



Preparing for the Bernard and Audre Rapoport *L'Taken* Social Justice Seminar

Introduction to the Legislative Process

60 minutes, 90 minutes

GOALS:

- Help *L'Taken* participants who have not taken an American Government class understand the legislative process and clarify the system for participants who have already learned about the process.
- Show all *L'Taken* participants the importance of advocacy, how they can make a difference in the legislative process, and how they can make their voice heard (by showing the importance of their issue for themselves, their community, and other groups).

SUPPLIES:

Program Part I:

- “I’m Just a Bill” Video: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tyeJ55o3EI0>
- Computer, speakers, and a display to show the “I’m Just A Bill” Video
- Pens
- 3 Branches of Federal Government Infographic (Appendix A)
- Legislative Process Chart Handout (Appendix B)
- Federal Government Bingo Boards (Appendix C) and Answer Sheet (Appendix D)

Program Part II:

- Papers that say “Strongly Agree” and “Strongly Disagree” to put on each side of the tape line
 - (You can also put “Agree,” “Disagree,” and “Neutral” sign across the spectrum to provide the students with a range)
- Tape (for signs and to place a spectrum across the room)
- Pens
- Legislative Process Chart Handout (Appendix B)
- Bill Proposal Sheet for each group (Appendix E)
- Large paper/white board and markers

TIME SCHEDULE:

Program Part I:

- 0:00-0:05 “I’m Just a Bill” Video
- 0:05-0:30 Discussion of Video/Lesson on American Government
- 0:30-0:40 Bingo
- 0:40-1:00 Discussion/Conclusion

Program Part II:

- 0:00-0:20 Interactive Questions Game
- 0:20-0:40 Bill Proposal Worksheet
- 0:40-1:15 Bill Proposal Simulation
- 1:15-1:30 Discussion/Conclusion

PROCEDURE:

Program Part I:

0:00-0:05 “I’m Just a Bill” [Video](#)

Introduction to the video: To give us an introduction to the legislative process and a better understanding of how the system works, we are going to watch a classic video about how a bill becomes a law.

0:05-0:30 Discussion of Video/Lesson on American Government

Discussion:

- What are some key points that were made in the video?
- Was there anything you didn’t understand?
- What surprised you about the process a bill becomes a law?

Draw out together how a bill becomes a law on a whiteboard or large piece of paper in the front of the room (keep this process interactive and see how much the students know before giving them hints or the answer).

Steps for a bill to become a law:

1. **IDEA:** Anyone thinks of an idea which they introduce to their Representative or Senator. The member then writes legislation about the idea known as a “bill.”
2. **INTRODUCTION:** The Member of Congress introduces the bill in the House or Senate.
3. **COMMITTEE:** The bill is sent to the appropriate committee that focuses on issues that the bill covers--the members of the committee discuss, amend, and vote on whether to send the bill to the floor. a. If the bill is rejected, it dies in committee.
4. **FLOOR DEBATE, DISCUSSION, AND VOTE:** If the committee votes to send the bill to the floor, the entire House of Representatives or the entire Senate (depending on the chamber the bill is in) discuss, debate, add amendments to, and vote on the bill.
 - a. In the Senate, a Senator can slow down the discussion by using a filibuster (a prolonged speech that obstructs a bill’s progress). To stop a filibuster, $\frac{2}{3}$ (super-majority) of the Senate need to vote to end it.
 - b. Need a majority vote (51/100 votes in the Senate; 218/435 votes in the House) to pass a bill.
 - c. Conference Committee: the House and the Senate must resolve disagreements on the similar bill and create an identical bill for Congress to vote on to send to the President.
5. **PRESIDENT:** The President can either sign on to the bill so that the bill becomes a law OR the president can veto the bill.
6. **Veto:** If the president vetoes the bill, it is sent back to Congress. In order to turn the bill into a law, both chambers of Congress must pass the bill with a $\frac{2}{3}$ super-majority (66/100 votes in the Senate; 290/435 votes in the House).

