
Senate Leadership

Who leads the State Senate of California?

The president pro tempore is responsible for the overall administration of the Senate. Elected by the Senate, the pro tem chairs the Rules Committee, which promotes the prompt disposition of bills and other business before the Senate.

What are the powers of the Senate Rules Committee?

The Senate Rules Committee has the power to appoint members and designate chairs and vice-chairs of other Senate committees, and decide which committee will consider each bill. The committee also makes recommendations to the full Senate on the confirmation of many gubernatorial appointments.

Assembly Leadership

Who are the leaders of the State Assembly of California?

The speaker of the Assembly is elected from and by the Assembly membership.

The speaker names the majority floor leader and the chair of the Assembly Rules committee; establishes the size and membership of all standing committees; designates the chairs and vice chairs of policy committees.

What are the powers of the Assembly Rules Committee?

The rules committee refers bills to committees, and selects and supervises Assembly support staff. It is responsible for expediting procedures and proposing changes in house rules.

Legislative Committees

What is the role of committees in the development of legislation?

Policy committees are standing committees established in the rules adopted by each house; their membership usually changes after each election. Each committee is assigned bills in its subject area to hear, study, and vote on.

What areas do the committees address?

Committee names change slightly from session to session, but each house has committees which deal with similar issue areas. Examples include: agriculture and water resources, banking, commerce, and international trade, business and professions, consumer protection, constitutional amendments, education, elections, energy, environmental safety, government organization, health and human services, housing, insurance, industrial relations, judiciary, labor, local government, natural resources, public employees and retirement, public safety, revenue and taxation, transportation, utilities and commerce, veterans affairs, water, parks, and wildlife.

Can committees meet when the legislature is not in session?

In the interim period between legislative sessions, committees can meet to gather information and make recommendations, although they may not take official actions.

What is the role of the Appropriations Committees?

The Senate and Assembly Appropriations Committees are standing committees that handle all bills that are approved by policy committees if they have fiscal implications, as defined in the Joint Rules.

What are conference committees?

Conference committees are set up to resolve differences in the Assembly and Senate versions of bills. They are composed of three members of each house, chosen by the Assembly Speaker and the Senate Rules Committee, pursuant to specified joint rules.

Legislative Staff

What is the role of staff in the legislature?

Although California has one of the largest legislative staffs in the nation, it was substantially reduced by Proposition 130. Staffers provide legal, technical, research, and secretarial services for the legislators. Most employees of the legislature are appointed by the rules committee in each house and are exempt from civil service.

What is the role of committee staff?

Each committee is provided at least one committee consultant, depending on the workload of the particular committee. Especially knowledgeable in their subject areas, committee consultants analyze bills, help draft legislation, plan hearings, and conduct studies.

What office advises the legislature on legal matters?

The chief legal advisor to the legislature is the Legislative Counsel. A nonpartisan position, the Legislative Counsel is elected at the beginning of each regular session by both houses. The Legislative Counsel provides legal services which the legislature may require in connection with their legislative activities. The legislative counsel's office also prepares all bills, resolutions, and amendments pursuant to the requests of the legislators; advises legislators on the constitutionality and legality of proposed measures; and prepares digests and indexes of codes and statutes.

What office advises the legislature on fiscal matters?

Fiscal advice is provided by the Legislative Analyst. A nonpartisan position, the legislative analyst is appointed by the Joint Legislative Budget Committee. The analyst's staff evaluates the proposed state budget for the Legislature.

Legislative Procedures

What procedures are used by both houses?

The state constitution specifies the dates on which, and number of days in which, the legislature must complete certain procedures. Within this framework, each house determines its own standing rules of procedure.

Each session is convened under the standing rules of the previous session. Each house then adopts the same or new rules to govern procedural matters such as the committee system, duties of officers, order of daily business, parliamentary rules, and joint legislative rules, for the new session.

Who calls special sessions of the legislature and what are the rules?

The governor is constitutionally authorized to call the legislature into special session at any time to deal with urgent or extraordinary issues. Action during a special session is limited to the subjects specified by the governor. Procedural rules permit more expeditious action during a special session than a regular session. Non-urgency bills passed in special session take effect 91 days after the session adjourns.

When are the regular legislative sessions?

The new legislature convenes each two-year session in December after each November statewide general election. A regular session lasts two years; the meeting schedule is as follows:

Odd-numbered years

- January: Regular session begins (after a few days of organizing in the previous December)
- Spring: One-week recess
- Summer: One-month recess
- September-December: Interim recess

Even-numbered years

- January: Regular session resumes
- Spring: One-week recess
- Summer: One-month recess
- August 31: End of regular session

What is a bill and how are they numbered?

A bill is a proposal to change, repeal, or add to existing state law. An Assembly bill (AB) is one introduced in the Assembly; a Senate bill (SB), in the Senate. Bills are designated by number, in the order of introduction in each house. For example, AB 16 refers to the sixteenth bill introduced in the Assembly. The numbering starts afresh each session.

A constitutional amendment, known as an ACA or SCA, depending on the house of origin, is a resolution proposing a change in the constitution. An ACA or SCA must be approved by two-thirds of the members of each house by a certain deadline in order to qualify for a statewide ballot. A constitutional amendment does not go to the Governor for action but must be approved by a majority of voters to take effect.

