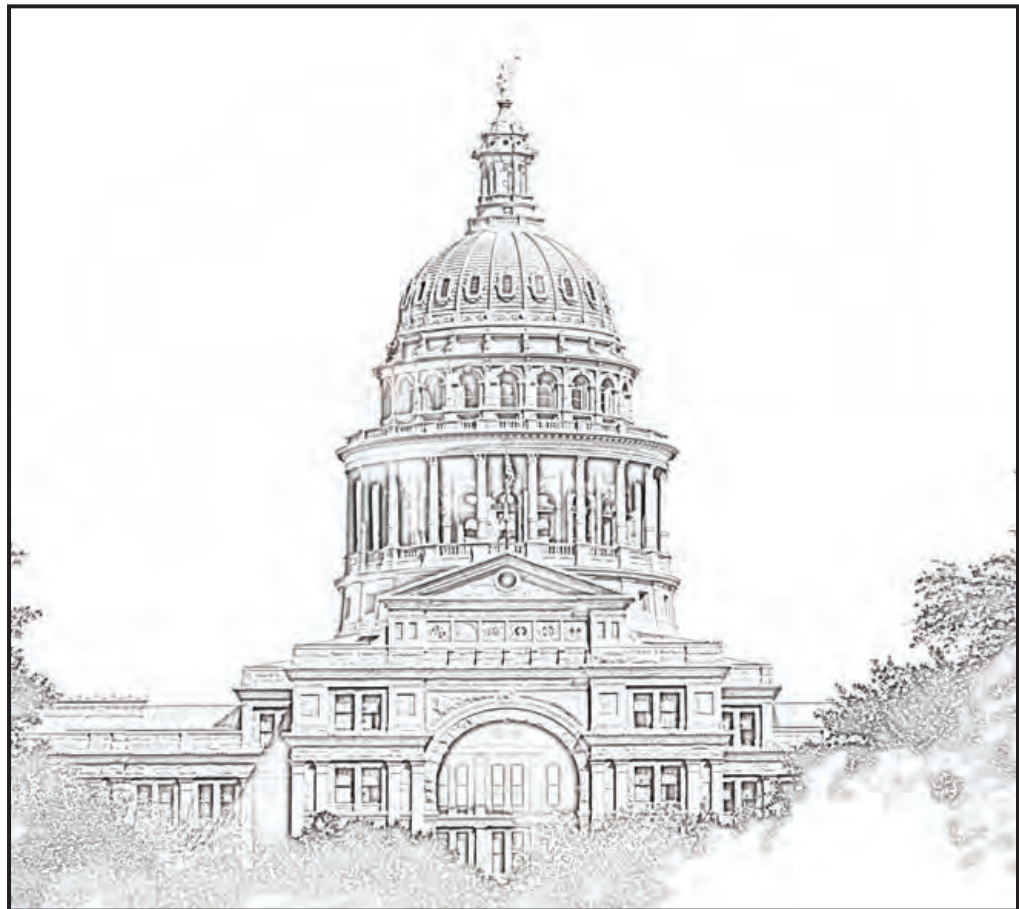




# HOW A BILL BECOMES A LAW



# How a Bill Becomes a Law Lesson Plan

## Learning objectives

Students will discover the complexities of how a bill becomes a law.

**TEKS:** 4th Grade Social Studies (§113.15): 4.5, 17B,E, 18A, 21-C; 5th Grade Social Studies (§113.16): 5.18A-B, 19B, 24A-E, 25A-E; 7th Grade Texas History (§113.19): 7.15B, 17A, 20B-C; 8th Grade U.S. History (§113.20): 8.6, 19C, 29A-E, 30A-C; 11th Grade U.S. History (§113.41): 11.6, 28A-B, 29A-B, 31; High School US Government (§113.44.): (b)1, 5-6, (c)7A, 19A, 20A-B, 21

## Estimated Time:

45-60 Minutes

## Materials Needed:

- “How a Bill Becomes a Law” PowerPoint Presentation
- Internet access
- For Teaching US Government:
  - “How Our Laws are Made,” Infographic
  - “Scavenger Hunt (US Government)” worksheet
  - “What Does it Look Like In Action in the US Congress” worksheet
- For Teaching Texas Government:
  - “How Texas Laws are Made” Infographic
  - “Scavenger Hunt (Texas Government)” worksheet
  - “What Does it Look Like in Action with the Texas Government” worksheet

