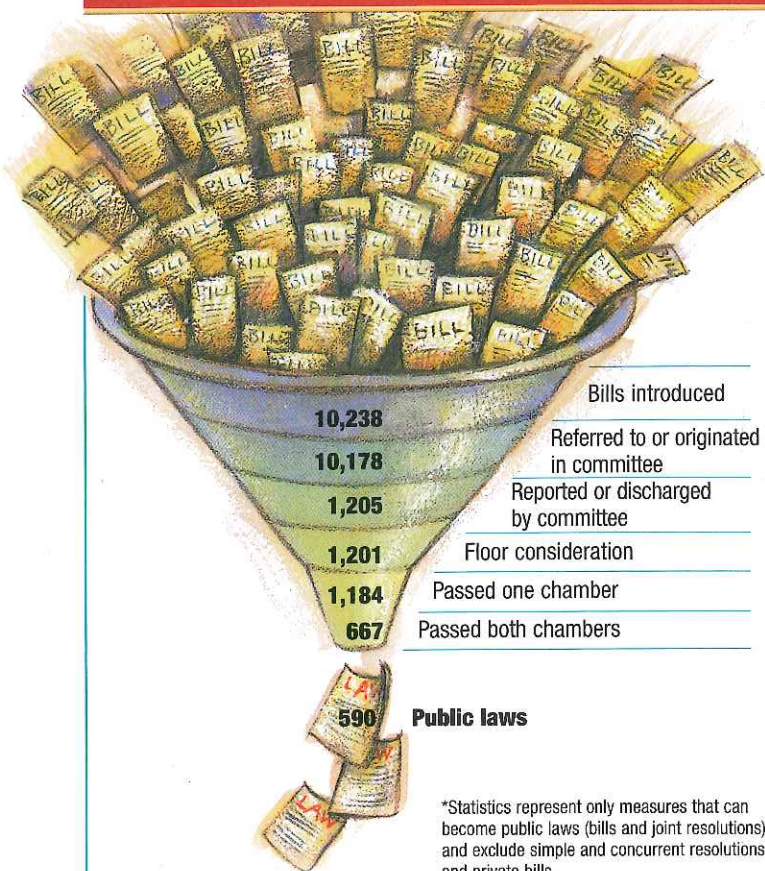


## The Number of Bills that Become Laws\*



SOURCE: Ilona B. Nickels, Congressional Research Service, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C. Figures are for the 102nd Congress.

**Interpreting Charts** This chart illustrates the many stages through which a bill must pass before it becomes a law. **After which step do most bills “die”?**

and contemptible.” The Senate passed the Cloture Rule at its next session, later that same year.

Rule XXII provides for **cloture**, or limiting debate. The rule is not in regular, continuing force; it can be brought into play only by a special procedure. A vote to invoke the rule must be taken two days after a petition calling for that action has been submitted by at least 16 members of the Senate. If at least 60 senators—three fifths of the full Senate—then vote for the motion, the rule becomes effective. From that point, no more than another 30 hours of floor time may be spent on the measure. Then it *must* be brought to a final vote.

Invoking the rule is no easy matter. So far, more than 400 attempts have been made to invoke the rule, and only about one third have succeeded. Many senators hesitate to support cloture motions for two reasons: (1) their

dedication to the Senate’s tradition of free debate, and (2) their practical worry that the frequent use of cloture will undercut the value of the filibuster that they may some day want to use.

## Conference Committees

If you have ever watched a marathon, you know that no matter how well a runner covers the first 25 miles or so, he or she still has some distance to go in order to finish the race. So it is for bills in the legislative process. Even those that survive the long route through committees and rules and the floor in both houses still face some important steps before they can finally become law. Some of those final steps can be very difficult.

Any measure enacted by Congress *must* have been passed by both houses in identical form. Most often, a bill passed by one house and then approved by the other is not amended in the second chamber. When the House and Senate do pass different versions of the same bill, the first house usually concurs in the other’s amendments, and congressional action is completed.

