
APPENDIX B: GLOSSARY OF LEGISLATIVE TERMS

ACT – the term used to refer to a bill after it has passed both chambers of the legislature.

ADJOURNMENT – Marks the end of a legislative session. The legislature is closed to business until the start of a new session.

ADOPTION – The formal approval or acceptance of amendments or resolutions.

ADVICE AND CONSENT – Constitutionally based power of the Senate to advise the President and give consent to proposed treaties and Presidential appointments.

AMENDMENT – A proposal to change, or an actual change to a bill, motion, act, or the Constitution.

APPORTIONMENT – The allocation of legislative seats by law. The seats in the U.S. House of Representatives are apportioned to states based on each state's population.

APPROPRIATION – The allocation of funds by the legislature for a public purpose. In most instances, money cannot be withdrawn from the treasury except through a specific appropriation. Congress must pass appropriations bills in order to fund the government; there are 12 separate appropriation bills in the U.S. Congress used to fund the entire federal government.

AUTHOR – The legislator who files a bill and guides it through the legislative process.

AUTHORIZATION – A legislative action establishing the terms of a program and general amounts of money the program is legally allowed to use. Subsequent appropriation bills provide the specific funding amount and can be less than the amount authorized.

BICAMERAL – A legislative body divided into two separate assemblies (e.g. the Senate and House of Representatives in the U.S. Congress, the House of Commons and the Senate in Canada's Parliament).

BILL – A proposed law that requires passage by both the House of Representatives and Senate. A bill is the primary means used to create and change the laws. Bill types include: Senate and House bills, Senate and House joint resolutions, Senate and House concurrent resolutions, and Senate and House resolutions.

BILL ANALYSIS – A document prepared for all bills reported out of committee that explains in non-legal language what a bill will do. A bill analysis may include background information on the measure, a statement of purpose, and a section-by-section analysis.

BIPARTISAN – A term used to refer to an effort endorsed by both political parties, or a group composed of members of both political parties.



BLOC – Representatives or Senators who are members of a group with common interests.

BUDGET – The executive branch’s annual proposal to Congress anticipating revenue and expenditures by the federal government for the upcoming fiscal year.

BUDGET RESOLUTION – Originating in Congress, the budget resolution sets spending ceilings for the fiscal year in response to the budget proposed by the executive branch.

CALENDAR – A list of bills or resolutions to be considered by a committee, sub-committee, the House, or the Senate.

CAUCUS – A meeting of members of a political party, usually to decide policy or select members to fill positions. The term also refers to the group itself, or of any other grouping of elected representatives focused on a particular issue (i.e. Congressional Sportsmen's Caucus, Invasive Species Caucus).

CHAMBER – One portion of the legislature. The House of Representatives and the Senate are the two chambers in the United States Congress.

CLOTURE – The closing of debate in the Senate, or ending of a filibuster by the required three-fifths vote (60 senators), thereby allowing a bill to be voted on.

COMMITTEE – Group of appointed legislators who consider legislation and guide congressional action on particular issues.

COMMITTEE CHAIR - A member of the majority party, assigned the position by party leadership, who guides the committee and determines legislative action.

COMMITTEE REPORT – The text of a bill or resolution and its required attachments that is prepared when the measure is reported from a committee for further consideration by the members of the full chamber. The committee report includes the recommendations of the committee regarding action on the measure by the full House or Senate and is generally necessary before a measure can proceed through the legislative process.

COMPANION BILL – A bill introduced in either the House or Senate that is identical or similar to a bill introduced in the other house.

CONFEREES – Members of a conference committee that is composed of Senators and Representatives named to work out differences between same-subject bills passed by both chambers. Once the conferees have agreed on compromises in the bills, each chamber must vote on the revised bills before the bills can be signed into law by the Executive office.

CONGRESSIONAL RECORD – A daily account of House and Senate debates, votes, and comments published by the Government Publishing Office.



CONGRESSIONAL SESSION – The assembly of Congress to conduct business. Each Congress has at least two congressional sessions, one each year.

CONSTITUENT – A citizen residing within the district of an elected representative.

CONTINUING RESOLUTION – Legislation providing continued funding for a federal department or program, usually at the previous fiscal year’s funding level. Used when Congress fails to pass necessary appropriations bills for a new fiscal year.

CONVENE – To assemble or call to order the members of a legislative body.

EARMARK – A congressional provision directing funds to be spent on specific projects. Also referred to as congressionally directed spending.

ENACTING CLAUSE – The initial language in a bill saying “*be it enacted.*” To prevent the bill from being in effect, a legislator will move to “*strike the enacting clause.*”

ENGROSSED BILL – Official copy of a bill passed by either the House or Senate.

ENROLLED BILL – Final certified copy of a bill passed in identical form by the House and Senate.

EXECUTIVE SESSION – A meeting closed to the public.

EXTENSION OF REMARKS – Comments that were not spoken on the floor but inserted into the Congressional Record by a Senator or Representative.

FILIBUSTER – Talking and debating a bill in an effort to change it or kill it.

FISCAL YEAR – The 12-month period denoted “FY XXXX” in which funds are apportioned. The U.S. federal government’s fiscal year begins October 1st of the previous year and ends the following September 30th. For example, FY 2015 begins October of 2014.

FLOOR – The meeting chamber of either the House or Senate.

FLOOR ACTION – Action taken by either House or Senate on a bill reported by a committee. Members may propose amendments, enter debate, seek to promote or prevent a bill’s passage, and vote on its final passage.