## Relevant Vocabulary

Amendment	Quorum
Appropriations	Reconciliation
Bill	Representative
CBO (Congressional Budget Office)	Resolution
Hearings	Joint,
Legislation	Concurrent
Lobbyist	Simple
Pocket Veto	Standing Committee
Proposals	Veto

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# Teaching Strategy

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1. Open the “How a Bill Becomes a Law” PowerPoint and ask students if they know of any traffic safety laws. They will have time to explore their answers to this question later. Use slide 1 as inspiration for conversation.
2. Ask students to consider how and why these laws were created. (The intention is to assess their understanding at this point as to the process of how a bill becomes a law).

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## OPTIONAL ACTIVITY:

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- Share a video clip to help students connect what they know about the lawmaking process. Here are two to consider. Be sure to preview before sharing with students.
  - “I’m Just a Bill,” from SchoolHouse Rocks: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FFroMQIKiag>,  
or
  - “Mr. Smith Goes to Washington” where the process is explained  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=et4Y8ZI96xw>
- 
3. Share with students the Learning Objective for the lesson: Students will discover the complexities of how a bill becomes a law, (slide 2).
  4. Review with students the basic process for how a bill becomes a law (slide 3). You might want to have them write the process down in their notes.
  5. Divide students into small groups (4 to a group is recommended, but not required).
  6. Pass out “Scavenger Hunt” worksheet to each student (be sure to use the correct corresponding worksheet to follow the US or Texas process).
  7. Pass out the Infographic. One per group is recommended and can be found in the PowerPoint (slide 5 is for Texas Government, slide 6 is for US Government).
  8. In their groups, have students complete the worksheet using the infographic.
  9. Go over answers as a class and entertain any questions students might have at that point.

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10. Still working in those same groups, have students logon to the internet and complete the “What Does it Look Like in Action” worksheet, (slide 7). It is recommended for this to be completed in small groups, but could be done as a whole class, or individually if desired. Be sure to use the correct worksheet for either Texas Government, or US Government.
  11. When students finish their online scavenger hunt, have them brainstorm additional traffic safety laws.
  12. Share observations as a class, as well as items brainstormed regarding traffic safety.

## Optional Activity

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Now that students hold a stronger understanding of the complexities of law making, share the Crash Course Government clip, “How a Bill Becomes a Law”: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=66f4-NKEYz4>

## Extension Activity

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Have students select a traffic safety law, conduct additional research over the topic, and write a letter to their representative regarding the issue.

**For further extension, have students play any or all of the following games on computers or devices:**

- “There Should Be A Law”: [https://texaslr.org/games\\_eng/HowABill](https://texaslr.org/games_eng/HowABill)
- “Lawcraft”: <https://www.icivics.org/games/lawcraft>
- “Represent Me”: <https://www.icivics.org/games/represent-me>
- “Responsibility Launcher”: <https://www.icivics.org/games/responsibility-launcher>

## Extension for Gifted/Talented

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Have students create a board game using the law-making infographic. Students could also create a story from the viewpoint of a traffic safety bill and describe his/her travels through the complex system.

Drivers cannot send or receive electronic messages in Texas

Drivers with learner's permits are prohibited from using handheld cell phones in the first six months of driving

Drivers under the age of 18 are prohibited from using wireless communications devices

