



## **THE FEDERAL LEGISLATIVE PROCESS**

**A Lesson Plan  
developed for  
Teachers of Agriculture**

***This lesson plan is designed to assist teachers in guiding the learning process in students as they learn more about the procedure followed in the enactment of new laws. As with any lesson materials that are not prepared by the teacher who uses them, this lesson plan serves only as a guide. Teachers must adapt, supplement, and/or alter this suggested plan according to their expertise and to the local needs, interests, and expected outcomes of the students who are in that classroom. Only in this way will the instruction given meet the needs of the students, school, community, and state in which the students live and the teacher works.***

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## THE FEDERAL LEGISLATIVE PROCESS

**Lesson Title:** The Farm Bill, How a Bill becomes Federal Law

**Terminal Objective:** To examine the process the Federal Government follows in passing new laws

**Enabling Objectives:** Given a lesson on the procedures that are followed by the U.S. Government in passing new laws, the students will be able to:

1. define relevant terminology used by Congress in passing a new law;
2. distinguish between the two chambers of Congress, the House of Representatives and the Senate;
3. name the elected officials from their areas who are the Representatives and Senators;
4. diagram the process that is followed for a new bill to become law;
5. track the current status of any bill;
6. describe the Farm Bill in general terms; and
7. participate as a responsible citizen when public policy is being formed.

The teacher is encouraged to add his/her own enabling objectives that would take into account local situations or the need to add additional content information not provided within this lesson outline.

### References, Equipment, Instructional Aids, and Selected Web Sites:

**NOTE:** *A teacher should use professional judgment in the selection and use of web sites. Web sites change over time and thus, the relevancy and accuracy of information contained on these sites will change as new information related to the passage of new bills evolves.*

Attend local meetings of policy makers (school boards, town/city councils, boards of supervisors)

Invite local, state, or national elected officials to attend class to speak on the law making process

Review local newspapers for articles on current state or national legislative bills under discussion

<http://bensguide.gpo.gov/9-12/lawmaking/index.html> - A guide to understanding the U.S. Government

<http://www.gpoaccess.gov/cdirectory/index.html> -The current directory of the U.S. Congress

<http://www.ers.usda.gov/Features/FarmBill/> - Highlights of the Farm Security and Rural Investment Act of 2002.

[http://frwebgate.access.gpo.gov/cgi-bin/BillBrowse.cgi?dbname=108\\_cong\\_bills&wrapperTemplate=BillBrowse\\_wrapper.html&billtype=hr](http://frwebgate.access.gpo.gov/cgi-bin/BillBrowse.cgi?dbname=108_cong_bills&wrapperTemplate=BillBrowse_wrapper.html&billtype=hr) – Location for tracking current bills in the House of Representatives

[http://frwebgate.access.gpo.gov/cgi-bin/BillBrowse.cgi?dbname=108\\_cong\\_bills&wrapperTemplate=BillBrowse\\_wrapper.html&billtype=s](http://frwebgate.access.gpo.gov/cgi-bin/BillBrowse.cgi?dbname=108_cong_bills&wrapperTemplate=BillBrowse_wrapper.html&billtype=s) – Location for tracking current bills in the Senate

<http://agriculture.house.gov/inside/members.html> - Members of the Agricultural Committee in the House of Representatives

<http://www.whitehouse.gov/omb/budget/fy2004/summarytables.html> - Total U. S. Budget estimates for years 2003-2008

### Lesson Plan Color Code

**GREEN** – Suggestions to the teacher of teaching approaches, teaching techniques, instructional aids, or other ideas that the teacher might find helpful in teaching this lesson. Space is also adequate for teacher notes.

**BLUE** – Web sites that provide information, knowledge, or background that relate to the Enabling Objectives for the lesson. In some cases, the teacher can use the web sites to prepare for the lesson, in other cases; the students can go to the web sites for basic information or further reading.

**RED** – Questions a teacher can pose to the students or they can be used to guide the teaching process. Question numbers relate back to the Enabling Objectives found at the beginning of the lesson.

**Introduction:** The following ideas are possible suggestions for introducing this lesson topic.

1. Ask the students to attend a local meeting of government officials to observe the policy making procedures of the group. This group could be a town/city council, school board, board of supervisors, state law makers, or other appropriate boards. The students should note how policy was set or decisions were made by the group. A video tape (with permission) of the meeting could be made for the entire class to view the actions of the group, or in some areas, the meeting could be on a local, public service channel.
2. Write on the chalkboard, “What if no laws existed in our society or community?” What would it be like? Would this be a good idea?
3. Divide the class into the following group sizes: 1 student; 2 students; 3 students; 4 students; 5 students; 6 students; until all students are

assigned a group. Give the groups a problem or case study where a decision is to be made and after an appropriate length of time, **ask them to share how the decision was made.** Discuss what difficulty was experienced as the group sizes increased?

