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Legislation: Engrossment, Enrollment, and Presentation

Engrossment, enrollment, and presentation of legislation are components of the legislative process that attest to the accuracy of bill texts, confirm House and Senate action, and confirm delivery of the bills to the President for review.

Engrossment

When either house orders the third reading of a bill, it simultaneously orders the engrossment of the bill. In earlier times, such bills were handwritten in very large script, hence the term “engrossment.” In current practice, engrossment is the formal reprinting of the bill in the form upon which the chamber will vote final passage. Official, engrossed copies are prepared by staff in the Office of the Clerk of the House and the Office of the Secretary of the Senate. House and Senate rules require that all bills, amendments, and joint resolutions passed in each chamber must be examined by the Clerk of the House or Secretary of the Senate, as appropriate. The Clerk or Secretary are required to attest to the accuracy of the engrossed text by signing the measures.

House-engrossed measures, including amendments to bills passed by the Senate, are printed on blue paper; the Senate prints its engrossed measures on white paper. If either chamber later discovers errors in one of its engrossed measures, it may adopt a resolution formally requesting the other chamber to return the engrossed bill or resolution to it for correction.

An engrossed bill is “messed” by the originating house to the other; the second chamber to act attaches the text of whatever amendments it adopts to the original measure it has received from the first.

Enrollment

An enrolled bill is the final version of a measure agreed to by both chambers, and may be printed on parchment or paper. Enrolled measures in the Senate are examined under the supervision of the Secretary of the Senate. In the House, the Clerk, in cooperation with the Senate, examines all bills and joint resolutions that have passed both Houses to see that they are correctly enrolled. House-enrolled bills are also certified by the Clerk as having originated in the House.

Enrolled bills are then signed by the presiding officers of both chambers, with the Speaker typically signing the measure first. In the House, the Speaker may sign enrolled measures at any time. A formally designated Speaker pro tempore, appointed with the approval of the House, may sign enrolled bills in the Speaker’s absence. The presiding officer of the Senate is authorized to sign enrolled measures when the Senate is in session. When a new Congress

convenes, the Senate typically adopts by unanimous consent an order authorizing the President of the Senate, the President pro tempore, or any Senator appointed by the President pro tempore to sign duly enrolled bills and joint resolutions during recesses and adjournments for the duration of that Congress.

Both houses must adopt a concurrent resolution to recall an incorrectly enrolled bill already sent to the President, or to make changes in the text of an enrolled bill still in the possession of Congress.

When the officials from both chambers have signed an enrolled bill, the measure is sent by the Clerk or Secretary, as determined by the chamber from which the bill originated, to the President for his consideration. With the general exception of an expiration of a Congress, there is no specific deadline within which Congress must submit an enrolled bill to the President. Preparing and signing enrolled bills may take significant time, especially at the end of a Congress when many such bills must be prepared.

Presentation

The Constitution provides that “Every Bill which shall have passed the House of Representatives and the Senate, shall, before it become a Law, be presented to the President of the United States.” Enrolled bills are delivered to the White House by the Clerk of the House or Secretary of the Senate, as determined by the chamber in which the measure originated, and stamped to certify the date and time of their arrival. The Clerk and Secretary are also required to report the fact and date of presentation to the President to their respective chambers. When the President has been away from Washington, DC, for long periods of time, Congress has sometimes agreed to present enrolled measures upon his return; at other times, bills have been sent to the President outside the capital.

If the President signs a bill during the 10-day period, excluding Sundays, provided in the Constitution for his review, it becomes law. If the President disapproves, or vetoes, a bill, he must return it to the originating chamber with a message indicating his reasons for disapproval. If the President does not sign or return a bill during the 10 days, the bill becomes law, unless Congress has adjourned during the 10 days, thereby making impossible the return of the bill (pocket veto).

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