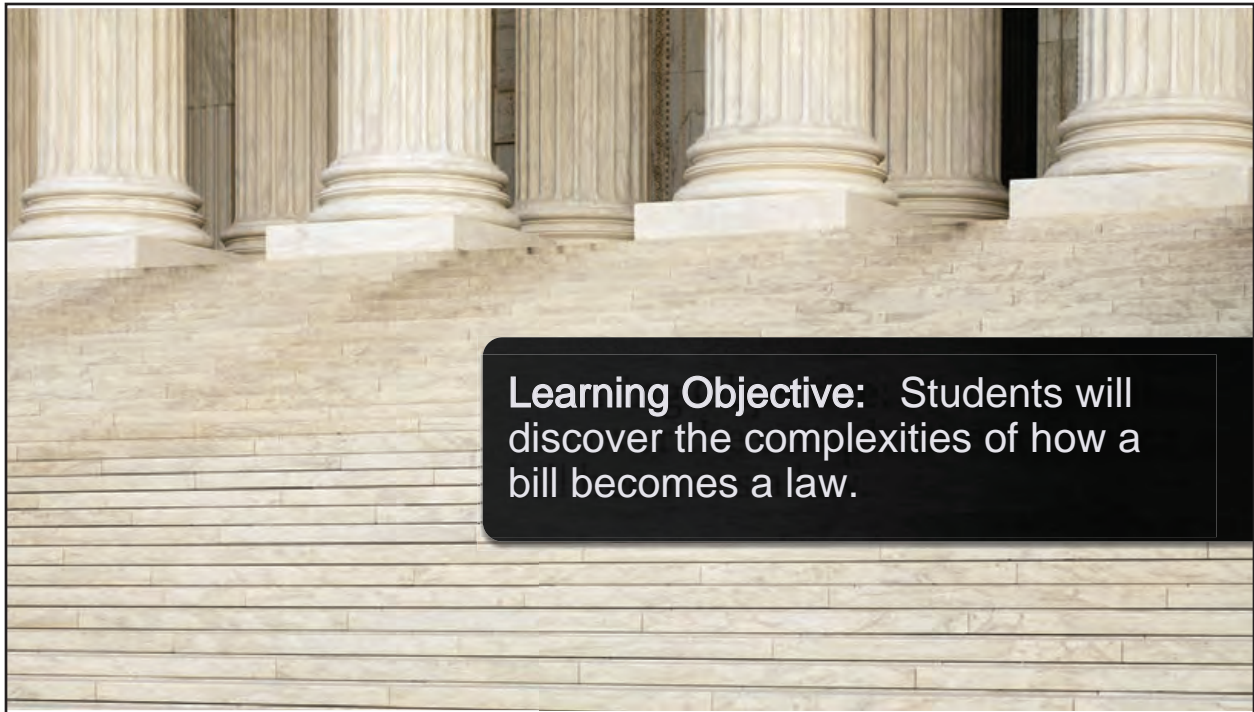
## Did you know...

All riders under the age of 21 are required to wear a helmet when operating a motorcycle

