatives is elected and s/he represents in Congress. There are 435 Congressional districts.

Congressional Record

A daily account of House and Senate floor debate, votes and Members’ remarks. It is available for free online

at www.gpoaccess.gov/crecord.

Congressional Research Service (CRS)

The Congressional Research Service of the Library of Congress. CRS responds to requests for general information and issue analysis only from Members, Committees, or Congressional staff.

Cosponsor

A Member who formally adds his/her name as a supporter to another Member’s bill. An “original” or “initial” cosponsor is one who was listed at the time of the bill’s introduction, not added on later.

Continuing Resolution

A short-term or long-term spending bill that funds the federal government

after September 30 until a permanent appropriations measure is enacted.

D**Dear Colleague**

A letter sent by one or more Members of Congress to fellow Members. “Dear Colleague” letters can describe a new bill and ask for cosponsors, may ask for a Member’s vote for or against a particular issue, or request fellow Members’ support for another priority such as increasing funding for a specific research program. Appropriations “Dear Colleague” letters usually request Members to show support by signing onto to a joint letter to be sent to Appropriations Committee leaders asking for a particular funding amount for a specific program of interest.

Debt

The debt is total amount owed by the Treasury Department, the accumulation of the yearly Federal deficits.

Delegate

A Member of the House from Samoa,

Guam, Puerto Rico, Virgin Islands, or Washington, D.C. The Constitution prohibits delegates from voting on the House floor, but permits them to

vote in Committee.

Deficit

The amount which budget outlays exceed the government’s revenue for the year. The deficit is a yearly figure, whereas debt is the total accumulation of deficits.

Discretionary Spending

Refers to optional spending set by the annual appropriation levels and decided by Congress. This spending is in contrast to entitlement programs (e.g. Medicare and Medicaid) for which funding is mandatory. Funding for the National Institutes of Health and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention is considered discretionary spending and annual funding is determined in each appropriations cycle.

District Work Period

The time set for Members to work at-home away from Washington, D.C. during which the chamber is not in session (aka, recess).

E**Earmarks**

Specific provisions detailing—or setting aside—funding for a particular program or purpose. Expenditures are earmarked in appropriations bills or the accompanying reports. Congress currently has a self-imposed ban on earmarks.

Entitlement Program

Programs like Medicare, Medicaid and Social Security where recipients have a legal right to benefits. Funding levels are set automatically by the number of eligible recipients, not at the discretion of Congress.

Executive Branch

One of the three branches of government, charged with “executing the law”. The President oversees the executive branch, and it is made up of numerous agencies and departments including Health and Human Services.

Executive Order

A Presidential directive with the force of law that does not need Congressional approval.

F**Filibuster**

The term used for an extended debate in the Senate that prevents a vote. Senate rules contain no motion to force a vote. A vote occurs only once debate ends by cloture.

Fiscal Year

The federal government's budget year begins on October 1st and ends on September 30th. For example, fiscal year 2013 began on October 1st, 2012 and will end on September 30th, 2013.

Floor Consideration

When a bill is being considered by the entire House or Senate, it is brought to the Floor. Party leaders can then determine rules for debate, and individual members can comment or attempt to amend the bill.

Free-Standing Bill

Refers to a coherent bill, dealing with a single issue. (aka, stand alone bill)

G

GAO

The Government Accountability Office, which audits and studies federal agencies and programs for Congress.

Germane

The technical Congressional term for "relevant." Amendments are said to be germane or non-germane to a bill.

GOP

Stands for "Grand Old Party," used to refer to the Republican party.

GPO

The Government Printing Office, which prints laws, bills, committee reports, etc. GPO sells these documents to the public and distributes an allotted number of them free to Members of Congress.

H

Hearing

A formal meeting of a committee or subcommittee to review legislation or explore a topic. Hearings also may be called to investigate a matter or conduct oversight of existing programs. Witnesses are called to deliver testimony and answer questions in all three types of hearings.

J

Joint Resolutions

Measures used to appropriate funding, pose constitutional amendments, or fix technical errors. Joint resolutions become public law if adopted by both the House and Senate and, where relevant, approved by the President. In terms of Constitutional amendments, they must be approved by three-fourths of the states.

L

Lame Duck

The period of time that Congress meets after an election but before Congress adjourns, in which Members of Congress who have not been re-elected still cast votes. Lame duck usually occurs in November and December of an election year.

Legislative Assistant

Offices have multiple LAs who each handle a portfolio of issues; LAs take meetings, draft legislation, and work with the LD to advise the Member on legislation.