4. **Ask students to review local newspapers for articles reporting current discussions underway on laws and/or policies that are being considered and bring those to class.**

As a transition to the lesson, the teacher could briefly summarize or review how local and/or state governments are formed and operated, and how policy is set. Or a recent policy decision made by the local FFA Chapter could be reviewed and discussed. An emphasis should under gird the discussion on the democratic process used by the government or groups in our society and the responsible role of local citizens.

## TEACHING OUTLINE

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**Methods/hints/aids**  
**Teacher notes**

**Technical/subject matter content**

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**The teacher may choose several different approaches to this lesson. If all or most of the students have access to the Internet outside of school AND if they have some level of knowledge on how bills become law, then the teacher might one week before teaching this unit make the beginning assignment as a review. BUT if most students lack access to the Internet OR if they have a limited knowledge on how bills become law, then the teacher may wish to teach the content for Enabling Objectives 1-5 during regular class hours.**

**Assignment one week before this unit is taught. Students are to go to the following web site and be ready to answer the questions to achieve Enabling Objectives 1-5.**

**<http://bensguide.gpo.gov/9-12/lawmaking/index.html>**

**Discussion to verify understanding and ask them to report in class.**

**1. What is the meaning of the following words?**

**Bill** – an idea for a new law

**H.R #** – House of Representative bill followed by a number

**S #** - Senate bill followed by a number

**Hopper** – a figurative box where proposed bills are filed

**Bill sponsor** – the Representative or Senator that has the idea for a bill. A bill sponsored by more than one legislator is co-sponsored.

**Sub-committee** – a small sub-group of legislators in each chamber that discuss and vote on the merits of a bill introduced in that chamber

**Reporting it out** – when a bill is passed by the sub-committee and released to the full House or Senate for action

**Tabling** – when the sub-committee lays a bill aside and does not report it out

**Calendar** – a released bill is placed on a time schedule with other bills awaiting action by the full House or Senate.

**Act** – a bill approved by one or both chambers, but the term is usually reserved for when it is approved by both chambers

**Conference committee** – a sub-committee of members from both chambers whose job is to work out any differences in a bill that was previously approved by their respective chambers, but in a different version

**Enrolled bill** – A bill that has been approved by both chambers, sometimes after revisions are approved by the conference committee. The bill goes to the Speaker of the House and Vice President for signatures, before it goes to the President.

**Presidential veto** – The President has ten days to sign the bill, indicating

approval; or veto the bill, indicating disapproval

## **2. What is the U.S. House of Representatives and Senate and how do they differ?**

The U.S. Government is composed of **three separate branches**

This **structure prevents** any one person or groups from having absolute control of government

The **three branches** of Government are:

**The Executive Branch**, which gives executive power to the President

**The Judicial Branch**, which gives power to the Supreme Court

**The Legislative Branch**, which gives legislative powers to Congress

The **Legislative Branch** is composed of the **U.S. Congress**, made up of the **House of Representatives** and the **Senate**

**Members of the House are elected** for two-year terms and representation from each state is based on the number of congressional districts, with the size of the district based on the **population**. At least each state is guaranteed one representative.

The **Senate members** are elected for six-year terms and each state is represented by **two senators**, regardless of population size.

Assign students to check out the web site of the Congressional Directory

<http://www.gpoaccess.gov/cdirectory/index.html>

Diagram on the chalk board, flip chart, or through power point schematic flow the steps in passing a bill

3. Who are the U.S. Representatives and Senators representing the students' district/state?

4. What is the process that is followed to make a bill a new law?

a. Either chamber can **initiate** an idea (a bill) that is then given a number, e.g. H.R. 123 or S. 123

b. The bill is **assigned** to a sub-committee or standing committee with committee members who have interests or expertise in the area of the bill. That committee approves the bill, approves a revision of the bill, or lays it aside (tables).

c. If the bill is **released (approved)**, it is placed on a calendar for action by the full chamber

d. When a bill comes up for **vote**, it can be approved, approved with revision(s), or defeated. If it is approved, it goes to the other chamber of Congress

e. A member of the other chamber must be **willing to introduce** that bill in his/her chamber

f. The bill is **assigned** a standing or sub-committee in that chamber with members who have an interest or expertise in the area of the bill. The bill is approved, approved with revision(s), or tabled.

g. If the bill is **released (approved)**, the bill is placed on the floor for action

h. If the bill was approved, but is of a different version than the bill approved by the other chamber, it goes to a **conference committee** with representation of both chambers to work out the differences. Once approved by the conference committee, it is printed in its final version.

i. The bill then **goes to** the Speaker of the House and Vice-President for signatures, then to the President. The **President has ten days** to sign or veto the bill. If the bill is vetoed, it still can become law if **two-thirds** of the Senate and **two-thirds** of the House vote in favor of the bill.