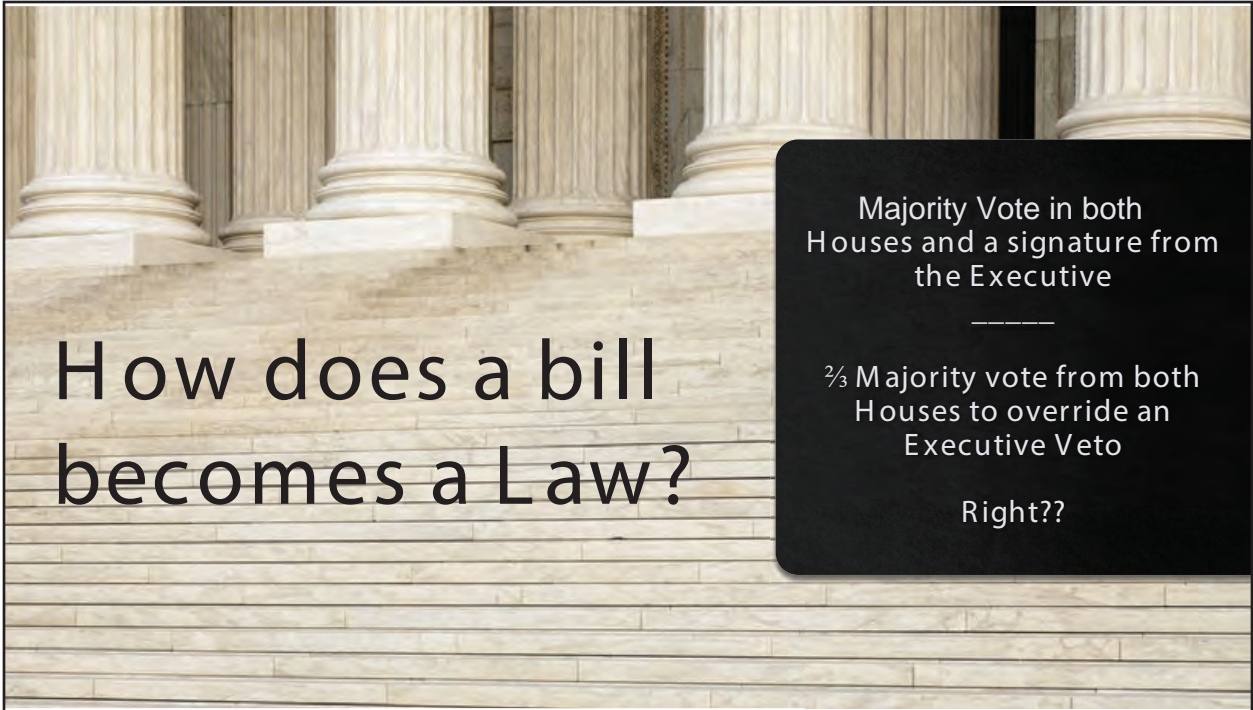

School bus operators are prohibited from using cell phones while driving if children are present

In school zones, all drivers are prohibited from texting and using handheld devices while driving

## How did these laws come to be?



**Learning Objective:** Students will discover the complexities of how a bill becomes a law.



# How does a bill becomes a Law?

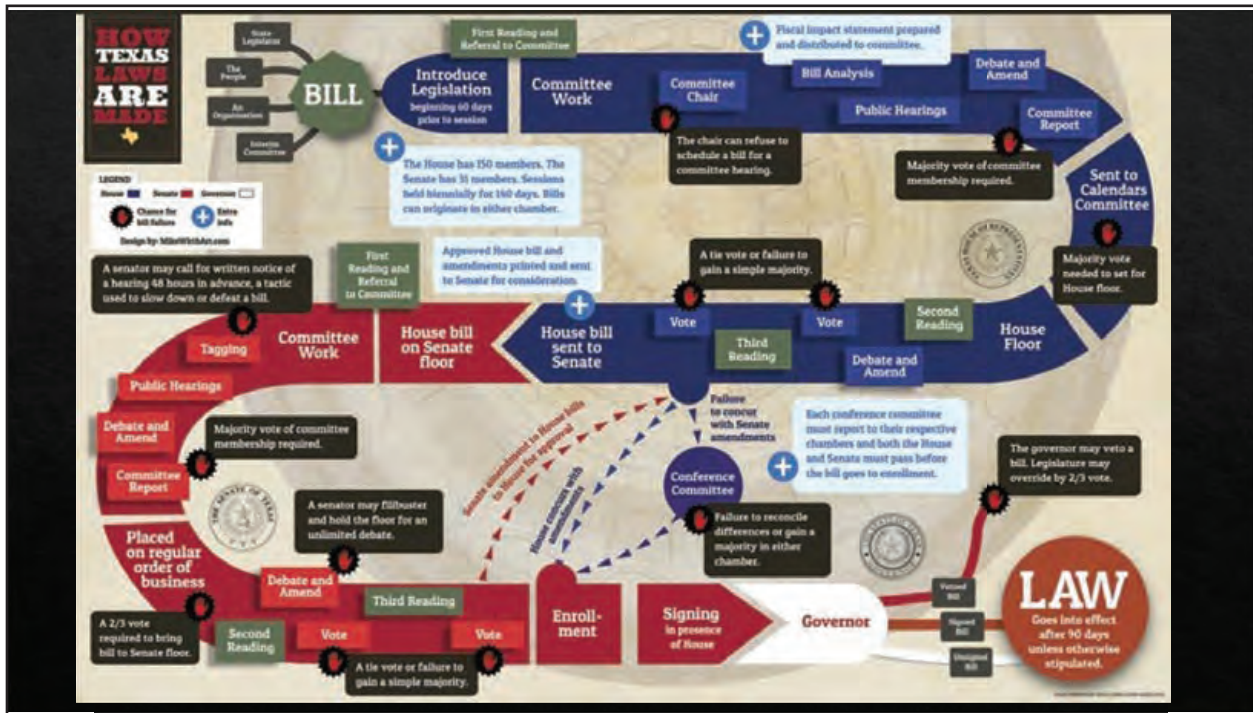
Majority Vote in both Houses and a signature from the Executive


$\frac{2}{3}$  Majority vote from both Houses to override an Executive Veto

Right??

Yes, but there are a few steps in between. Let's take a look...

Use the Infographic to follow the path of a bill...





What does it look  
like in action?