Afterwards, hand out the Federal Government Infographic (Appendix A) and Legislative Process Chart Handout (Appendix B). Encourage them to bring both sheets to *L’Taken!*



Key terms to discuss:

- Articles of Confederation failed → Constitution (ratified 1788)
- Separation of Powers: 3 branches of government → Checks and Balances
 - Legislative Branch: Congress (2 chambers)
 - Lower House: House of Representatives (435 members determined by proportional representation)
 - Upper House: Senate (100 members--each state has 2 Senators)
 - Executive Branch: President, cabinet and agencies/departments
 - Judicial Branch: system of judges that interpret the laws that Congress passes, with the Supreme Court as the final decider (9 justices appointed for life who determine the constitutionality of legislation and actions)
- Electoral College: 538 votes
 - Each state receives the number of electors based on the number of representatives they have in the House and the Senate.
 - Washington D.C. receives 3 electoral votes although they have no Senators in Congress (brings electoral votes that represent the states from 535 to 538).

0:30-0:40 Bingo

Directions

Have each student answer the questions individually on the worksheet to achieve “bingo” (5 in a row diagonally, horizontally, or vertically). You can use the Federal Government Infographic and Legislative Process Chart for help.

Bingo cards can be found in Appendix C, and answers in Appendix D.

0:40-1:00 Discussion/Conclusion

Go over the answers to the entire Bingo board. Have the students answer the questions; if no one knows the answers, try to give them hints before answering it.

Discussion Questions/Wrap-Up:

In a couple of words, how would you describe the federal government? (examples could include adjectives such as complicated, complex, challenging)

After learning about how congress works, did your previous impressions or thinking about congress change? How do you feel constituents fit into the whole legislative process?





Program Part II:

0:00-0:20 Interactive Questions Game

Directions

I am going to read some statements and you will choose a spot to stand on the spectrum based on your opinion. One side of the room represents absolute, total disagreement, while the other side of the room represents absolute, total agreement. You can place yourself on either spectrum or anywhere in between based on your opinion. Please make your decisions on where to stand based on your own opinions and not your friends' opinions.

We may stop after some statements to discuss why you chose where to stand. If your opinion changes about a statement, you are welcome to move spots. (Encourage back and forth, while emphasizing the importance of a respectful and safe space. After that hopefully lively discussion, give the participants the opportunity to re-evaluate where they stand. If someone moves, ask them why.)

Statements:

- I am educated about current policy and news.
 - What are your news sources? Is the news easily accessible to you?
 - What is your interest level in staying informed on the news?
- “And God created man in God’s own image, in the image of God, God created them.” (Genesis 1:27)
- My Jewish identity and Jewish beliefs influence my perspective on different social justice issues.
 - Why did you choose to stand where you are?
 - If you agree, how so? If you disagree, why not?
- “You shall not stand idly by while your neighbor bleeds.” (Leviticus 19:16)
 - What do you think this text is saying?
 - How does this text inform your life or how can you incorporate it into your life and the lives of those around you?
- It is easy to create new laws in the United States.
- Members of Congress need to compromise with their colleagues in order to create effective legislation.
 - Why or why not?
- “Do justly, love mercy, walk humbly with your God.” (Micah 6:8)
 - How do these three statements connect?
 - What does this text mean to you? How does this text inform your life?
 - How can this text be viewed as a social justice text?
- My Members of Congress represent my beliefs when voting on legislation.
- Members of congress should always put their constituents' beliefs and opinions before their own.
- Members of Congress should only vote based on the opinions of their direct constituents.
- “Is not this the fast that I have chosen?...to let the oppressed go free,...Is it not to deal thy bread to the hungry, And that thou bring the poor that are cast out to thy house? When thou seest the naked, that thou cover him...?” (Isaiah 58:6-7)
 - Can you describe this quote in your own words?
 - Do you think this is an important idea? Why or why not?
- I have a say in the legislative process.
- “Justice, justice you shall pursue.” (Deuteronomy 16:20)

Discussion Questions (for after reading the statements):

- Was there anything that stuck out to you while you were participating in that activity?
- How might these statements relate to our participation in L'Taken and social justice?
- What can we do during L'Taken to make a difference?

