

American Association of Museums

ADVOCACY FOR MUSEUMS

Glossary of Selected Legislative Terms

Authors: The author or sponsor of a bill is the Representative or Senator who introduces the bill into the chamber in which they are a member. The co-authors or co-sponsors also sign the bill in support of its introduction.

Act: A bill or measure after it passes one or both chambers. Also used to denote a law currently in place.

Amendment: A proposal to change a bill, a motion, an act, or the Constitution.

Appropriation: Spending from the U.S. Treasury for specified purposes, for example, for the operations of federal agencies. A lump sum may be appropriated, or an itemized appropriation may be made. The former allows for greater executive discretion. The latter permits expenditures only for narrow purpose specified by Congress.

Appropriations Act: Law providing spending for federal agencies and programs from the U.S. Treasury. The three major types of appropriations acts are regular, supplemental, and continuing.

Continuing Appropriations: Stop-gap measures that fund programs and agencies between the beginning of the fiscal year (October 1) and the date on which the President signs the regular appropriations bill into law. In the absence of Continuing Appropriations, the government would shut down because there would be no authority to spend money without a funding bill in place.

Regular Appropriations: Measures that fund agencies or programs for a full year.

Supplemental Appropriations: Spending that is approved outside the normal annual appropriations process either to pay for unanticipated or extraordinary expenditures (e.g. emergency earthquake relief for California) or to fund activities authorized too late for normal budgetary deadlines. Supplemental appropriations bills are usually considered mid-year, well after the approval of the regular appropriations bills.

Authorization: Provision in a law that establishes an agency or program and allows for spending for that agency or program. An authorization may be effective for one year, a fixed number of years, or for an indefinite period. An authorization may be for a definite amount of money or for "such sums as may be necessary."

Authorization Act: A law that establishes or continues one or more federal agencies or programs, establishes the terms and conditions under which they operate, allows for spending, and specifies how funds appropriated are to be used. An appropriation provides the funds.

Bill: A proposed law.

"Must Pass" Bill: Informal term for a measure that Congress must enact, such as an annual spending bill to fund operations of the government. Because of their "must-pass" quality, these bills often attract unrelated provisions called "riders".

Budget: The president's annual proposal to Congress. Legislation anticipating revenue and expenditures by the federal or state government for the upcoming fiscal year.

Budget Resolution: The Congressional "Blueprint" for the federal budget that establishes budget priorities for federal spending and taxation. The Budget Resolution does not hold the force of law and does not go to the President for signature.

Committee: A subdivision of the House or Senate that considers legislation. Committees also undertake investigations within their areas of expertise. Most Committees are divided into specialized subcommittees. Committees and subcommittees hold hearings and debate legislation. Most amendments to legislation occur at this level.

Conference Committee: A temporary, ad hoc panel composed of House and Senate conferees that is formed for the purpose of working out differences in legislation that has passed both chambers.

Conferees: Senate or House members appointed to serve on Conference Committees, also called "managers". Conferees are usually appointed from the committee or committees that reported the legislation and they are expected to try and uphold their Senate or House position on measures when they negotiate with conferees from the other body.

Conference Report: The compromise product negotiated by the Conference Committee. The Conference Report is submitted to the House and Senate for approval, on a yes or no vote, and cannot be amended.

Congressman: Title generally applied to a member of the House of Representatives. See Representative.

Continuing Resolution: See Continuing Appropriations

Engrossed Bill: Official copy of a bill passed by the House and Senate.

Federal Register: The federal government's daily publication of final regulations, proposed regulations, rule-making and comment periods, funding priorities, grant application deadlines, meetings, and other agency activity.

Filibuster: A time-delaying tactic that is used in the Senate to prevent a vote on a bill or an amendment. Sixty votes are needed to end a filibuster.

Fiscal Year: A 12-month period for using federal funds. The fiscal year for the federal government begins on October 1 and ends on September 30, and is designated by the calendar year in which it ends. For example, fiscal year 2000 began on October 1, 1999 and ended on September 30, 2000.