Use your “what  
does it look like  
in action...” to  
find out

## Questions to Consider...

- Why is this system so complex?
- What are the benefits? What are the drawbacks?
- Why do you think the framers designed it this way?
- If you could change anything about the process, would you? If so, what?



## Scavenger Hunt (US Government)

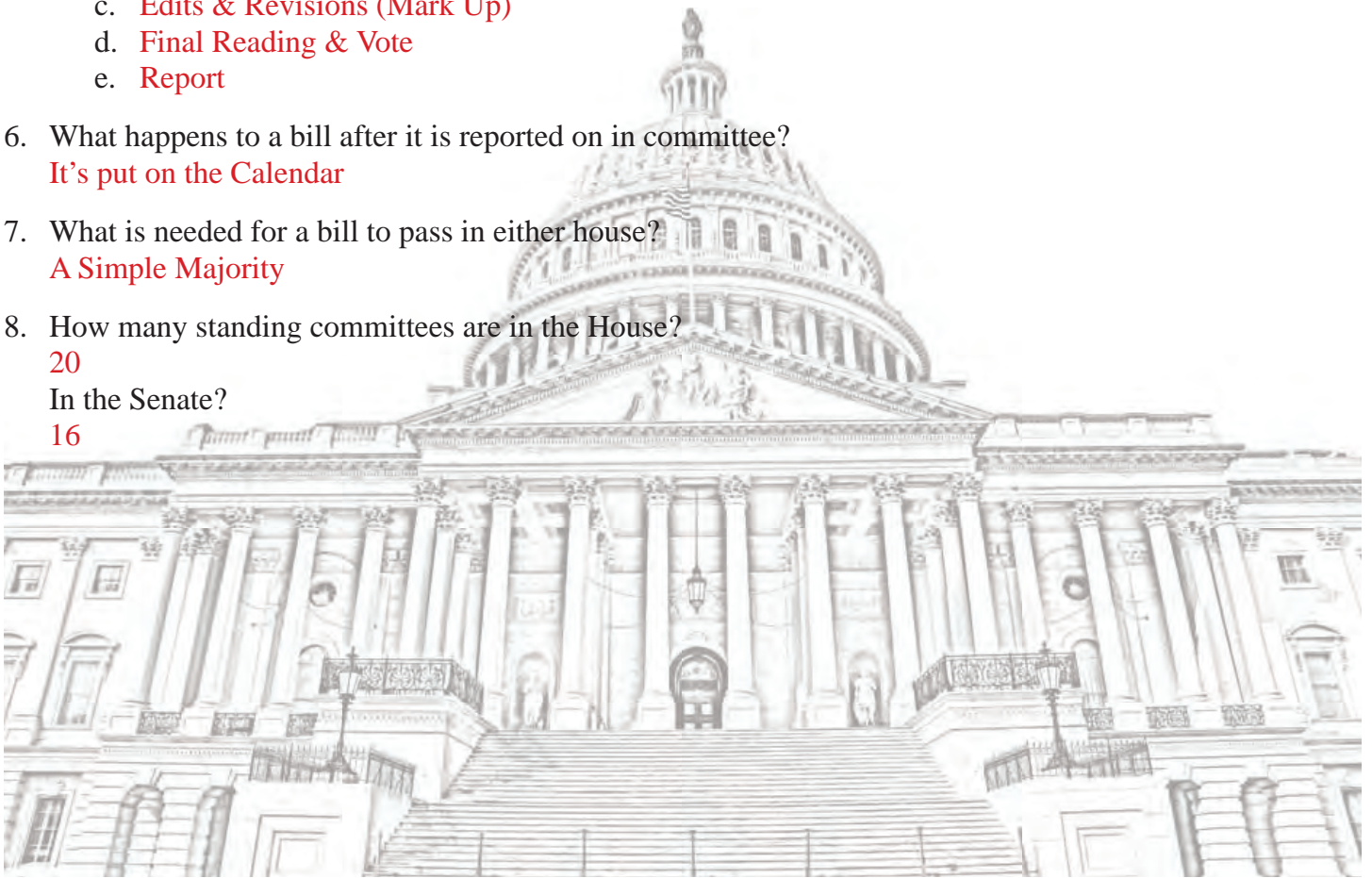
1. Who can introduce a bill?
  - a.
  - b.
  - c.
  - d.
2. How do you read the code of a bill? If it says H.R. 301 [110], what does the 110 stand for?
3. **True or False:** Bills can be introduced in either chamber of Congress.
4. If you had to guess, a bill that originates in the Senate would start with what letter?
5. Once a bill makes it to committee, what are some steps it goes through while there?
  - a.
  - b.
  - c.
  - d.
  - e.
6. What happens to a bill after it is reported on in committee?
7. What is needed for a bill to pass in either house?
8. How many standing committees are in the House? \_\_\_\_\_ In the Senate? \_\_\_\_\_
9. **True or False:** A bill can go straight from the House to the desk of the President.
10. What is a lobbyist?
11. Bills that include “appropriations” (money) must originate where?
12. What is a CBO?
13. What is a “Pocket Veto?”
14. What is needed in Congress to override a Presidential veto?
15. According to the “How Our Laws are Made” infographic, how many chances does a bill have to fail?  
\_\_\_\_\_ What are some examples?

