



DICTIONARY OF LEGISLATIVE TERMS

Act	a measure which has become law after being passed by both houses and approved (by President or Governor), or passed over his veto.
Action	disposition of any question before the legislature.
Adjourn	to end a meeting, usually for a stated time only.
Advise and Consent	confirmation by the Senate of certain appointees (of President or Governor).
Amendment	an addition to a constitution (the United States Constitution or a state constitution); a change in any bill or document by adding, substituting, or omitting a certain part before its final passage.
Apportionment	a division of the state into districts from which representatives are elected.
Appropriation	money set apart by formal action for a specific use.
Bicameral	a legislature consisting of two houses.
Biennial	occurring every two years; applied to the scheduled regular session of the legislature.
Bill	a proposed law introduced in either house during a session for consideration (by Congress or the legislature).
Private Bill	a bill for the benefit of one or a few individuals.
Public Bill	a bill of broad general application.
Bill Analysis	a synopsis consisting of background information, statement of purpose, section-by-section analysis, and a summary of committee action for all bills reported out of committee.
Bipartisan	approved by two political parties, or including representatives of two political parties.
Bloc	a group of legislators (not necessarily of the same party) working together to achieve a common goal.
By Request	phrase which may be added to legislator's name when introducing a bill the legislator sponsors at request of constituent, an organization of agency.
Calendar	a legislative schedule; thus when a bill is reported from a committee to the House or Senate, it is placed upon a "calendar." The House and Senate calendars are lists on which bills are recorded in numerical order.
Calendar Days	consecutive days on which Legislature may be in session.
Caption	a concise statement of the subject of a bill; also referred to as a title.
Carry-Over Bill	legislation introduced in one year which may be considered for passage the following year without re-introduction.
Casting Vote	the deciding vote the President of the Senate may cast in case of a tie vote in that chamber.
Caucus	a meeting of party members in a legislative body to determine the party's stand on forthcoming issues.
Censure	a vote of condemnation or disapproval of the conduct of a member of Congress or the legislature. It carries with no special punishment.
Chair	a traditional designation of the current presiding officer.
Chubbing	a planned group undertaking whereby members organize to delay a vote by parliamentary tactics.
Chief Clerk	an officer of the Senate of House responsible for the direction of the clerical staff and the preparation of daily and general publications.
Cloture	the process of closing the debate in a legislative body and bringing the matter under discussion to a vote.
Committee	a group of members of a legislative body to which is assigned a special task.
Standing Committee	a permanent committee set up to handle legislation in a certain field.
Special (of Select) Committee	a temporary committee set up to handle a specific problem.
Joint Committee	a committee representing both houses.
Conference Committee	a joint committee of both houses whose function is to arrive at a single version of a bill that has passed the two houses in somewhat different form.



Committee of the Whole	a whole legislative body turned into a committee for the purpose of suspending formal procedure and speeding its work.
Committee Report	judgment of committee on particular bill. Committee report is usually crucial to life or death of a bill. Different states use different terms to indicate committee recommendation for a bill to fail; inexpedient to legislate, do not pass, unfavorable, adversely reported, etc.
Companion Bills	identical bills introduced in each house for the purpose of expediting passage by substituting the one that passed one house first for the other.
Confirmation	approval by the Senate of appointments made by the President (or Governor).
Consent Calendar	schedule of bills on which there is general agreement that opposition is not anticipated.
Constituent	citizen residing within the district of an elected representative.
Constitution Amendment	a resolution affecting the United States or a state Constitution which has been adopted by Congress or the legislature, requiring an affirmative vote of the electorate to become effective.
Contempt of Congress	in law, disobedience to or disrespect of Congress.
Contingent fund	funds appropriated by the respective houses for members' operational expenses.
Convene	to assemble the members of a legislative body.
Discharge Petition	a paper signed by a majority of House (or Senate) members to remove a bill from a committee's control.
District	a geographic division of a state on the basis of population and in accordance with conditions laid down by Congress or the state legislature.
Do Pass	the affirmative recommendations made by a committee in sending a bill to the floor for final vote.
Election	the process of choosing government officials by vote of the citizens.
Primary Election	an election within a party to select its candidates for public office.
Off-Year Election	a local (not Federal) election.
Special or By-Election	an election to fill an office vacated because of death or resignation.
Enact	to pass a law.
Enacting Clause	a provision whereby each proposed law must be preceded by the phrase: "Be it enacted by the Legislature of the State of....."
Engrossment	the preparation of an exact, accurate, and official copy of a measure passed by the house of origin containing the proper endorsements of said house and including insertion of all amendments; the measure is then forwarded to the other house for its consideration.
Enrollment	the preparation of an exact accurate, and official copy of a measure in the house of origin in its final form, with amendments adopted in the other house and concurred in by the initiating house or by a conference committee incorporated in the measure; the final and official copy shall contain the certification (determining the effective date of the measure), signature of the presiding officers of both houses and then forwarded to the President (or Governor).
Ex Officio	the holding of a particular office by reason of holding another.
Filibuster	prolonged talking by a Senator or Senators for the purpose of delay, in the hope of forcing the majority to give up the proposal being debated.
Fiscal Year	a 12-month period at the end of which accounts are reckoned. Congress appropriates funds on the basis of our Government's fiscal year which begins on October 1 and ends on September 30.
Floor	a traditional description of the interior of either house; "floor action" describes the consideration of measures by the entire membership of the respective chambers.
Franking Privilege	a privilege accorded members of Congress to post "official business" mail without charge.
Gerrymander	to divide a state, county, etc., into election districts or other civil divisions in an unnatural and unfair way, to give a political party an advantage over its opponent.
H.R.	in Congress used before a bill number, indicates that the bill originated in the House of Representatives.
Hearing	a session of a Congressional or legislative committee at which supporters and opponents of a proposed measure are given an opportunity to express their views.
Closed Hearing	a hearing barred to the public and the press.