0:20-0:40 Bill Proposal Worksheet

Directions

Everyone has different ideas about how to make our country a better place. In groups of 3-5 (try to have no more than 5 groups depending on the size of the entire class), come up with three ideas for bill proposals that you believe would make your community at home, at school, at temple or the United States a better place to live, if these ideas became laws. Each group will then choose their top bill idea to share with the class.

Bill Proposal Worksheets can be found in Appendix E

0:40-0:45 Bill Proposal Presentations

Each group will have 1 minute to present their number one bill idea to share with the rest of the group.

0:45-1:00 Advocacy Sessions

The facilitator will pick one bill proposal to carry through the rest of this activity. Each group will be assigned a position either for or against the bill. The Facilitator will pretend to be a Member of Congress, and each group will have 3 minutes to advocate their position to the congressperson, trying to influence the position. Each group will get about 5 minutes to prepare. All ideas presented for and against will be written on a large piece of paper.

1:00-1:15 Mock Congress

After the advocacy sessions are complete, students will then assume the role of Members of Congress. Stress to them that they do not have to represent the position they took as an advocate. Students are encouraged to debate and amend the proposal for 10 minutes. At the end of the debate, students will vote on whether or not to enact this bill into law.

1:15-1:30 Discussion/Conclusion

Discussion Questions

- How do different opinions complicate the process? Did you feel as though you had to compete for your issues to be heard? How did you make your issue and ideas stand out among the rest? (Encourage the students to talk about how there are many different issues that several communities care about and how you need to show why your issue matters for everyone.)
- How did it feel to be an advocate? Do you think your advocacy made a difference? ☐ Did you ever feel frustrated having to compromise on your original bill idea?
- Each year, hundreds of bills are proposed but only a select few ever make it into law, similar to how we had many ideas but only voted on one bill. What is the impact of this? Do you think this is a good thing? What would happen if we tried to vote on every bill idea?



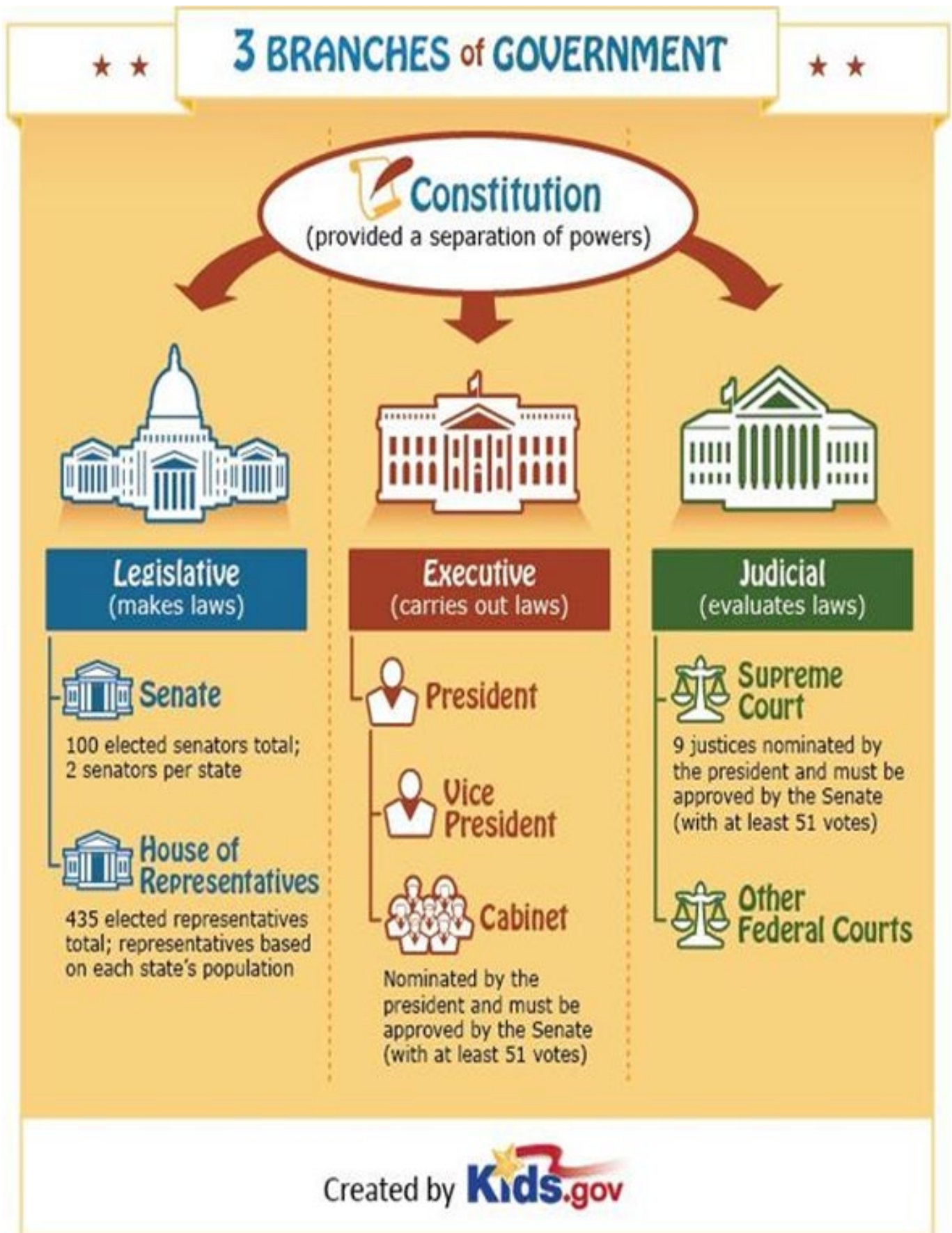
- How do you think the activity we just did might mirror what happens in Congress? How does it affect you, others in your community and other communities in general? How do you think you can have a voice in this process in Congress?