Additional thoughts to consider: Compare and contrast the House of Representatives to the Senate. What similarities do you notice? What are some differences? Why is it that way?

## Scavenger Hunt (US Government)

### KEY

- Who can introduce a bill?
  - A Representative
  - A State Legislature
  - The People
  - The Executive Branch
- How do you read the code of a bill? If it says H.R. 301 [110], what does the 110 stand for?  
The 110th Congressional Session / 110th Congress
- True or False:** Bills can be introduced in either chamber of Congress.  
True
- If you had to guess, a bill that originates in the Senate would start with what letter?  
S
- Once a bill makes it to committee, what are some steps it goes through while there?
  - Meetings
  - Public Hearings
  - Edits & Revisions (Mark Up)
  - Final Reading & Vote
  - Report
- What happens to a bill after it is reported on in committee?  
It's put on the Calendar
- What is needed for a bill to pass in either house?  
A Simple Majority
- How many standing committees are in the House?  
20  
In the Senate?  
16



9. **True or False:** A bill can go straight from the House to the desk of the President.

False

10. What is a lobbyist?

An activist paid by an interest group to promote their position in the legislature.

11. Bills that include “appropriations” (money) must originate where?

House of Representatives

12. What is a CBO?

Congressional Budget Office - a nonpartisan office charged with checking and creating budget estimates.

13. What is a “Pocket Veto?”

Occurs when the President fails to sign a bill into law AND Congress adjourns BEFORE the ten days expire.

14. What is needed in Congress to override a Presidential veto?

$\frac{2}{3}$  majority vote in both Houses

15. According to the “How Our Laws are Made” infographic, how many chances does a bill have to fail?

12

What are some examples?

Could be sent back for committee, could be voted down, could be “tabled,” a filibuster could happen, could be vetoed,(just to name a few)



## What Does it Look Like in Action in the US Congress?

Now that you have uncovered some of the steps a bill goes through to become a law, let's take a look at it in action. Go to <https://www.congress.gov/> and browse Congress' website. Here you can find details regarding current legislative activity, members of Congress, and schedules for upcoming meetings. After you have looked through the website, follow the steps below.

### Step One:

Find the search bar at the top of the page and type in the topic "seat belt law" and press Enter.

### Step Two:

Answer the questions below to the best of your ability.

1. Did any bills populate for that topic? If so, how many?
2. What is the name of one of the bills?
3. Focussing on that bill, who is the sponsor of it?
4. How many cosponsors does it have?
5. What is the date of the last action of the bill?
6. How many actions have been taken on that bill at this point?
7. Have there been any amendments added to the bill? If so, how many?
8. Where is that bill in the legislative process?
9. Using the infographic, can you identify where that bill currently sits in the process?
10. In a nutshell, what is the basic concept of the bill you investigated?

