

A CONGRESSIONAL POCKET DICTIONARY

- Act**
—a measure which has become law after being passed by both houses of Congress and approved by the President, or passed by two-thirds vote over his veto.
- Adjourn**—to end a meeting, usually for a stated time only. **Adjourn sine die** (pronounced SIE-nee DIE-ee)—to stop a meeting without setting a date for reconvening.
- 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.
- Appropriation**—money set aside by a legislative body for some government expenditure.
- Bill**—a measure introduced in either house of Congress. **Public bill**—a bill of broad general application. **Private bill**—a bill for the benefit of one or a few individuals.
- Bipartisan**—approved by two political parties, or including representatives of two political parties—for example, the U. S. bipartisan foreign policy, supported by most Democrats and Republicans.
- Bloc**—a group of legislators (not necessarily of the same party) working together to achieve a common goal—for example, the farm bloc of Congressmen from rural areas.
- 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.
- 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 by either house. It carries with it no special punishment.
- Closure** (or **closure**)—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 (or select) committee**—a temporary committee set up to handle a specific problem. **Joint committee**—a committee representing both houses of Congress. **Conference committee**—joint committee of both houses of Congress 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.
- Confirmation**—approval by the Senate of appointments made by the President.
- Constituent**—any citizen residing in a district represented by a Congressman.
- Contempt of Congress**—in law, disobedience to or disrespect of Congress. For example, a witness who refuses to answer questions of a Congressional committee may be charged with contempt of Congress.
- Discharge petition**—a paper signed by a majority of House (or Senate) members to remove a bill from a committee's control.
- District, Congressional**—a geographic division of a state on the basis of population and in accordance with conditions laid down by Congress. Each Congressional district elects a Representative.
- Enabling act**—an act passed by Congress permitting the people of a territory to draft a constitution for a state of their own.
- Enact**
—to pass a law.
- 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.
- 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 July 1 and ends on June 30. (Fiscal year 1960, for example, began July 1, 1959.)
- Floor**—a term referring to the full Senate or the full House. For example, "the bill is on the floor of the House" means that the bill is up for consideration by the House.
- Franking privilege**—a privilege accorded members of Congress to post "official business" mail without charge.
- Gerrymander**—an abuse in establishing Congressional districts whereby the political party in control in the state is favored by the distribution of its voters through as many districts as possible, while the voters of the opposing party are placed in the smallest possible number of districts.
- H. R.**—used before a bill number, indicates that the bill originated in the House of Representatives.
- Hearing**—a session of a Congressional 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**—accusations against a civil official of misconduct while in office, used as ground for removal of that official from office. Impeachment should not be confused with the trial itself. In Congress impeachment proceedings take place in the House of Representatives. The trial on the charges is held in the Senate.
- Lame duck**—a Congressman whose term of office continues after he has failed to be re-elected.
- Lobby**—a group or person (lobbyist) seeking to influence legislators for the passage or defeat of legislation.
- Logrolling**—political slang for the practice whereby Congressmen help one another to get their pet bills passed.
- Majority**—more than half, or the group that controls a vote of that size. **Absolute majority**—more than half 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 Congress.
- Motion**—a proposal on procedure or action presented to a legislative body.
- Nonpartisan**—free from party domination; not partisan. For example, a nonpartisan committee is one composed without regard to political party affiliations of its members.
- 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**—an agreement between two members of Congress, who are going to vote the opposite way on a measure, that if either is absent the other will refrain from voting. Usually, both members are away when the vote is taken.
- Patronage**—the control of appointive jobs by a political party in power.

Pork barrel—the slang expression for Federal appropriations for local improvements which are actually political favors to local politicians or citizens.

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 the House, Senate, or a Congressional 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.

Reapportionment—the redistribution of the number of members of the House of Representatives in the various states, according to changes in population.

Resolution, concurrent—a statement passed by both the House and the Senate that does not have the force of law. It merely indicates the opinion of Congress on a certain issue. It does not require the signature of the President. **Simple resolution**—a statement passed by one house only, also without force of law. **Joint resolution**—a statement passed by both houses of Congress. It has the effect of law and may be vetoed by the President.

Rider—an unrelated controversial measure attached to a Congressional bill in order to compel the President to accept the bill with its rider or do without the bill. (The President cannot veto part of a bill.)

Rule—in a special sense, 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 (usually to five minutes) of individual speeches during the debate of a measure. These rules are not used in the Senate.

S—as used before a bill number, indicates that the bill originated in the Senate.

Senatorial courtesy—a custom in the 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 Congressional committee shall be the person who has the longest record of service on the committee. Continual reelection to a seat in Congress thus becomes the chief qualification for a chairmanship.

Session—a single meeting or a series of successive meetings of either or both chambers of Congress. **Joint session**—a meeting attended by both chambers of Congress. **Executive session**—a meeting of a committee or other legislative body that is closed to the public and the press.

Unanimous consent—agreement to approve minor bills or to take certain procedural actions unless some member voices an objection. This eliminates necessity of time-consuming votes.

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 a 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.

Voice vote (or viva voce vote)—a vote by which members of Congress respond orally by "ayes" and "nays." **Teller vote**—vote is tabulated numerically (not by names). Tellers (clerks) count the number of Congressmen voting for and against a given measure, without recording their names. **Roll call vote**—the alphabetical calling of the names of the members of the House (or Senate) to determine each member's vote on a measure.

Whip—an official of the majority or minority party in Congress whose task it is to see that all the members of his party are present when important measures are to be voted upon. The office of whip is unofficial and carries no additional salary.

