
❖ *Guide to the Minnesota Senate*

Welcome to the Minnesota Senate. Whether you are visiting the Capitol in person, watching live, gavel-to-gavel coverage of a committee or floor session, or simply reading about the legislative process, this Guide is designed to provide information to help you understand state government and participate in the democratic process.

Revised July 2009

This document can be made available in alternative formats.
To make a request, please call (voice) 651-296-0504 or toll free 1-888-234-1112;
or (TTY) 651-296-0250 or toll free 1-888-234-1216.

Branches and levels of government

In order to understand the role of the Minnesota Senate, it may be helpful to review basic government structure. Our democratic system of government is separated into different levels and branches. The three levels of government—federal, state and local—all function to meet separate responsibilities. Each level of government is made up of different branches, with each exercising its authority in order to serve the people of the community, state and nation.

The responsibilities of each branch of government are separated, and each branch of government is given some power over the others. This system of “checks and balances” insures that no single group can dominate the workings of government and that no one part of government can dominate another part of government.

The three principal branches of government are the legislative, the executive, and the judicial.

The legislative branch is responsible for the enactment and revision of laws. The United States Congress makes the laws at the national level, and the Minnesota Legislature is the lawmaking body at the state level. Both Congress and the Minnesota Legislature consist of two bodies: a Senate and a House of Representatives. This two-body system is referred to as a bicameral system.

The executive branch administers and executes the laws passed by the legislative branch. The President of the United States is the chief executive at the federal level, and the governor serves as the state’s chief executive. They are aided by the officials appointed to head the various agencies and departments and by the other officials elected to the executive branch. For example, the governor is assisted by the lieutenant governor, secretary of state, state auditor, attorney general, and the agency heads.

The judicial branch decides cases and controversies and insures that the interpretation of the law is in accordance with the U.S. and state constitutions. The federal and state court systems are the judicial branch for those two levels of government.

The United States Congress

Many citizens confuse the elected officials who represent them in the state legislature with those who work for them in the U.S. Congress. At the national level, every citizen is represented by three persons—two senators and one member of Congress. While every state has two senators, the total number of members of Congress representing each state varies in proportion to the state’s population. In Minnesota, eight members are elected to the U.S. House of Representatives. The U.S. Senate has 100 senators and the U.S. House of Representatives has 435 members. Their responsibility is to concentrate on issues of national interest, such as federal tax policies, immigration laws and national defense. They are your voice in Washington, D.C.

State legislatures

Citizens of every state also elect officials to represent them at the state level. Those elected to the state’s lawmaking body, referred to as legislators, work on state issues, such as funding the elementary and secondary education system, setting state tax policy, and funding state health or human service programs.

The legislatures’ size and structure vary among the different states. Nebraska’s Legislature is unicameral (one body) and all the rest are bicameral. In some states, the larger body is called the Assembly, rather than the House of Representatives.

Minnesota Legislature

Minnesota is divided into 67 Senate districts, each having a population of about 78,000 people. Each Senate district is divided into an “A” and “B” portion to designate the House of Representatives districts. The people of Minnesota elect one person from each of the Senate and House districts to serve in the Legislature. Therefore, 67 Senators and 134 Representatives compose the Minnesota Legislature. Senators usually serve four-year terms and

Representatives serve two-year terms. However, Senators elected in 2000 served for two years. This is because all members of the Legislature must stand for election after redistricting. Redistricting occurs after every federal census, conducted in years that end in 0, and means that new district boundaries must be drawn to reflect changes in population.

Local government

Local units of government also consist of different branches. The lawmaking bodies consist of city councils, county commissions, and township boards. The executive branch of government for a city is headed by the mayor. District courts make up the judicial branches of government at the local level.

County government

In Minnesota, citizens elect a county board of commissioners along with local officers, who may include a sheriff, auditor, treasurer, attorney, recorder and coroner. The county has authority for housing and redevelopment, planning and zoning, property tax assessments, tax levies, human services, and county road maintenance.