Final Statement to end the program

“Let me leave you with one final thought: Members of Congress are elected to their positions by their constituents. They want to hear from their constituents, but they have a lot of people to hear from. Share your issues with your members of congress and explain to them why these issues matter to you, your community, and surrounding communities. You never know what argument might be the turning point for your representatives.”



Appendix A



Appendix B

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THE US LEGISLATIVE PROCESS



SENATE

HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

IT STARTS WITH AN IDEA...



A BILL IS INTRODUCED BY A MEMBER OF THE SENATE AND ASSIGNED TO A COMMITTEE FOR REVIEW.

A BILL IS INTRODUCED BY A MEMBER OF THE HOUSE AND ASSIGNED TO A COMMITTEE FOR REVIEW.

BILLS MUST PASS THROUGH BOTH CHAMBERS BEFORE BEING SENT TO THE PRESIDENT.

THE COMMITTEE MEETS TO DISCUSS, AMEND, AND VOTE ON THE BILL.

THE COMMITTEE MEETS TO DISCUSS, AMEND, AND VOTE ON THE BILL.



A CONFERENCE COMMITTEE, MADE OF MEMBERS OF BOTH CHAMBERS, MEETS TO RESOLVE ANY DIFFERENCES BETWEEN THE HOUSE AND SENATE VERSIONS OF THE BILL.

IF APPROVED, BILL PROCEEDS TO THE FULL SENATE FOR FURTHER DISCUSSION, AMENDMENTS, AND VOTING.

IF APPROVED, BILL PROCEEDS TO THE FULL HOUSE FOR FURTHER DISCUSSION, AMENDMENTS, AND VOTING.



BOTH CHAMBERS VOTE ON FINAL BILL



PRESIDENT SIGNS THE BILL AND IT BECOMES A LAW.



THE VETO CAN BE OVERRIDDEN BY CONGRESS WITH A 2/3 VOTE.

PRESIDENT VETOES THE BILL AND SENDS IT BACK TO CONGRESS.