Hopper	a box on the desk of the Clerk of the House where Representatives deposit the bills which they sponsor.
Immunity	a privilege enjoyed by members of Congress which exempts them from prosecution for any statement made in Congress.
Impeachment	a procedure to remove from office public officials accused of misconduct. In Congress, impeachment proceedings take place in the House of Representatives. The trial on the charge is held in the Senate.
Interim	the interval between regular sessions of the Congress or legislature.
Journal	the official chronological record of the proceedings of the respective houses; printed daily in pamphlet form and subsequently certified, indexed, and bound at the close of each session.
Lame Duck	an elected official whose term of office continues after he has failed to be re-elected.
Lay On The Table	temporary postponement of a matter before the legislature, which may be brought up for consideration by motion from the floor.
Leave Of Absence	motion by one member that another be granted permission to be absent during a session for a specified time and purpose.
Legislative Council	a fact-finding, bill-drafting, research agency for legislators.
Legislative Day	day legislature is called to order.
Lobby	a group of person (lobbyist) seeking to present their views for the passage or defeat of a measure under consideration.
Logrolling	political slang for the practice whereby elected officials help one another to get their pet bills passed.
Lower House	the House of Representatives.
Majority	more than half, or the group that controls a vote of that size.
Absolute Majority	more than half of the entire membership of a voting body.
Simple Majority	more than half the members present and voting at the moment.
Minority	less than half, or the group which controls only a minor fraction of the total vote in that body.
Minutes	accurate chronological record of the proceedings of a meeting.
Motion	a proposal on procedure or action presented to a legislative body.
Nonpartisan	free from party domination.
Omnibus Bill	bill regarding a single subject which combines many different aspects of that subject.
Override	to set aside or annul, as to override a veto by the President (which requires a two-thirds vote in each house of Congress).
Pairing	a procedure for voting whereby two members may pair their vote by previous agreement; where two members are "paired" on a vote or series of votes, the member present agrees with a member who is to be absent that the member present will not vote but will be "present and not voting," the pair must state for the record how they would have voted.
Passage	favorable action on a measure before the chamber.
Patronage	the control of appointive jobs by a political party in power.
Per Diem	daily expense allowance granted elected officials and other official personnel.
Petition	formal request submitted by an individual, group, or organization to individual members of the chamber as a whole.
Point Of Order	motion calling attention to a breach of order or rules.
Point Of Order Privilege	statement by a member that his character or motives have been impugned and his refutation of the alleged charges; or a statement that the integrity of the proceedings has been called into question.
Pork Barrel	the slang expression for Federal appropriations for local improvements which are actually political favors to local politicians or citizens.
Prefiling	filing of bills and other proposed legislation prior to the convening of the regular session of the legislature; such bills may be numbered and assigned to committees for pre-session study.
Privilege Of The Floor	permission to view proceedings from the floor of the chamber rather than from the public gallery; also access to the floor granted particular personnel or individuals for specific purposes.