City government

The mayor is the city's chief executive officer and the city council makes up the legislative branch. Cities are responsible for police and fire protection, parks and recreation, public works and city streets. Cities also have redevelopment authority, such as handling industrial revenue bonds and tax increment financing. Some cities are also responsible for the operation of airports, hospitals, ambulance services, utilities, and liquor establishments.

Township government

Township residents elect a board of supervisors and township officers. These officials handle zoning and planning, public works, parks and cemeteries, hospitals, property tax levies, township roads, and elections.

Urban townships

Urban townships are granted the statutory powers of a city. However, urban townships do not have the power to operate utilities other than water or sewer; to establish municipal liquor stores; to create a civil service system; or to exercise certain redevelopment powers. The bonding authority of urban townships is also limited compared to that of a city. And, urban township citizens do not have to meet to vote on every major issue.

Special taxing districts

Special taxing districts are another entity of local government. These districts are established for specific purposes, such as a school district. Special taxing districts have power to tax, borrow, and spend in order to provide a particular service. Other special districts include watershed districts, conservation districts and regional development districts.

Having reviewed the various levels and branches of government, it becomes easier to place the Minnesota Senate in proper context. Thus, the Minnesota Senate is part of the legislative branch at the state level of government.

The Senate in action

The Minnesota Senate televises coverage of Senate floor sessions and committee hearings. To watch the coverage on television, tune in the Minnesota Channel, available statewide from your local Minnesota Public Television Station (check your local listings for channel locations).

To view the coverage online, go to www.senate.mn/media for live and archived video of floor sessions, committee hearings, press conferences, special events and Capitol Report, a weekly public affairs program.

Viewers at home are able to watch Senate proceedings, complete with all the action and drama, just as if they were seated in the Senate Gallery or in a committee hearing room. And, sometimes the action may seem chaotic. The following is intended as a viewer's guide to the legislative process. Whether you are visiting the capitol in person or watching on television, this guide will help you follow the action.

Senate Chamber and leadership

The Senate Chamber, restored in 1988 to reflect the one designed by architect Cass Gilbert in the late 1890s and completed in late 1904, retains the original ideal envisioned by Gilbert while accommodating the technological needs of the 21st century.

Every Senator has a desk in the chamber. Seats in the Senate are allotted, primarily through seniority, with members of each caucus seated together. Although it is common to hear members of each party speaking of being on one or the other "side of the aisle," in Minnesota, both caucuses spread across the full width of the chamber. Each desk has a microphone, computer hook-ups, voting buttons and a page button. The page button summons a page to perform an errand, such as distributing copies of an amendment.

Two electronic voting boards display information that indicate what business is under consideration. When a roll-call vote is taken, the voting boards list all of the Senators alphabetically, and either a green "Y" for yea or a red "N" for nay. A running tally of the yeas and nays are indicated under the Senators' names as is other pertinent information.

The Majority Leader is the leader of the caucus, or political party, that has the most members. The Majority Leader directs the business of the Senate and is considered the leader of the Senate. The Majority Leader guides each daily floor session through the formal agenda of the Senate. The Minority Leader is selected by the members of the minority party to be their spokesperson. The presiding officer is the President of the Senate. Members elect a Senator, usually a senior member of the majority caucus, to serve as the President of the Senate. In addition to presiding over floor sessions, the President of the Senate also makes the initial decision about referring bills to the appropriate committee for hearing.

The Senate Desk

When viewing a floor session of the Senate, either while watching gavel-to-gavel coverage at your home or office or in person from the Senate Gallery, you will notice that one of the most active areas in the chamber is the "Senate Desk." The Desk is a term used to describe both the large desk at the front of the chamber and the many activities conducted at the Desk centering around the actual enactment of legislation. The primary role of the Senate Desk staff is to insure that the Senate functions smoothly and conforms to Senate rules and the various laws that relate to the process of enacting legislation.

The President of the Senate, or a designee, presides over the Senate from the Senate Desk. Seated just below the president are the officers of the Senate. In addition to their duties at the Senate Desk, each staff person has administrative responsibilities away from the chamber. For instance, directly in front of the president is the Secretary of the Senate (Legislative), the parliamentarian of the Senate.

