

Adventures of Bill

Teaching Guide

Office of the Secretary of State's Role-Play Tour of the Statehouse

Before you come to the Statehouse

- Read *The Adventures of Bill: A Real Life Adventure of How A Bill Becomes Law*.
- Review S.238, An Act To Increase The Legal Age For Purchase And Use Of Tobacco To 21
- Assign roles and discuss who each of you are in the process
- Brainstorm policy arguments for and against the bill
- Witnesses who will be testifying on the bill should decide whether they are in favor or against the bill
- Discuss possible amendments to the bill
- Discuss how this bill relates to the VT Constitution. (You can find a copy of the Constitution by going to www.sec.state.vt.us, click on Archives, then click on Constitution.)

The Stage

This role play begins after the bill has been introduced to the Senate.

History:

The bill S.238 was introduced by the Senator from Rutland, and then given first reading on the floor of the Senate. It was then assigned by the Lieutenant Governor to the Senate Health and Welfare Committee for consideration.

Before you begin, look at the bill:

Bill numbers. Bills are given numbers by the legislative counsel in the order they are drafted. This is the 238st Senate bill drafted during the two year legislative session, so it is called S.238. Once it is passed by the Senate and the House and signed by the Governor, the Secretary of State assigns it a new number called an "Act" number. Act 30 is the 30th bill signed into law during a particular legislative session.

Strike-through. When a bill “amends” (makes changes to) an existing law, the language that is being taken out is crossed out and the new language is underlined. ~~Like that.~~ Like this.

The Characters

Legislators	Witnesses	
Governor	Speaker of the House	Lt. Governor
Media reporters		

The legislator's job is to figure out if the bill addresses a real need and to understand how it will affect individuals and organizations in Vermont. The legislator must determine costs and make sure the bill fits with the Constitution.

The Role Play

The legislative process of bill to law

Testimony: In the Health and Welfare Committee

The **only time members of the public can officially participate in the process of making laws** is by testifying at a committee hearing. On really important bills legislators will go around the state and hold hearings so that many people can participate. On a bill like this one the committee might choose to move to one of the larger rooms in the building to hold their hearing so that more people could participate.

Q. What are some of the other unofficial ways people can participate in the legislative process?

A. Members of the public can call or e-mail their legislators about bills. They can write letters to the newspaper and can come to the legislature to speak to people in the halls.

For the purpose of this role play **we are acting out second reading in Chamber**, skipping third reading, and then voting on the bill. Between first and second reading legislators are lobbied by people who care about the bill and legislators often come to compromises that result in amendments.

Debate & Protocol: In the Chamber

Names: On the floor of the Chamber, legislators are usually not referred to by their names, but by the places they represent. “The Senator from Rutland District, or the House Member from Hardwick.”

Q. Why do you think legislators are not referred to by their names?

A. It is a reminder that legislators are not speaking and voting only for themselves: they are representing the interests of the people of their district.

Who speaks? In the Senate, only Senators and the Lieutenant Governor (and the secretary and his/her staff who help them) may be on the floor of the Senate. The Lieutenant governor is President of the Senate and is addressed as Mr. President or Madame President. These are the only people who may speak when the Senate is in session. A legislator may only speak when “recognized” (called on) by the Lieutenant Governor (or if he is absent, by the President Pro Tempore). The only time legislators hear from lobbyists and other people who are interested in a bill is during the hearing on the bill in committee or in the halls of the legislature. The same rules apply to the House of Representatives where the Speaker of the House presides.

Q. There are only a small number of legislators on the Health and Welfare Committee. How do you think the rest of the legislators (those who did not hear from witnesses in committee) learn about the Smoking Age bill before voting?

A. They learn about the bill during the debate on the floor, but before the debate they will have heard about the bill during their “caucus.” Democrats and Republicans each meet separately at least once a week to discuss the bills that are coming up for vote. During the Senate caucus the Democratic and Republican Senate leaders can encourage the Senators to vote as a block on the issues they care about. Legislators are also “buttonholed” by lobbyists in the hallway, in the cafeteria and during social events at the end of the day. Constituents may have also called them or written letters or e-mails about the issue.

Voting:

All votes are by voice vote (all in favor say “Aye”, then, all opposed say “Nay”) unless any legislator requests a division or a roll call vote. Today, you won’t have time for roll call votes as the bill must move on to the Governor’s action. When a division is called for, members in favor stand and are counted; then members opposed stand and are counted.

Crossover: In the House

If S.238 is passed by the Senate, the bill is sent to the House, given first reading, and is then sent(by the Speaker of the House) to the House Health Care Committee. If your group is large, some of your students will participate in this role play as legislators in the House of Representatives.

Q. There are so many more legislators in the House than in the Senate. Does this mean that House members are less powerful than Senators? Why do you think there are a small chamber and a larger chamber-why not just one?

A. Because there are so many more House members than Senators each individual House member may have less opportunity to influence legislation, but as a body **each chamber is co-equal**. Vermont changed from a unicameral (single house) legislature where every town had one representative no matter how large or small, to a bi-cameral (two chamber) legislature in 1836. The Senate represents regional interests and the House represents more local interests. Each Senator represents about 20,000 people and each House member represents about 4,000 people.

Notice how much more comfortable the chairs are in the Senate and how much larger the room is. The Speaker of the House controls the on/off buttons on the microphones. This gives him or her yet another way to control the debate in the House

Conference Committee: .If the bill passed by the House is in any way different than the bill passed by the Senate (perhaps it was amended by the committee or on the floor), then a Conference Committee is appointed to try to come up with a compromise that members of both the House and Senate can agree upon. When the Conference Committee comes up with a compromise, the bill is sent back to both the House and the Senate for a final vote.

Q. Why do you think legislators compromise?

A. To get things accomplished in the legislature there must be compromise. Indeed, the **foundation of democracy is compromise**. The legislature is made up of people with a broad range of views about policy issues. Rather than physically fighting about their differences, legislators argue and debate until a compromise can be forged that, while ideal to none, all can live with.

For the purpose of this role play we are assuming the House and Senate versions of the bill are the same.

Executive Action: Governor

The Governor has several choices – he or she can sign the bill, he or she can veto the bill, or he or she can choose to let the bill become law by neither signing nor vetoing the bill within 5 days after receiving it. The bill then becomes law. This option is used when the Governor disagrees with some aspect of a bill, but doesn't feel it is politically wise to veto it, or believes that despite his or her objection to a part of the bill, the overall bill should be passed.

A bill can also be vetoed by a Governor if the he or she doesn't sign the bill within 3 days after presentation, if the General Assembly has adjourned the final biennial session. This is called a 'pocket veto'.

Checks & Balances

When the Governor vetoes a bill, he sends a statement back to the legislative leadership informing them of the veto. The legislature can then choose to have a vote to see whether they can override – or sustain the veto. **It takes a 2/3 vote to override the veto.**

Included in the packet is Governor Snelling's 1982 veto of the Bill H.248 proposing to raise the drinking age to 21.

Q. Do you think if Governor Snelling was Governor today he would veto S.238?

In an average legislative session (two years), about 1,000 bills are introduced. Generally less than 1/5 of those bills pass and become law.
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