What is a resolution and what types of resolutions can be considered?

The legislature takes other kinds of action by resolution, though the term bill is often used loosely to include resolutions.

A concurrent resolution is used to adopt joint rules, establish joint committees, commend persons or organizations, or express legislative intent. Referred to as an ACR or SCR, depending on the house of origin, a concurrent resolution needs only a majority vote of each house to pass.

A joint resolution, referred to as an AJR or SJR, depending on the house of origin, usually urges passage or defeat of legislation pending before the U.S. Congress or urges presidential action.

A house resolution expresses the sentiment of either the Assembly (AR) or Senate (SR). A house resolution is used, for example, to create an interim committee, amend a house rule, or congratulate an individual or group; it is usually adopted by majority voice vote.

Resolutions do not go to the Governor for signature or veto.

What process does the legislature use when enacting bills?

The legislature handles bills according to a process prescribed by the constitution and statutory law to help ensure opportunity for citizen input.

The legislative process is divided into distinct stages:

Drafting. Upon the request of a legislator, the legislative counsel's office drafts the formal language of a bill and a digest of its main provisions. Ideas for proposals often come from various organizations and individuals, such as legislative committees, the executive branch, counties, cities, businesses, lobbyists, and citizens.

Introduction. A bill can be introduced in either house of the legislature, at which time it is numbered and read for the first time. The name of the legislator who introduced the bill, known as the "author", becomes part of the title. The bill is printed and subject to a 30-day waiting period before it can be heard or acted upon.

Policy committee. The rules committee of the house of origin assigns each bill to a policy committee appropriate to the subject matter contained in the measure. The committee hears public testimony from the author, proponents, and opponents. The committee can pass the original or an amended form of the bill, kill it by holding it in committee, refer it to another committee, or send it to interim study. Approval of a bill requires an affirmative vote by a majority of members of the committee.

Fiscal committee. If approved by the policy committee, a bill which has fiscal implications for the state is sent to the fiscal committee, where similar consideration and actions can occur. Approval of a bill requires an affirmative vote of a majority of those on the committee.

Second reading. The title of a bill recommended for passage by committee is read a second time on the floor of the house. Typically there is no debate at this stage. If a bill is amended at this stage, it may be referred back for another committee hearing.

Floor vote. A bill is read a third time, debated, and possibly amended on the floor. An ordinary bill needs a majority vote to pass (21 votes in the Senate, 41 votes in the Assembly). Urgency bills, bills that make appropriations, and Constitutional Amendments require a two-thirds vote (27 votes in the Senate, 54 in the Assembly).

Second house. If it receives a favorable vote in the first house, a bill repeats the same steps in the other house. If the second house passes the bill without changing it from the version that passed the 1st house, the bill is sent to the governor for signature or veto.

Concurrence or conference. If a measure is amended in the second house and passed, it is returned to the house of origin for consideration of amendments. The house of origin may concur with the amendments and send the bill to the governor, or reject the amendments and submit it to a two-house conference committee. If either house rejects the conference committee's report, a second (or even a third) conference committee can be formed. If both houses adopt the same conference report, the bill is sent to the governor.

Governor's action. Within 12 days after receiving a bill, the governor may sign it into law, allow it to become law without his or her signature, or veto it. In bills that appropriate funds, the governor may veto or reduce particular expenditure items while approving the rest of the provisions. When the legislature recesses at the end of the 1st year of a two-year session, the governor has 30 days to make decisions on bills that are in his or her possession as of the date of adjournment. In the second year of a legislative session, the governor has until September 30th to make decisions on bills that are in his or her possession on September 1.

Overrides. A vetoed bill is returned to the Legislature. A two-thirds vote of each house is required to override a veto.

Effective date. Ordinarily a law passed during a regular session takes effect January 1 of the following year. A few statutes go into effect as soon as the governor signs them; these include acts calling for elections and urgency measures necessary for the immediate preservation of the public peace, health, or safety.

How do people keep track of the bills being considered and passed by the legislature?

Typically, more than 5,000 pieces of legislation are introduced during each two-year session. Each house publishes three guides during the session to assist those trying to keep track of the bills.

The Daily File for each house is an agenda of the day's business. It lists measures scheduled for committee hearing and house action, the location and meeting time of each committee, and the current membership of all standing committees.

The Daily Journal contains an account of the proceedings of each house for the preceding day. It includes the titles of all measures introduced, considered, or acted upon; the text of house resolutions, roll calls, messages from the governor and the other house; and committee reports, motions, and roll calls. Senate committee votes are reported in the Senate's Journal; Assembly committee votes, in a separate appendix to the Assembly's Journal. No record is kept of arguments in debate.

A History is published by each house. The Weekly History, published at the end of each week, summarizes all action taken on every measure from the beginning of the session through the end of that week. Each chamber's Daily History shows the action taken on the action file each day since the last Weekly History. A Semi-final History is issued by the Assembly in February following the first year of the session. When the legislature adjourns, a Final History is published, summarizing all legislation introduced and acted upon during the two-year session.

Each of the above publications is available in the State Capitol Bill Room and online at leginfo.ca.gov.