The Secretary of the Senate calls the roll to begin each floor session and reads the items under the various orders of business on the agenda. The production of the Senate Journal, all calendars, the introduction and engrossment of Senate bills and the certification of bills passed are under the direction of the Secretary of the Senate. The Secretary of the Senate advises members of the Senate on parliamentary procedure, reports bills and other documents, and coordinates the procedural functions of the session.

In Minnesota, in order for a bill to become law it must be reported, or "read," three times. The first reading is when the bill is introduced. A list of bills to be introduced each day, called the "Gray Agenda" for its color on

the Senate's website, is available to members, staff, and the public the day before. On the day of introduction, the president gives the bills their first reading by noting their inclusion in the agenda. Bills are assigned Senate File numbers upon introduction. Each bill is then usually referred to by its Senate File number. When it is time for the second reading of Senate bills, the president will note their appearance on the "Blue Agenda" for that purpose. (Bills originating in the House receive House File numbers.) The actual bills are available on the Senate's website.

The Secretary of the Senate also reports any amendments that are proposed for bills under consideration by the Senate. In order to expedite the process, the Secretary will read aloud just the beginning of the amendment. Copies of amendments are available to all Senators online, using their laptop computers. The Secretary of the Senate also opens and closes the electronic voting machine that records and stores each Senator's vote.

Seated just to the right of the Secretary of the Senate is the Second Assistant Secretary of the Senate. The Second Assistant's main function is to compile the Senate Journal. The Senate Journal is a record of all formal actions of the Senate. The Journal follows the orders of business set forth in the agenda. In addition, the Journal includes the reports of Senate committees, amendments adopted to bills during a floor session and recorded roll-call votes taken during the session. A Senate Journal is prepared for every day that either Legislative body meets in floor session. A Permanent Journal containing all the Daily Journals is compiled at the end of each year's legislative session.

The Second Assistant Secretary compiles the Journal from previously printed items and by building copy as actions are taken during the floor session. For instance, when a recorded vote is taken on a bill, a copy of the vote is attached to the bill's title for inclusion in the Journal. At the end of each day's session, the material for the Journal is formatted, indexed and printed. The Daily Journal is then available the next day.

The Second Assistant Secretary also relieves the Secretary of the Senate at the podium, schedules Chaplains for the opening of each daily session and generally assists the Secretary of the Senate.

Seated at the far right of the Senate Desk is a staff person whose primary responsibility is running the electronic voting system. The electronic voting system, in addition to tallying yeas and nays, also prints out a copy of each vote. The staff person sees that copies of each vote are distributed to the Secretary and the Second Assistant Secretary. The voting boards also provide additional information about the item of business under consideration, and it is the staff person's responsibility to see that the voting board is correctly programmed.

Seated to the left of the Secretary of the Senate are the First and Third Assistant Secretaries of the Senate. The primary responsibilities of the First and Third Assistant Secretaries are the processing of bill introductions, messages from the House of Representatives, bills reported out of committee, motions and all the other written material that is a part of the legislative process. The Senate Agenda, General Orders, the Senate Calendar, the Consent Calendar and the Confirmation Calendar are all compiled by the First and Third Assistant Secretaries as the bills proceed through the process. The documents are computerized at the Desk and sent for printing.

There are three copies of every bill introduced in the Senate. The First and Third Assistant Secretaries of the Senate are responsible for assigning a Senate File number to the bill and for seeing that the copies are distributed appropriately.

The First and Third Assistant Secretaries of the Senate also receive amendments and keep track of the amendments and the appropriate bills. Sometimes there may be as many as eighty amendments for a particular bill. The First and Third Assistant Secretaries make sure that the right amendment is read at the right time and the correct amendment is adopted to the correct bill and sent for engrossment.

In addition, any communication with the House of Representatives is conducted through the First and Third Assistant Secretaries of the Senate. As action is taken on items being considered during a floor session, the First and Third Assistants are compiling material for the next floor session's agendas and calendars. They also advise members on parliamentary procedure.