Legislative Calendar

Congress' calendar designating days when they are in DC for legislative business and District Work Periods.

Legislative Day

Any day on which the House or Senate meets. It runs until the next recess or adjournment.

Legislative Director

Monitors the legislative schedule, work with the CoS to develop priorities, advises on legislation, develops legislation, and oversees the legislative staff.

M

Majority Leader

The Majority Leader is elected by his/her party members in the House or Senate to lead them, to promote passage of the party's issue priorities, and to coordinate legislative efforts with the Minority Leader, the other chamber, and the White House.

Manager's Amendment

A package of numerous individual amendments agreed to by both majority and minority sides in advance of floor consideration.

Mandatory Spending

Such required funding that accounts for nearly two-thirds of the federal budget. These funds are not controlled by annual decision of Congress but are automatically obliged by virtue of previously-enacted laws. For example, as Medicare, Medicaid, food stamps, and social security are entitlement programs, funding for them all falls under mandatory spending.

Mark-up

Refers to the meeting of a Committee held to review the text of a bill before reporting it out to the full chamber for consideration. Committee Members offer and vote on proposed changes (amendments) to the bill's language. Most mark-ups end with a vote to send the revised version of the bill forward to the floor (full chamber) for final consideration and approval.

Minority Leader

The Minority Leader is elected by his/her party members in the House or Senate to lead them, to promote passage of the party's issue priorities, and to coordinate legislative efforts with the Majority Leader, the other chamber, and the White House.

Motion to Instruct

Conferees

A motion to instruct conferees, if adopted, asks House or Senate conferees to take a certain negotiating position.

Motion to Proceed

A motion to proceed seeks to bring a bill to the Senate floor for debate and amendment.

Motion to Recommit

A motion to recommit returns a bill from the floor of the full chamber to committee, in effect killing it. However, a motion to recommit with instructions is a last opportunity to amend the bill.

Motion to Reconsider

A motion to reconsider, if adopted within two days of a vote in the House [or three days in the Senate], requires the original vote be held again before the full chamber.

Motion to Strike

A motion to strike is a type of amendment that seeks to delete language from a bill.

Motion to Table

A motion to table, if adopted, permanently kills the pending matter. It also ends any further floor debate.

Motion to Waive the Budget Act

If adopted, this motion temporarily sets aside a specific provision of the Congressional Budget Act. Without a waiver, the CBA provision would cause the pending amendment to fall on a point of order (defined below). With a waiver, the amendment may be considered even though it violates the Congressional Budget Act. A minimum of 60 votes are required for adoption.

O

Off-Budget

Describes programs not counted toward budget limits due to provisions in current law. For example, Social Security trust funds and the United States Postal Service are off-budget programs.

Offset

Spending cuts or revenue increases put into a bill to “offset” any spending increases. Used to prevent new bills from raising the deficit.

OMB

The Office of Management and Budget is the federal agency that prepares the President’s budget submission to Congress and develops associated economic forecasts.

Omnibus Bill

A large measure that packages together several bills into one or combines diverse subjects into a single bill. Examples are reconciliation bills and combined appropriations bills.

Override

The vote taken to pass a bill again, after it has been vetoed by the President. It takes a two-thirds vote in each chamber, or 290 in the House and 67 in the Senate, if all are present and voting. If the veto is overridden in both chambers, the bill becomes law despite the objection of the President.

Outlays

The actual payments made out of the U.S. Treasury to fulfill spending obligations.

Oversight

The term used for Congressional review inquiry of federal agencies, government programs and performance.

P

Payfor

A funding source used to pay for new government spending, usually comprised of reductions to, or elimination of, other government programs. Also known as an “offset.”

Paygo

The pay-as-you-go rule compels new spending or tax changes to not add to the federal deficit.

Pocket Veto

A veto that occurs when the President fails to sign a bill within the ten days allowed by the Constitution. For a pocket veto to take effect, Congress must be adjourned.

Point of Order

A point of order is made during floor proceedings to assert that the rules of procedure are being violated. A point of order halts proceedings while the presiding officer rules on whether or not it is valid. In the Senate, the presiding officer’s ruling may be appealed by any Senator. The Senate votes on the appeal and the chair has been frequently overturned. In the House tradition, appeals are also possible, but rarely entered and almost never succeed.

President Pro Tempore

The highest-ranking Senator from the Majority party, traditionally the Senator with the most seniority. The President Pro Tempore presides over the Senate in the absence of the Vice President, who has constitutionally authority over the body.

President’s Budget

The budget document sent to Congress each year by the Administration, usually the first week of February. It estimates federal receipts and spending, and recommends appropriation levels and outlines the Administration’s priorities for the upcoming fiscal year.