FEDERAL GOVERNMENT BINGO! (Appendix C)

After Congress passes a bill, the president can either _____ or _____ the bill.	_____ Number of Justices on the Supreme Court	What are the 2 houses of Congress called?	The Vice President of the United States is also the _____ of the Senate.	How long does a Justice serve on the Supreme Court?
How many votes does a presidential candidate need from the electoral college to win the election? (Bonus: what is the size of the electoral college?)	True or False: Bills remain indefinitely under consideration by Congress until they pass or fail.	The president can issue an _____ which has the full force of law rather than wait for Congress to pass a law.	Name the three branches of government: 1) 2) 3)	It requires a majority of this (_____) amount of voting members in both the House and Senate to override a veto.
_____ Number of members in the House of Representatives.	Each Congress lasts _____ years.	FREEDOM	True or False: All bills in Congress must be introduced by both a Republican and a Democrat.	True or False: The President is the U.S.' Commander-in- Chief.
What is the purpose of having three branches of government?	The Declaration of Independence was signed on: _____	True or False: The President nominates a Supreme Court justice and this nomination must be confirmed by Congress	What is the length of the president's term?	Top member of the majority party in the House is called the _____
How many terms can a president serve?	True or False: All bills must originate in the Senate.	How many terms can members of the House and Senate hold?	In the Senate, this tactic is often used to "kill" legislation _____	_____ Number of Senators

Bingo Answer Key (Appendix D)

After Congress passes a bill, the president can either <u>sign</u> or <u>veto</u> the bill.	<u>9</u> Number of Justices on the Supreme Court	What are the 2 houses of Congress called? The Senate & House of Representatives	The Vice President of the United States is also the <u>President</u> of the Senate.	How long does a Justice serve on the Supreme Court? Until death or retirement
How many votes does a presidential candidate need from the electoral college to win the election? (Bonus: what is the size of the electoral college?) 270 (538 total)	True or False: Bills remain indefinitely under consideration by Congress until they pass or fail. (True)	The president can issue an <u>executive order</u> which has the full force of law rather than wait for Congress to pass a law.	Name the three branches of government: 1) legislative 2) executive 3) judicial	It requires a majority of this (<u>2/3</u>) amount of voting members in both the House and Senate to override a veto.
<u>435</u> Number of members in the House of Representatives.	Each Congress lasts <u>2</u> years.	FREEDOM	True or False: All bills in Congress must be introduced by both a Republican and a Democrat. (false)	True or False: The President is the U.S.' Commander-in-Chief. (True)
What is the purpose of having three branches of government? Checks and balances	The Declaration of Independence was signed on: <u>July 4, 1776</u>	True or False: The President nominates a Supreme Court justice and this nomination must be confirmed by Congress (True)	What is the length of the president's term? 4 years	Top member of the majority party in the House is called the <u>Speaker</u> of the House
How many terms can a president serve? 2	True or False: All bills must originate in the Senate. (False)	How many terms can members of the House and Senate hold? Unlimited	In the Senate, this tactic is often used to "kill" legislation <u>filibuster</u>	<u>100</u> Number of Senators



Appendix E

Bill Proposal Worksheet

Group Name _____

Directions: Everyone has different ideas about how to make our country a better place. In groups of 35, come up with three ideas for proposals of a bill that you believe would make your community at home, at school, or at temple or the United States a better place to live. Each group will then choose their top bill idea to share with the class.

Examples of Jewish Values:

- *Kavod* (Honor/Respect)
- *Chesed* (Kindness)
- *Tzedakah* (Generosity)
- *Tikkun Middot* (Character)
- *Kehillah* (Community)
- Shabbat Values

Example:

- Proposal: Schools must allow students, faculty, and staff to wear kippot if it is their religious belief.
- Jewish Value: *Kavod* (Honor/Respect)
- Benefits: All students, faculty and staff feel comfortable and safe practicing their religious beliefs at school.

LAW #1		
Proposal:	Jewish Value(s):	Benefit(s):



LAW #2		
Proposal:	Jewish Value(s):	Benefit(s):

LAW #3		
Proposal:	Jewish Value(s):	Benefit(s):

Of the three proposals, rate which one would be the most important for you to present in the Legislature.

1st _____

2nd _____

3rd _____