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Janet Wilson

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How a Bill Becomes Law in Nebraska

This NebGuide looks at the steps necessary for a bill to become a law in Nebraska.

Janet Wilson, Extension Specialist (Consumer Education)

The legislative process sometimes seems to be clothed in an aura of mystery. An understanding of the organization of the governing body and the steps involved in the introduction and passage of a bill should help remove some of the mystery.

A bill is an idea for a new law, or an idea to abolish or change an existing law.

Several hundred bills, ideas about many things, enter the legislative process in Nebraska each time the legislature meets.

Nebraska is unique because it has had the only one-house, non-partisan legislature in the United States since 1937. This is called a Unicameral. There are 49 state senators who serve in the Nebraska Legislature. Each senator represents approximately 30,000 people and is elected to serve a four-year term by the people of his or her legislative district. Members of the Legislature are identified by no party label and run for office in their districts on their own merits and through an independent campaign. Your state senator works for you (the constituents), and will study, discuss and vote on bills for you.

Bills begin their legislative journey when they are introduced into the legislature by the sponsor (one of the senators), but before they can become law, bills must have a public committee hearing and be debated by all members of the Unicameral on the Floor of the Legislature. After passage by the Legislature the bill is sent to the governor for his signature. In some special instances a bill may become law without the governor's signature.

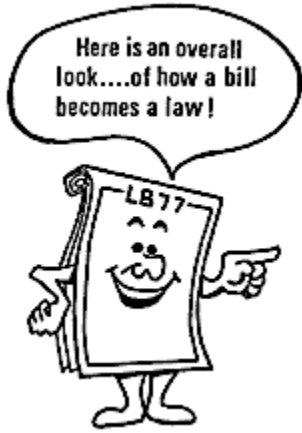
In a way it is a circle--an idea from people becomes law for people.

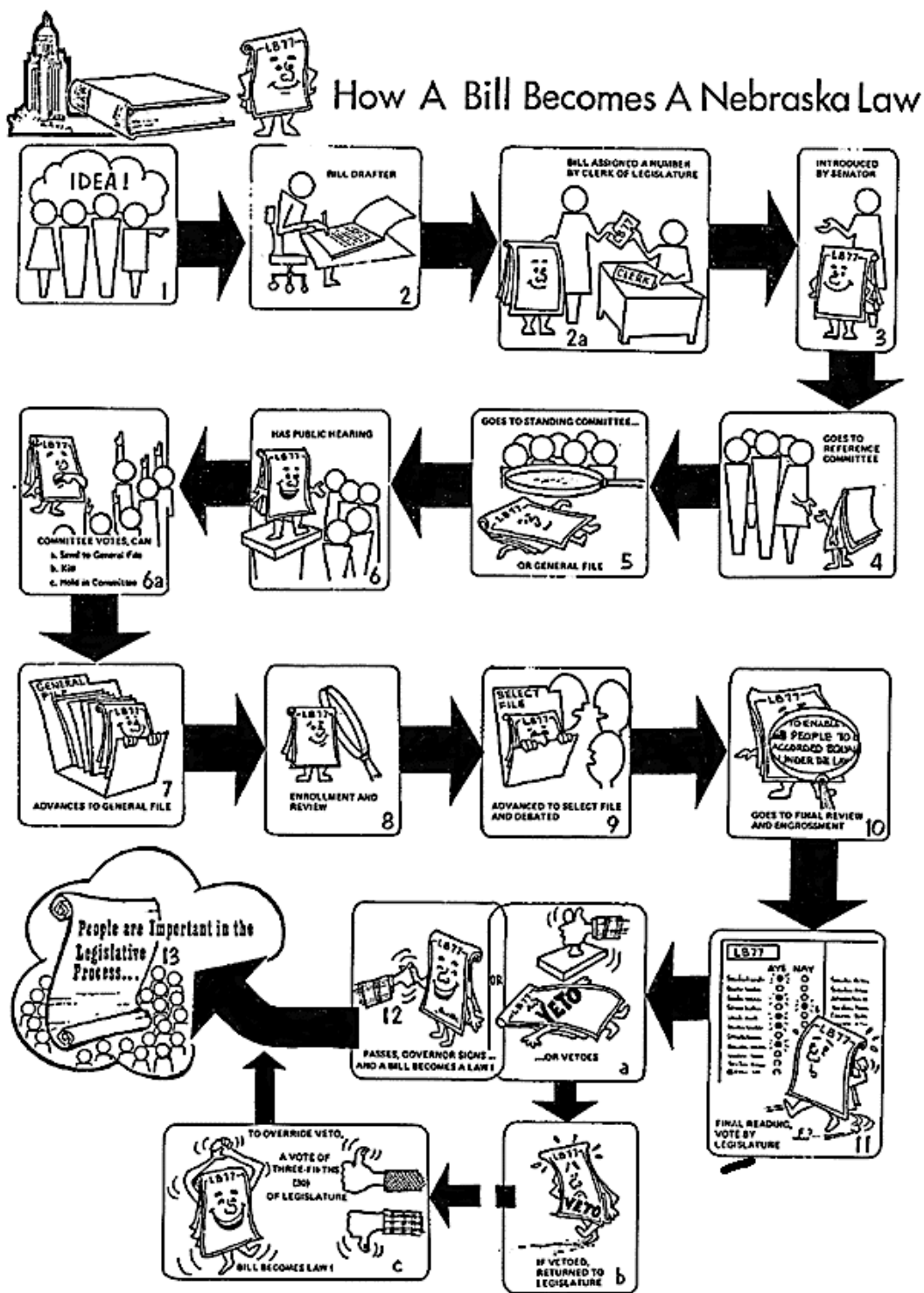
1. **The Idea** Anyone can propose an idea for a bill to his or her senator--a private citizen, consumer group, corporation, lobbyist, association, the governor, or the legislator on his/her own initiative.
2. **The Bill Drafter** The primary sponsor (senator) submits the bill or amendments to the Bill Drafter who puts the bill into proper legal form. Each bill contains only one subject. The completed form is given a number by the Clerk of the Legislature in the order he receives them from the individual senators.

