



# SENATE OF CANADA

## FACT SHEET

### The Senate and Legislation

The Parliament of Canada examines legislation in a wide variety of areas in the form of bills. There are two types of bills:

- **Public bills**, which deal with public policy; and
- **Private bills**, which convey special rights or powers on a particular individual or a specific group.

Most bills considered by Parliament are public bills.

While bills can be introduced either in the Senate (in which case their number is preceded by the letter S) or in the House of Commons (in which case their number is preceded by the letter C), the Senate cannot initiate money bills (i.e. bills imposing taxes or providing for the collection or spending of public money).

Bills can be introduced by either the Government (i.e. a Cabinet minister) or by private members (i.e. either a senator or a member of the House of Commons).

All bills must be considered and passed by both the Senate and the House of Commons before receiving Royal Assent from the Governor General, the final step in a bill's passage into law. If the Senate and the House of Commons do not agree on the contents of a bill, amendments may be proposed until agreement is reached.

### Passing Bills in the Senate

Passing bills in the Senate is similar to passing them in the House of Commons. There are five steps:

**1. First reading**

The bill is received, printed and circulated. This is an introductory proceeding without debate or vote.

**2. Second reading**

The principle of the bill is debated: Is the bill good policy?

**3. Committee stage**

Ministers, department officials, experts and members of the public who have an interest in the bill appear as witnesses before a Senate committee. Committee members then study the bill clause by clause. Amendments or changes to the bill may be proposed. In the final stage, the committee adopts a report on the bill, recommending to the Senate that it be accepted as is; that it be accepted with amendments; or that it be rejected.

#### **4. Report stage**

If the committee report recommends adopting the bill as is (i.e., with no amendments), there is no report stage in the Senate and the bill goes directly to third reading.

If, however, the report recommends amendments, the Senate must debate the report and either accept, amend or reject the amendments, in whole or in part.

#### **5. Third reading**

Final approval of the bill. Senators may propose further amendments at this stage.

If the bill originated in the Senate, it is sent to the House of Commons, which will examine it through a similar three-reading process. If the bill originated in the House of Commons and *was not* amended in the Senate, it is now ready for Royal Assent. If the bill originated in the Commons and *was* amended in the Senate, a message about the amendments is sent to the Commons to ask for their agreement. The Commons and the Senate must agree on the exact contents of a bill before Royal Assent can be granted, making it law.