The Orders of Business

Although sometimes it may seem that the action is chaotic, Senate floor sessions follow a set agenda. The agenda lists various orders of business that the Senators must accomplish each daily session. There are thirteen Orders of Business on the agenda:

Orders of Business

- First order of business** - Petitions, letters and remonstrances
- Second order of business** - Executive and official communications
- Third order of business** - Messages from the House
- Fourth order of business** - First reading of House bills
- Fifth order of business** - Reports of committees
- Sixth order of business** - Second reading of Senate bills
- Seventh order of business** - Second reading of House bills
- Eighth order of business** - Introduction and first reading of Senate bills
- Ninth order of business** - Motions and resolutions
- Tenth order of business** - Calendar
- Eleventh order of business** - Consent Calendar
- Twelfth order of business** - General Orders
- Thirteenth order of business** - Announcements of Senate interest

To begin a floor session, the Senate President will call the Senate to order at the appropriate time. A Senator, usually the Majority Leader, will impose a “call of the Senate” requiring the attendance of members. Senators enter the chamber and indicate their presence by pressing the “yea” button on their desks. When a majority, or quorum, of 34 Senators is present, the call will be lifted, and the Senate Chaplain will give a short prayer. The Pledge of Allegiance is recited the first day of any week the Senate convenes. The Secretary of the Senate will then call the roll alphabetically.

The Senate then begins to go through the day’s agenda.

Many of the items under each order of business are printed on what is known as the “Blue Agenda” and may not be read or discussed individually. (In order to reduce costs, the various agendas and calendars are no longer printed on colored paper. However, the online versions use the original background colors. The terms are still used to differentiate the various agendas and calendars.)

The first order of business, Petitions, Letters and Remonstrances, is an archaic item dating from a time when the means of communications between elected officials and citizens were not so available.

The second order of business, Executive and Official Communications, consists of messages from the governor or secretary of state. These messages are usually in regard to appointments to executive branch positions that must be approved or “confirmed” by the Senate. These messages are generally printed in the blue agenda and are referred to various committees for future consideration. Examples of other messages include bill signings and veto messages from the governor or chapter letters from the secretary of state.

The third order of business, Messages From the House, consists of messages from the other body about actions taken by the House. For instance, the House may have granted final passage to a Senate bill but may have made some changes to the bill. The House must then send a message to the Senate informing the Senate of the actions the House has taken. The chief sponsor of the Senate bill then must decide on the next action. There are two primary responses the Senator may make. The sponsor may request that the Senate agree with the changes the House made and repass the bill, or the sponsor may not like the changes and ask that the Senate appoint a conference committee to work out the differences.

Other messages may be requests for a conference committee, announcements of the passage of Senate bills without changes, or other announcements of House activity. These items are printed, when possible, in the blue agenda and are acted upon individually.

The fourth order of business, the First Reading of House Bills, is the reading of the House File number of bills that have originated and gained final passage in the House. After being read by noting their appearance on the agenda, the House Files are assigned to the appropriate Senate committees for consideration. The number and title of each bill are printed in the blue agenda, along with the name of the committee to which the bill is to be sent. All of the items of the fourth order of business are usually acted upon as a group.

The fifth order of business, Reports of Committees, is also usually acted upon as just one item. The reports contain the committee's recommendation for the future progress of a particular bill and any changes made to the bill by the committee. Just the number, title, recommendation and whether the bill was amended are printed in the blue agenda. The Senate Journal for the next day will contain the actual amendments or changes that the committee made. If there is an objection to the committee's referral, a member may rise and orally object under Rule 21.

The sixth order of business, Second Reading of Senate Bills, is the oral or written reporting of the bills' Senate File numbers. The bill numbers are usually printed in the blue agenda. The President of the Senate announces "second reading" and strikes the gavel to fulfill part of the constitutional requirement that each bill be reported three times. Bills that receive their second reading have been acted upon by the relevant standing committees, and will be placed on General Orders or the Consent Calendar to await consideration on the Senate floor.

The seventh order of business, Second Reading of House Bills, is very similar to the sixth order of business. The President of the Senate announces "second reading of House bills" and strikes the gavel.

