

Record: 1

Title: Isn't the Bill a Law Yet?

Timeline: Civics -- Distribution of Power & Branches of Government; Language Arts -- The Writing Process -- Rules & Guidelines

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Abstract: Deals with legislation and checks and balances in the United States (U.S.). Need for a bill to go through the Executive Branch before it can become a law; Veto power of the U.S. President; U.S. Congress's power to override the President's veto; Judicial Branch's interpretation of the laws.

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ISN'T THE BILL A LAW YET?

Not yet. Just because the House of Representatives and the Senate have done all this work does not mean that bill will immediately become law.

If both Houses of Congress do finally approve the bill, then it still must go through the Executive Branch before it can become a law.

Executive Checks and Balances:

The Executive Branch checks the lawmaking power of the Legislative Branch through veto power. A veto is the right to reject a bill passed by a legislative body in order to prevent or delay the bill from becoming law. If the President of the United States disapproves of the bill that was passed by the Congress, the President can veto the bill and prevent it from becoming law.

One way a President vetoes a bill is by refusing to sign it and returning the bill (within ten days) to Congress.

The second way the President can veto a bill is called a "pocket veto". A pocket veto can happen if Congress will end its session within ten days after it passed a bill. If Congress is ending by that date, then the President can simply ignore the bill and refuse to sign it--as if he had just put it in his pocket. As a result of the pocket veto, the bill does not become law. However, this method can only be used just before Congress closes session.

If a bill is not signed or vetoed by the President while Congress is still in session, then the bill automatically becomes law.

Congress can Override a Veto

The President vetoing a bill is not necessarily the end of that bill. Congress also has the power to override the President's veto if Congress can obtain a two-thirds majority vote

for the bill in both the House of Representatives and the Senate. Unfortunately for Congress, a bill receiving a "pocket veto" cannot be voted on again.

Judicial Checks and Balances:

The way the Judicial Branch can check the Legislative Branch's lawmaking power occurs through its interpretation of the laws. The court interprets laws by deciding what exactly the law means and if the law is Constitutional, or is allowed by the Constitution. However, it is only when a particular law or part of the Constitution is brought in a case to court that the court is allowed to interpret the law.

Why such a Process?

If it seems to you that it takes forever for a bill to become a law, then you're right!

The United States Government is designed to be slow, so that every decision is carefully thought out, and every side has a chance to have their say about the decision being made. Everyone getting to have their say is what makes our country a Democracy!

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