3. **Introduction** The bill is read by title at the time of introduction when the Legislature is in session.
4. **Reference Committee** It is then sent to the Reference Committee. The Reference Committee is composed of the nine members of the Executive Board.
5. **Standing Committees** The Reference Committee refers all bills to a standing committee. The Clerk's office prints the bill after it has been referred to a committee and copies are furnished to senators and to the public.
6. **Public Hearings** Public hearings are held before the bill is sent to General File. The Committee sets all bills for afternoon hearings. A seven-day notice is given in advance of public hearing, except for hearings during the first 20 legislative days, which require only five days' notice.
7. **General File** If passed by a majority of the standing committee members, the bill is placed on the legislative calendar on General File, which is a daily list of bills ready for consideration of all 49 senators. The Clerk of the Legislature reads the number, title and introducer of the bill as it comes up for consideration on General File. The bill is read section by section if requested by a senator. Amendments to the bill by the standing committee and by the sponsor are considered and the bill is debated. Each section is open to amendment. A fiscal note is prepared for each bill which the Legislative Fiscal Analyst determines could have a financial impact of more than \$5,000. No bill with such fiscal impact can be considered by a committee or on General File until a fiscal note is attached. If amendments are adopted which change the fiscal impact, a fiscal note is prepared showing revised estimates of costs.
8. **Enrollment and Review** If a bill passes the majority vote of elected members (25), it is advanced to Enrollment and Review (E and R) where it is reviewed for proper form.
9. **Select File** After a bill is reviewed by E and R it may be advanced to Select File where changes made by E and R are approved or rejected. The bill is again debated on Select File and may be amended, referred back to committee, indefinitely postponed or advanced to E and R Engrossment. A motion to adopt an amendment requires a majority vote of the elected members (25).
10. **Engrossment** After a bill has been debated or amended and advanced to Engrossment, it is put in proper form for Final Reading.
11. **Final Reading** Copies are printed, placed on the members' desks and made available to the public. The engrossed bill is ready for Final Reading. Two legislative days must pass between engrossment and the final vote on passage of the bill. Each bill is read aloud to all 49 senators before a vote is taken. A bill needs a majority vote of elected members to be adopted.
12. **The Governor** The governor has five days, excluding Sunday, to return a bill to the Legislature without his signature and with his objections, (commonly known as a veto). After five days, with a vote of three-fifths (30) of the elected members, the bill becomes law over his veto. When the governor signs a bill into law the signed copy is delivered to the Secretary of State where it is permanently filed. A bill containing an emergency clause must pass a two-thirds vote (33) of the elected members and becomes effective immediately after being signed by the governor. A bill not containing the emergency clause becomes effective three calendar months after the Legislature adjourns.

13. **People** You play an important part in the legislative process. You may write your state senator c/o State Capitol, Lincoln, Nebraska 68509, to express your support or opposition to any bill before the Legislature. Your senator votes for you, the people he or she represents.

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