FLY-IN – An event bringing constituents from different jurisdictions/geographic areas to the legislative capitol (i.e. state or federal capitals) to advocate on behalf of a common interest or broadly-supported legislation. Fly-ins may also occur in a virtual setting, with many virtual meetings scheduled with offices in a set timeframe.



GERRYMANDER – To divide a state, county, or other political subdivision into election districts in an unnatural manner to give a political party or ethnic group an advantage over its opponents.

HEARING – A meeting of the Senate, House of Representatives, committee, subcommittee, or special committee of Congress to obtain information and solicit opinions on proposed legislation, conduct an investigation, or conduct oversight on the actions of a government agency or the implementation of a Federal law.

HOPPER – The box in which proposed bills are placed.

INTRODUCE – Placing a new bill in the Hopper to start the process of moving a bill through the legislature. This is the first stage of the bill process.

JOINT COMMITTEE – A committee that includes both Senators and Representatives.

JURISDICTION – Authority to interpret and apply law. Jurisdiction is often used to mean the geographical area in which a governing body's authority applies.

MAJORITY LEADER – Leader of the majority party in either the House or the Senate.

MARKUP – A committee session where the members perform a section-by-section review and revision of one or more bills.

MINORITY LEADER – Leader of the minority party in either the House or the Senate.

MOTION – A formal suggestion presented to a legislative body for action by one of its members while the body is meeting.

NONPARTISAN – Free from party domination.

PAIRING – An agreement by two members of Congress to be recorded on opposite sides of an issue if one or both persons will be absent when the vote is taken. The votes are not counted, but make the members' positions known.

PASSAGE – Approval of a measure by the full body.

PETITION – An official request submitted under the federal Endangered Species Act to either list, reclassify, or delist a species, or revise the definitions of critical habitat for a species.

POINT OF ORDER – An objection by a Senator or Representative to a rule being violated.

PRESIDENT PRO TEMPORE - The Vice President is the president of the Senate, but is present only for crucial votes. In their place, the Senate elects a president pro tempore



(temporary president) who presides, or, when routine measures are being considered, assigns the job to a junior Senator.

PREVIOUS QUESTION – By a motion to “*move the previous question*,” a Representative seeks to end debate and bring an issue to a vote. Senators do not have this debate-limiting device.

PRIVILEGE – A privileged question is a motion that is considered before other motions. A “*question of privilege*” relates to the personal privilege of a Senator or Representative.

PUBLIC HEARING – A meeting of a House or Senate committee or subcommittee during which public testimony may be heard and formal action may be taken on any measure or matter before the committee or subcommittee.

QUORUM – The number of members of a legislative body who must be present before business may be conducted.

RANKING MEMBER of a COMMITTEE – a member of the minority party, typically determined by seniority, who is the voice of the minority party in that committee or subcommittee.

RECESS – Suspends legislative business and sets time for the next meeting of the legislative body.

REPORT – A committee’s written record of its actions and views on a bill. The committee is required to report its findings to the House or Senate.

RESOLUTION – A formal statement of a decision or opinion by the House, Senate, or both.

- A **simple resolution** is made by one chamber and generally deals with that chamber’s rules or prerogatives; does not need Presidential approval.
- A **concurrent resolution** is presented in both chambers and usually expresses a congressional view on a matter not within congressional jurisdiction; does not need Presidential approval.
- A **joint resolution** is procedurally the same as a bill and requires approval by both chambers and the President. These are used to authorize “continuing resolutions” to fund the government, declare war, create federal commissions and ad hoc bodies, etc.

RIDER – A provision added to a bill so it may “*ride*” to approval on the strength of the bill. Generally, riders are placed on appropriations bills and limit the uses of federal funds.

SERGEANT AT ARMS – Legislative officer who maintains order and controls access to the chamber at the direction of the presiding officer.

SPECIAL RULE – A simple resolution of the House of Representatives to permit the immediate consideration of legislation outside the standard procedures of the House.



SPEAKER – Speaker of the House of Representatives who presides over the House. Elected, in effect, by the majority party in the House. Next in the line of succession to the Presidency after the Vice President.

SPONSOR/CO-SPONSOR – A sponsor of a bill is a Representative or Senator who introduces a bill for consideration. A co-sponsor is a Representative or Senator who adds their name as a supporter of the bill.

SUSPEND THE RULES – A motion in the House intended to quickly bring a bill to a vote.

SUPERMAJORITY – A threshold in the level of support (typically in relation to legislation) that is greater than a simple majority (e.g. a presidential veto of a bill may be overridden by congress by a two-thirds supermajority in both Houses).

TABLE A BILL – A motion to, in effect, put a bill aside and thereby remove it from consideration, or “*kill*” it.

TELLER VOTE – A House vote in which members’ votes are counted “*for*” or “*against*” as representatives file past tellers in the front of the chamber. A count is taken, but there is not an official record of how each representative voted.

TREATY – A formally signed and ratified agreement between two or more nations or sovereigns.

UNANIMOUS CONSENT – A timesaving procedure for non-controversial measures. Measures are adopted without a vote when a member simply says, “*I ask unanimous consent for...*” and states the proposal and no member of Congress objects.

UNION CALENDAR – The calendar on which bills involving money are placed in order of the dates on which they are to be reported by committees.

WHIP – A legislator who is chosen to be the assistant to the leader of the party. A Whip is chosen in each of the House and Senate. The Whip is generally responsible for gathering votes for measures within a party.

VETO – The rejection of a decision or proposal made by a legislative body.

(Adapted from the U.S. Congress Handbook and CHADD Advocacy Manual)