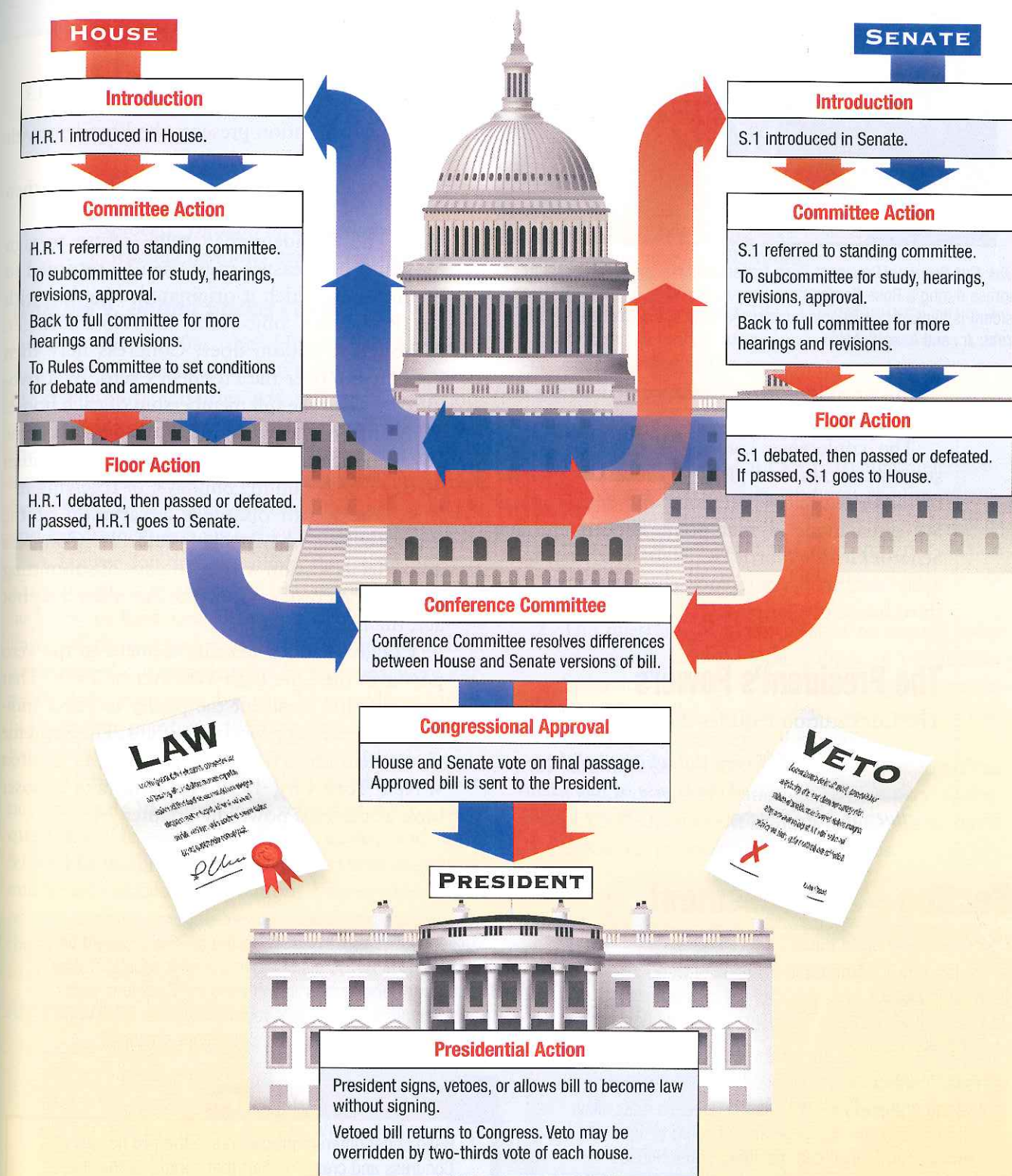
There are times when the House or the Senate will not accept the other’s version of a bill. When this happens, the measure is turned over to a conference committee, a temporary joint committee of the two houses. It seeks to iron out the differences and come up with a compromise bill.

The conferees, or managers, are named by the respective presiding officers. Mostly, they are leading members of the standing committee that first handled the measure in each house.

Both the House and Senate rules restrict a conference committee to the consideration of those points in a bill on which the two houses disagree. The committee cannot include any new material in its compromise version. In practice, however, the conferees often make changes that were not even considered in either house.

Once the conferees agree, their report, the compromise bill, is submitted to both houses. It must be accepted or rejected without amendment. Only rarely does either house turn down a conference committee’s work. This is not surprising, for two major reasons: (1) the powerful membership of the typical conference committee, and (2) the fact that its report usually comes in

## How a Bill Becomes a Law



**Interpreting Charts** A typical bill may be introduced in either house. It must be passed by each house before going to the President. **In what way does the process of moving a bill through the House differ from the process in the Senate?**