Glossary of Terms

Act - A term for legislation once it's passed both chambers of the legislature and has been signed into law by the Chief Executive or has become law without a signature by virtue of specified time limits.

Administrative Assistant (AA) or Legislative Assistant (LA) - Key staff member(s) of legislators. In most instances, the AA serves as the key political advisor to the legislator and oversees all activities on critical pieces of legislation. The LA is responsible for coordinating the legislative activity of the legislator or legislative committee.

Amendment - A proposal to modify or delete the language in a pending bill or to change an existing law.

Appropriations Bill - Legislation granting funds for a specific program or agency. Appropriations bills generally originate in the House.

Author - Also called "sponsor" or "chief author". The official sponsoring the proposal. Bills may have many co-authors or co-sponsors.

Authorization Bill - Legislation that gives legal authority for the government to establish or continue a governmental program or agency.

Bill - Proposes new law or changes existing law, commonly designated at "HR" in the U.S. House of Representatives and "S" in the U.S. Senate. States use similar codes, such as House Bill (HB), House File (HF), or Assembly Bill (AB).

Private Bill – A bill that is introduced on behalf of a specific individual that if it is enacted into law only affects the specific person or organization the bill concerns. Often, private bills address immigration or naturalization issues.

Public Bill – A bill that affects the general public if enacted into law.

Calendar Wednesday - A procedure in the House during when standing committees can bring up for consideration any bill that has been reported on the floor on or before the previous day. The procedure limits debate on each subject to two hours.

Cloture - Process in the U.S. Senate to end a filibuster. Invoking a cloture requires a vote by 3/5 of the full Senate. If cloture is invoked further debate is limited to 30 hours, it not, a vote on the passage of a piece of legislation.

Conferee - A member of the House or the Senate who is appointed to serve on the Conference Committee.

Conference Committee - An ad hoc committee of members of the House and the Senate appointed to reconcile differences in bills that have passed both houses.

Executive Session - A non-public meeting of legislative committee.

Filibuster - Procedure in the U.S. Senate and in many state legislatures which allow a Senator to speak continuously on a particular issue. Extended debate.

Full Committee - Used to defer to a committee of either the House of Representatives or the Senate. A committee considers legislation within a particular policy area. Also called a standing committee or policy committee.

Hearing - A critical step in the legislative process. A formal review of legislation brought before a committee or subcommittee. During the proceedings, witnesses are called upon to submit both written and oral testimony on the policy and legislation under consideration. At the state level, there may be little or no advance announcement of the hearing schedule.

Law - An act that has been passed by both houses and signed by the Chief Executive – or that goes into effect automatically without a signature after a certain number of days.

Lobby - Term used to describe an individual's attempt to influence the legislative process through contact with the lawmaker.

Majority Leader - Chief spokesperson and strategist for the majority party in the chamber. This person also controls the agenda and directs the legislative process.

Majority Whip - Responsible for assisting the Majority Leader.

Mark-Up - Procedure in the committees and subcommittees whereby amendments to proposed Federal legislation are offered and considered after a hearing is held. State legislatures do not allow for this procedure.

Motion to Recommit - A motion that requests a bill be sent back to committee for further consideration. Normally, the motion is accompanied by instructions concerning what the committee should change in the legislation or general instructions such as that the committee should hold further hearings.

Motion to Table - A motion that is not debatable. It can be made by any Senator or Representative on any pending question. Agreement to the motion is equivalent to defeating the question tabled.

Override a Veto - A procedure that allows the disapproval of a bill by the President or Governor to be overridden by a specified vote in each chamber.

Quorum - The number of Representatives or Senators that must be present before business can begin. In the House 218 members must be present for a quorum. In the Senate 51 members be present, however, Senate can conduct daily business without a quorum unless it is challenged by a point of order.

Reported Out - Term used for action on a measure by a committee or subcommittee. The report indicates the body's action on the measure, such as amendments, vote for passage, vote to defeat, or event to take no action.

Rider - An informal term for an amendment or provision that is not relevant to the legislation to which it is attached.

Rule - A rule that establishes the guidelines that will be used to govern the consideration of the bill on the floor.

Sponsor - The original member who introduces a bill.

Co-Sponsor – A member or members that add his/her name formally in support of another member's bill. Co-sponsors are not required on a bill.

Subcommittee - A subgroup of the full or standing committee which has the responsibility of considering and reviewing legislation in a specialized area.

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