Floor Debate. The discussion of a proposal on the "floor" of the House of Representatives or Senate.

Hearing: Committee session - usually open to the public – to take testimony in order to gather information and opinions on proposed legislation, to conduct an investigation, or review the operation of any federal agency or program.

Joint Resolution: Legislation considered to have the same effect as a bill. Unlike simple and concurrent resolutions, a joint resolution requires the approval of the President. Also, a joint resolution may be used to propose amendments to the Constitution. A joint resolution originating in the House of Representatives is designated by the letters "H.J. Res." followed by a number and joint resolutions introduced in the Senate as "S.J. Res." followed by a number. For example: S.J. Res. 2.

Legislative History: The public record and deliberations on a bill prior to its enactment. Courts and administrative agencies may look to the legislative history for guidance in interpreting legislation and congressional intent. Federal agencies also look at the legislative history for guidance in developing regulations to implement the law.

Majority Leader: Leader of the majority party in either the House or the Senate. In the House, second in command to the Speaker.

Markup: The process by which congressional committees and subcommittees debate, amend and rewrite proposed legislation. A mark-up is generally a meeting where members go through a proposal line-by-line.

Minority Leader: Leader of the minority party in either the House or the Senate.

Override: A vote to disagree with the president's veto of a bill. This takes a two-thirds majority of the members present in both the House of Representatives and the Senate.

Public Law: A bill or joint resolution passed by both the House of Representatives and the Senate in identical form that has been enacted into law. Public laws affect the entire

nation. A Public law is designated by the abbreviation "Pub. L." followed by the Congress number (e.g. 108), and the number of the law. For example: Pub. L. 108-211.

Ranking Minority Member: The senior member (in terms of service) of the minority party on a committee. Commonly just referred to as the Ranking Member.

Referred. When bills are sent to a committee or moved from one committee to another, they are said to be referred.

Representative: Title of a Member of the United States House of Representatives. See Congressman. Legislators elected to two-year term in November of even numbered years to the House of Representatives. Each of the 435 Representatives in the House represents a district containing approximately 600,000 people.

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. A concurrent resolution is presented in both chambers and usually expresses a Congressional view on a matter not within Congressional jurisdiction. A joint resolution also requires approval in both chambers and goes to the president for approval. **Simple and concurrent resolutions do not go to the president.**

Rescission: The cancellation of spending which was previously provided by Congress.

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. Also known as "pork barrel" legislation.

Roll Call Vote: A vote by which each member of the House of Representative or Senate's vote is recorded by name.

Speaker: Speaker of the House of Representatives. Presides over the House. Elected, in effect, by the majority party in the House. Next in line of succession to the presidency after the vice president.

Senators. Title of a member of the United States Senate. Legislator who serves a six - year term in the Senate and one-third of whom are elected in November of even-numbered years. Each State has two Senators representing the population of the entire State.

Simple Resolution: Legislation that relates to the operations of a single chamber or expresses the collective opinion of that chamber on public policy issues. A simple resolution originating in the House of Representatives is designated by the letters "H. Res." followed by a number and simple resolutions introduced in the Senate as "S. Res." followed by a number. For Example: H. Res. 10.

Sponsor: See Author

Suspending the Rules: A motion in the House intended to bring a bill to a vote quickly.

Table a Bill: A motion to, in effect, put a bill aside and thereby remove it from consideration or kill it.

Unanimous Consent: A time-saving procedure for noncontroversial measures whereby measures are adopted without a vote. A member simply says "I ask unanimous consent for..." and states the proposal.

Veto: The procedure established under the Constitution by which the President disapproves a bill or joint resolution and thus prevents its enactment into law. A regular veto occurs when the President returns the legislation to Congress. The President usually returns a vetoed bill with a message indicating his reasons for rejecting the measure. The veto can be overridden only by a two-thirds vote in both the Senate and the House. See Override.