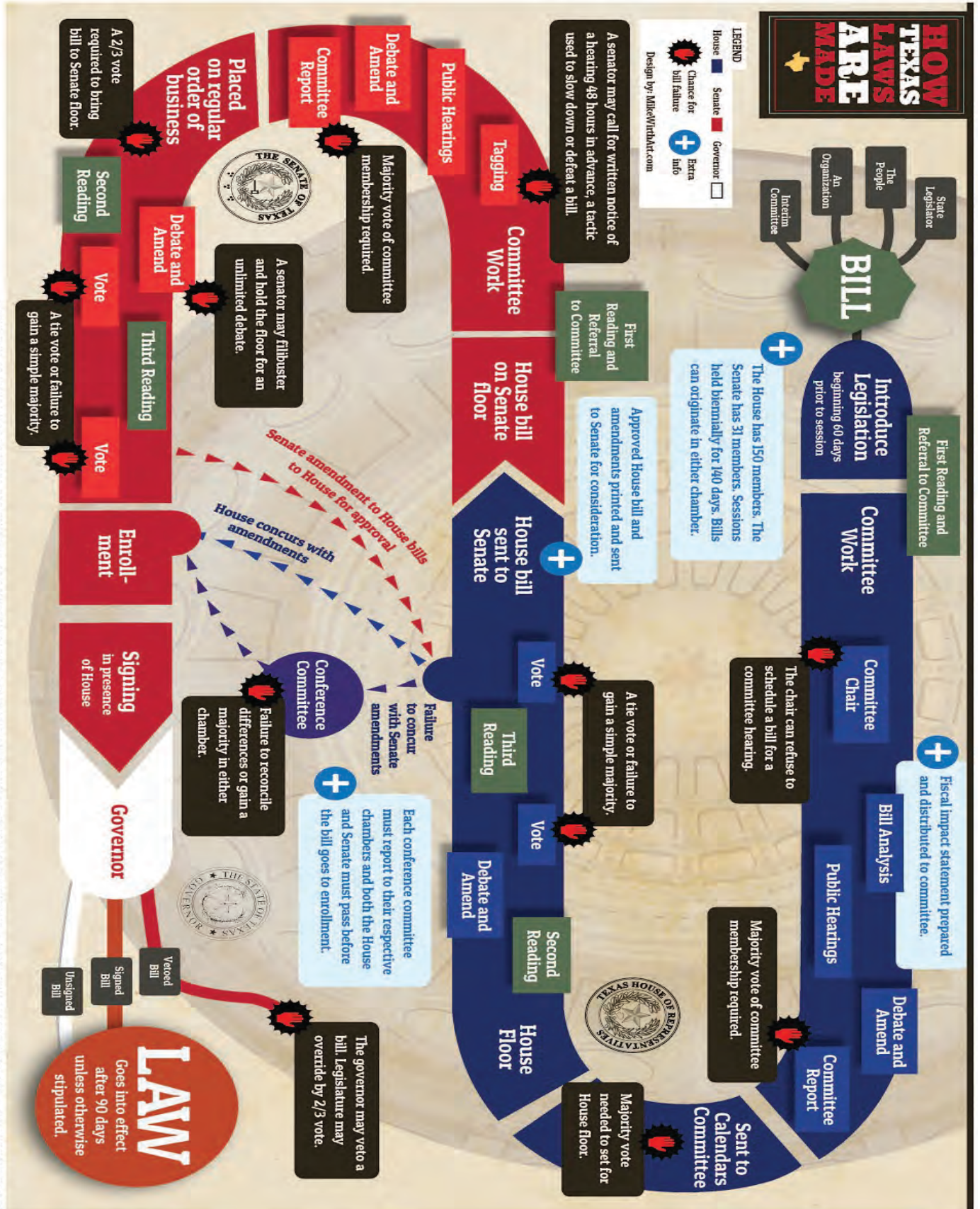
### Step Three:

Brainstorm additional traffic safety issues in the space provided below. Pick one that most interests you and see what Congress is doing about the issue.

#### Extension Activity:

Visit <https://wrm.capitol.texas.gov/home> and type in your address to uncover who represents you locally, statewide, and in Washington, D.C. Based on the traffic safety issue of interest to you, write your representative asking them to propose, support, or stop the legislative issue you researched.

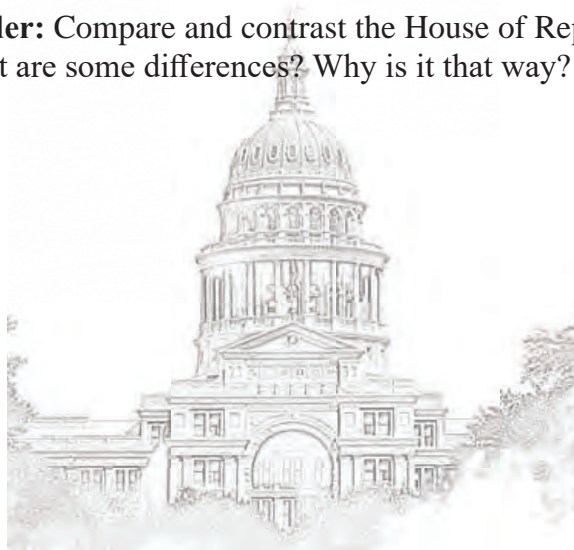
Using the infographic provided, answer the questions below to the best of your ability.



