5 LEGISLATIVE PROCESS

HOW LAWS ARE MADE Introduction of Bills

ANY HOUSE MEMBER MAY INTRODUCE ANYONE OF SEVERAL types of bills and resolutions by handling it to the Clerk of the House, or placing it in a box called the hopper. A Senator first gains recognition of the presiding officer to announce the introduction of a bill. Then his bill is "read" twice, though in practice only the title usually is given.

As the next step in either the House or Senate, the bill is numbered, referred to the appropriate committee, labeled with the sponsor's name, and sent to the Government Printing Office so that copies can be made for subsequent study and action. One bill sometimes carries several Senators' names; this practice does not extend to the House where each bill carries the name of one sponsor only. However, other Members may file identical measures. Bills written in the executive branch and proposed as Administration measures usually are introduced by the chairmen of the Congressional committees.

Committee Action

A bill is referred to the appropriate committee by the House parliamentarian on the Speaker's order or by the Senate President.

When a bill reaches a committee it is placed upon that group's calendar. At that time is comes under the sharpest Congressional focus. Its chances for passage are quickly determined—and the great majority of bills fall by the legislative roadside. Failure of a committee to act on a bill is equivalent to killing it; the measure can be withdrawn from the committee only by a discharge petition requiring signatures of a majority of House members on House bills, or by passage of a special resolution in the Senate.

The first committee action taken on a bill usually is a request for comment on it by interested agencies of the government. The committee chairman may assign the bill to a subcommittee for study and hearings, or it may be considered by the full committee. Hearings may be public, closed (executive session), or both. A subcommittee, after considering a bill, reports to the full committee its recommendations for action and any proposed amendments.

The full committee then votes on its recommendation to the

House or Senate. Occasionally a committee may report a bill unfavorably; most of the time a report calls for favorable action on the legislation (since the committee can effectively "kill" legislation by simply failing to take any action).

When a committee sends a bill to the chamber floor, it explains its reasons in a written statement, called a report, which accompanies the bill. Often committee members opposing a measure issue a dissenting minority report.

The chamber must approve, alter, or reject the committee amendments before the bill itself can be put to a vote.

Floor Action

After a bill is reported back to the house where it originated, it is placed on the calendar. If a routine measure, it may await the call of the calendar. If it is urgent or important, it can be taken up in the Senate by unanimous consent, or by a majority vote. The Policy Committee of the majority party in the Senate schedules the bills that it wants taken up for debate.

In the House, precedence is granted if a special rule is obtained from the Rules Committee. Such rules often are debated and voted upon in the same fashion as regular bills. They are important because they specify how long the bill may be debated, and whether it may be amended from the floor. If floor amendment is banned, the bill is considered under a "closed rule" which permits only committee members to alter its language, subject to chamber acceptance. This is the usual practice on tax bills.

Voting on bills may occur repeatedly before they are finally approved or rejected. The House votes both on the rule for the bill, and various amendments to it. Voting on amendments often is a more illuminating test of a bill's support than is the final tally. Sometimes Congressmen approve final passage of bills after vigorously supporting amendments which would have scuttled the legislation if adopted.

After a bill is passed it is sent to the opposite chamber. This body may then take one of several steps. It may pass the bill as is—accepting the other chamber's amendments. It may send the bill to committee for scrutiny or alteration, or reject the entire bill, advising the opposite house of its actions. Or it may simply ignore the bill submitted while it continues work on its own version of the legislation. Frequently, one chamber may approve a version of a bill that is greatly at variance with the version already passed by the other house, and then substitute its amendments for the language of the other, retaining only the latter's bill designation.

Often the opposite chamber makes only minor changes. If these