### **5. How can a bill under consideration be tracked to determine the approval status of the bill?**

Any bill currently introduced in Congress **can be tracked** by going to several web sites. For bills introduced in the **House of Representatives**, go to:

[http://frwebgate.access.gpo.gov/cgi-bin/BillBrowse.cgi?dbname=108\\_cong\\_bills&wrapperTemplate=BillBrowse\\_wrapper.html&billtype=hr](http://frwebgate.access.gpo.gov/cgi-bin/BillBrowse.cgi?dbname=108_cong_bills&wrapperTemplate=BillBrowse_wrapper.html&billtype=hr)

For bills introduced in the **Senate**, go to:

[http://frwebgate.access.gpo.gov/cgi-bin/BillBrowse.cgi?dbname=108\\_cong\\_bills&wrapperTemplate=BillBrowse\\_wrapper.html&billtype=s](http://frwebgate.access.gpo.gov/cgi-bin/BillBrowse.cgi?dbname=108_cong_bills&wrapperTemplate=BillBrowse_wrapper.html&billtype=s)

At the **end** of each bill in **parentheses** is indication of the current status of that bill.

**Assign students to go to one of the web sites and locate a bill currently under consideration. Track the bill over a period of time to determine its status.**

**6a. What is the Farm Bill?**

<http://www.ers.usda.gov/Features/FarmBill/>

**NOTE:** The teacher may approach this part of the lesson from several alternatives. If the intent is to make students aware of the Farm Bill in the most general way, then one approach would be to cover the main points under Questions 6 a-g. If the teacher wants to cover the Bill in greater depth (all of the Bill or any one or more of the Titles), then students can be referred to the web site above, with special assignment(s) by the teacher, to focus on those Title(s) most relevant to the agricultural businesses in the community or to any other relevant issues affecting the local area.

**6b. What is the official name of the Farm Bill?**

**H.R. 2646** – Farm Security and Rural Investment Act of 2002

**6c. How many pages in length is the bill?**

421 pages

**6d. How many years does the Farm Bill cover?**

5 years, from 2002-2007

**6e. What are the ten titles (sections) of the Bill?**

- Title I** – Commodity Programs
- Title II** – Conservation Programs
- Title III** – Trade
- Title IV** – Nutrition Programs
- Title V** – Credit
- Title VI** – Rural Development
- Title VII** – Research
- Title VIII** – Forestry
- Title IX** – Energy
- Title X** – Miscellaneous

**6f. How many dollars are proposed for the 2004 Farm Bill?**

<http://www.ers.usda.gov/Features/FarmBill/>

\$74,000,000,000 (4 percent of the total U.S. Budget)

**6g. What is the total estimate for the U.S. Budget in 2004?**

<http://www.whitehouse.gov/omb/budget/fy2004/summarytables.html>

\$1,797,000,000,000

**6h. Who are the members of the agricultural committees in the House and Senate?**

**Students look up on the following web sites for the committee membership**

<http://agriculture.house.gov/inside/members.html>

<http://www.gpoaccess.gov/congress/senate/agriculture/index.html>

### **Summary**

1. Daily summaries are encouraged to refresh students of the content covered during those class periods.
2. In some cases, students could take the lead in reporting what they had learned from their Internet searches.
3. The class could also be set up for a mock congress, where two groups could draft a law(s) for their community, discuss its merits, and follow the U.S. Congress' procedure for approving it.

### **Plans for Application**

1. Depending on the time of year, students could be assigned to track the Farm Bill as to its current status. They should be encouraged to check out the USDA web site under the Farm Bill link.
2. If state or local legislative groups are in session, they could also be assigned to follow the current activities and decisions of these groups within their states.
3. The local FFA Chapter could also be used as an opportunity to demonstrate how decisions are made, how policies or rules are set for groups and organizations, and how groups carry out these decisions once they are made.

## **Evaluation**

1. Students should be evaluated on the Enabling Objectives for this unit.
2. Written quizzes/tests could be given on relevant terms and facts about the Farm Bill.
3. Students could be assigned to prepare a 2-3 page report on how bills become law.
4. Students could be asked to diagram the steps on how an idea becomes law.