## Scavenger Hunt (Texas Government)

- Who can present a bill?
  - a.
  - b.
  - c.
  - d.
- How many members are in the Texas House? \_\_\_\_\_ Texas Senate? \_\_\_\_\_
- Do bills have to go through both houses to pass?
- True or False:** Bills can be introduced in either chamber of Congress.
- Which comes first in the process: the introduction of legislation? Or Public Hearings?
- According to the “How Texas Laws are Made” chart, how many chances does a bill have to fail?
- What are some examples for why a bill might fail?
- How many votes are needed to bring a bill to the House Floor?
- How many votes are needed to bring a bill to the Senate Floor?
- If a bill passes, how many days before it goes into effect unless otherwise stated in the bill?
- What does it take to override the Governor’s veto?

**Additional questions to consider:** Compare and contrast the House of Representatives to the Senate. What similarities do you notice? What are some differences? Why is it that way?



## Scavenger Hunt (Texas Government)

### KEY

1. Who can present a bill?
  - a. State Legislatures
  - b. The People
  - c. An Organization
  - d. Internal Committees (?)
2. How many members are in the Texas House?  
150 Texas  
Senate?  
33
3. True or False: Bills are introduced during the first 60 days of the legislature session.  
True
4. Do bills have to go through both houses to pass?  
Yes
5. Which comes first in the process: the introduction of legislation? Or Public Hearings?  
The Introduction of legislation.
6. According to the “How Texas Laws are Made” chart, how many chances does a bill have to fail?  
13
7. What are some examples?  
Answers may vary
8. How many votes are needed to bring a bill to the House Floor?  
A simple majority
9. How many votes are needed to bring a bill to the Senate Floor?  
 $\frac{2}{3}$  majority
10. If a bill passes, how many days before it goes into effect unless otherwise stated?  
It goes into effect after 90 days
11. What does it take to override the Governor’s veto?  
 $\frac{2}{3}$  vote in both Houses

## What Does it Look Like in Action with the Texas Government?

Now that you have discovered steps a bill goes through to become a law, let's take a look at it in action. Go to <https://www.capitol.state.tx.us/> and browse the Texas Legislature website. Here you can find details regarding current legislature activity, members, and other helpful sites regarding government and its processes.

### Step One:

Find a traffic safety law present in the Texas Legislature. To do so, follow these steps below

- Find the “search” tab at the top of the screen.
- Scroll down and click on “bill search.”
- Type in “speed limits” in the “select subject criteria section.”
- Highlight “speed limits,” and press the arrow to move the topic to the right.
- Click “ok” at the bottom of the screen. This will take you back to the previous page.
- Now, highlight “speed limits” and click the “search” button in the upper right hand corner.

### Step Two:

Answer the questions below to the best of your ability.

1. Did any bills populate for that topic? If so, how many?
2. Click one of the bills - what is its bill code?
3. What is the name of one of the authors, or sponsors, of the bill?
4. What House committee is overseeing the bill?
5. What Senate committee?
6. Click on the “actions” tab at the top. What is the date of the last action taken on that bill?
7. Click on the “text” tab. Open the text of the bill. What are three words that come to mind when you see it?
8. Click on the “bill stages” tab. What is the stage of this bill?
9. Refer back to your infographic - where is the bill currently located in its process?
10. In looking through the bill, can you give a brief synopsis of what it is about?

### Step Three:

Brainstorm additional traffic safety issues in the blank space below. Pick one that most interests you and do a Google Search to see if the Texas Legislature has taken any action on that topic.

#### Extension Activity:

Visit <https://wrm.capitol.texas.gov/home> and type in your address to uncover who represents you locally, statewide, and in Washington, D.C. Based on the traffic safety issue of interest to you, write your representative asking them to propose, support, or stop the legislative issue you researched.