Presiding Officer

Synonymous with Chairman, the Presiding Officer maintains legislative order and decorum during House or Senate debates, hearings or votes.

Pro Forma Session

A daily meeting of the House or Senate during which no votes are held and no legislative business is conducted. Members still can become cosponsors during a pro forma session.

Q

Quorum—House

The number of House (218) Members who must be present before business may be conducted.

Quorum—Senate

The number of Senators (51) who must be present before business may be conducted.

Quorum Call—House

A quorum call in the House seeks to bring a majority of Members to the floor to record their presence.

Quorum Call—Senate

A quorum call in the Senate may have more than one purpose. It is most often used to delay floor proceedings.

R

Ranking Member/Ranking Minority Member

The Member of the minority party on a committee and/or subcommittee next in seniority after the chairman (highest ranking Member of the minority party).

Recess

A temporary break in the session for a short period of time within the same day. Recess also refers to longer breaks over several days, such as holiday periods, which are approved by vote. Senators and Representatives usually travel home during recess to conduct business with local constituents.

Recorded Vote

A recorded vote is a specific type of vote held on the record. It links the name of each Member with his/her voting position.

Reconciliation Bill

Makes the changes in law required to meet pre-set spending and revenue levels. The bill comes forward when a prior budget resolution passed by the House and Senate calls for it. The budget committee packages the bills produced by all the other committees into one master omnibus bill.

Regular Order

Regular order refers to the regular rules of procedure in the chamber. In the Senate, the term also may refer to the daily order of business.

Report

A written document by a Committee to accompany the legislation that has been voted out.

Reporting Out

The vote of a committee to send a bill to the full House or Senate for review.

Rider

An amendment attached to a bill, usually unrelated to the subject of the underlying bill.

Roll Call Vote

A vote held on the record. The name

of the Member and his/her voting position are noted together.

S

Sense of the House

Legislative language that offers the opinion of the House, but does not make law.

Sense of the Senate

Legislative language that offers the opinion of the Senate but does not make law.

Sine Die Adjournment

The end of a Congressional session or an entire Congress.

Special Interest (Group)

Any group of people organized around a specific shared interest (e.g. nephrology nursing advocates, environmentalists, a specific industry (such as oil or tobacco), an ethnic community, an individual corporation, or a professional trade association, like trial lawyers or insurance agents).

Sponsor

Member or Members who propose and support legislation.

Senior Senator/Junior Senator

Senior Senator/Junior Senator describes the seniority relationship between two Senators from the same state, with the senior Senator serving in the Senate longer than the junior Senator.

Staff Assistant

Junior staff member usually responsible for answering the phones. Keep in mind that today's staff assistant could be tomorrow's Chief of Staff.

State of the Union

The President's State of the Union Speech defines his view of national priorities and needed legislation. The Constitution requires that the President report to Congress on the State of the Union "from time to time."

**Suspension of the Rules
(Suspension Calendar)**

A special procedure used in the House to speed up action by setting aside the regular rules. Bills brought up under this process are debated for 40 minutes, may not be amended and require a two-thirds vote for approval.

T

Time Agreement

A voluntary pact among Senators to limit debate time on a bill or on an amendment.

U

Unanimous Consent

Unanimous consent means that all Members on the floor agree, or consent, to a pending request.

Unfunded Mandate

A requirement imposed by Congress on state or local governments without the provision of associated funding to pay for it.

Up or Down Vote

A direct vote on the substance of an amendment or bill sometimes referred to as a "clean vote" or "straight up or down." Members simply vote "yea" or "nay" on it.

V

Veto-Proof

Votes with a margin sufficient to override a Presidential veto, should it occur. Since a two-thirds vote is required to override, a veto-proof majority is 290 votes in the House and 67 votes in the Senate.

Voice Vote

During a voice vote Members say "aye" aloud as a group, followed by the group saying "no." No names are recorded.

W

Whip

A Member elected by his/her party to count potential votes and promote party unity in voting. The House Majority Whip is the third ranking leadership position in his/her party and the House Minority Whip ranks second. The Senate Majority and Minority Whip are the second ranking leadership position in their respective party.

Y

Yeas & Nays—House

A specific type of recorded vote. It requires a seconding of the Motion of one-fifth of those present to take place. The vote, if ordered, places

Members' positions on record. It is usually held by electronic device.

Yeas & Nays—Senate

The term for a roll-call vote. Members call out "yea" or "nay" when their last name is called or signal the clerk with a "thumbs" up or down.