Procedure	the rules and traditional practices of the legislature.
Pro Tempore or Pro Tem	temporarily; literally, for the time. It is used particularly to apply to a temporary presiding officer of either the House or Senate.
Quorum	the number of members (usually more than half) required to be present in a chamber of a committee before business may be transacted.
Ratification	the act of approving an appointment or a treaty. The U.S. Constitution provides that all treaties must be ratified by a two-thirds vote of the Senate; only a simple majority vote is required to approve the appointment of a public official by the President.
Reading	the presentation of a bill before either house by the recital of the caption of the bill; until passed a bill is in the process of first, second or third reading, which are specified stages in the enactment of a measure.
Reapportionment	the redistricting of the state for election purposes.
Reconsideration	a motion which, when passed by the House, allows another vote annulling or reaffirming an action previously taken.
Referendum	the method by which a measure adopted by the legislature may be submitted to the electorate for popular vote.
Rescind	annulment of an action previously taken.
Resolution	a statement of opinion on a certain issue.
Concurrent Resolution	passed by both houses but does not have the force of law.
Simple Resolution	passed by one house only, without force of law.
Joint Resolution (Congress)	passed by both houses and has the effect of law. It may be vetoed by the President.
Joint Resolution (States)	the means by which the legislature amends the state constitution (most states require ratification by the voters). Also used in some states for a temporary measure which has the effect of law while in force.
Rider	an unrelated controversial measure attached to a bill in order to compel the President (or Governor) to accept the bill with its rider or do without the bill. (The President cannot veto part of a bill.)
Rule	the procedure set down by the House Rules Committee for debate on a bill.
Open Rule	permits the bill to be debated in full and amended from the Floor.
Closed Rule	bars any amendment from the Floor.
“Gag” Rule	limits length of individual speeches during the debate of a measure. These rules are not used in the Senate.
Rules	the methods of procedure determined by the legislature at the beginning of a session.
S	as used before a bill number, indicates the bill originated in the Senate.
Secretary Of The Senate	an officer of the upper house elected by the members to direct the clerical staff and be of general assistance to the presiding officer in administrative and procedural matters.
Senatorial Courtesy	a custom in the U.S. Senate of withholding approval of nominations for appointive officers in the various states which are opposed by the Senators of those states. Should a conflict arise between the President and a Senator over an appointment in the Senator’s state, the Senate is expected to support the view of the Senator.
Seniority Rule	the custom that provides that the chairman of a committee shall be the person who has the longest record of service on the committees.
Sergeant At Arms	an officer of the House and the Senate charged with maintaining order and carrying out the directives of the presiding officers or the members.
Session	period during which the Congress and legislature meets.
Joint Session	a meeting attended by both chambers.
Executive Session	a meeting of a committee or other legislative body that is closed to the public and the press.
Sine Die	adjournment “without day” being set for reconvening; final adjournment of the legislative body. (Pronounced SIE-nee DIE-ee).
Speaker	presiding officer of the House of Representatives.
Special Order	matter of business set for a special designated time and day regardless of its place on the calendar.



Statutes	the compilation of all enacted bills.
Stopping The Clock	the practice of extending the hour of final adjournment on the last day of a session in order to complete clerical duties of the session; no votes or action may be taken by either house.
Substitute Bills	bills usually drafted by a standing committee to replace an original bill in need of extensive amendment. Substitute bills may also be proposed on floor.
Unanimous Consent	agreement to approve minor bills or to take certain procedural actions unless some member voices an objection.
Unicameral	legislature with one house. Nebraska is the only state with a unicameral legislature.
Upper House	the Senate.
Veto	action by the President refusing to approve a bill passed by Congress.
Pocket Veto	the process by which the President prevents a bill passed by Congress at the end of a session from becoming law. Ordinarily, a bill unsigned by the President becomes law ten days after it has been passed by Congress, if Congress is still in session. However, if Congress adjourns before the ten days are up, the bill dies unless the President signs it. Thus he “puts it in his pocket” to veto it.
Voce Vote (Viva Voce Vote)	a vote by which members of Congress respond orally by “ayes” or “nays.”
Teller Vote	vote is tabulated numerically (not by names). Tellers (clerks) count the number of Congressmen voting without recording their names.
Roll Call Vote	the alphabetical calling of the names of the members to determine each vote on a measure.
Whip	an official of the majority or minority party in Congress whose task is to have members of his party present for votes on important measures.