The eighth order of business, the Introduction and First Reading of Senate Bills, is a listing of all the bills introduced that day in the Senate. The eighth order of business is printed on a separate "Gray Agenda" and lists the Senate authors, Senate File number, the title of the bill, and the committee to which the bill will be sent for consideration. If any Senator doesn't think the committee reference is appropriate, the Senator may object under Rule 4.10. If there is a Rule 4.10 objection, the bill will be sent to a subcommittee of the Committee on Rules and Administration and the members of the subcommittee will decide which standing committee will consider the bill. In fact, Senators may use a similar Rule 21 objection for bills found on the Fifth Order of Business.

The ninth order of business, Motions and Resolutions, is composed of several items. For example, the addition of a Senator's name as an author of a bill, Senators' requests to have their names removed as an author of a bill, and congratulatory resolutions to groups or individuals are contained in the ninth order of business. Many of the bill authorship motions are printed in the blue agenda and are approved all at once through a single motion.

By motion, members may move a bill from one committee to another, or return a bill to its author.

Frequently, the Senate will remain on the order of business of motions and resolutions for the balance of the day's floor session. This is done to make it easier to move back and forth among the various orders of business. Unless the Senate is on the order of business of motions and resolutions, it would not be possible to go backward through the agenda, or to skip forward through the agenda, without a suspension of the rules. And, sometimes because of the way messages are received from the House, or because of the flow of paperwork, it speeds the entire process along by being able to move from one item of business to another out of order. In addition, toward the end of the year's session when there is a large amount of legislation before the Senate, the Majority Leader, under the rules of the Senate, may designate specific bills as Special Orders. It is while on the ninth order of business that bills on Special Orders are considered. Each Special Order bill has been acted upon favorably by one or more standing committees, is subject to debate and amendment and may be considered for final passage. A bill on Special Orders thus bypasses the Committee of the Whole, is given a third reading after all discussion and amendments have been considered and receives a roll call vote. Thirty-four votes are needed for final passage of most bills, unless it is a bonding bill, when 41 votes are needed.

The tenth order of business, the Calendar, is a separate listing of the bills scheduled for final passage. Each bill has had two prior readings, has been acted upon by one or more standing committees, and has been given preliminary approval on the Senate floor in the Committee of the Whole. Each bill on the Calendar is given a third reading by the Secretary of the Senate reading the first part of the title aloud just before the vote is taken. Generally, there is little discussion of the bills on the Calendar and the bills are considered quite quickly. The

bills are considered in the order in which they are listed on the Calendar, unless the chief author of the bill is not present in the Chamber. In such cases, the bill is “progressed,” which simply means that no action is taken at that time. A roll-call vote is taken for every bill on the Calendar and the vote is recorded in the Senate Journal. There must be 34 yeas for most bills on the Calendar to be given final passage. Bonding bills require a three-fifths majority (41 yeas) for final passage. Bills on the Calendar may not be amended unless there is the unanimous consent of all the Senators or the amendment is needed to fill a blank number or amend the title.

The eleventh order of business, the Consent Calendar, is another separate listing of bills scheduled for final passage. Bills on the Consent Calendar, though, were considered noncontroversial by the committee that last heard the bill and were recommended for placement on the Consent Calendar as a way of speeding the legislative process. Bills on the Consent Calendar are explained by the chief author and given a third reading just before the roll call vote. In order to gain final passage, every bill must receive at least 34 yeas. If three Senators consider the bill controversial, it will be stricken from the Consent Calendar and placed on General Orders. Bills on the Consent Calendar may be amended before the third reading.

The twelfth order of business, General Orders, is a listing of bills that have had two readings, have been acted upon by one or more standing committees and have been printed. In order to consider bills on General Orders, the Senate becomes one large committee known as the Committee of the Whole. The chief sponsor of each bill on General Orders explains the bill and answers any questions that other Senators may have. There is often extensive debate on the bills on General Orders. In addition, Senators may offer amendments to the bills on General Orders. Unless there is a request for a roll-call vote by three Senators, bills on General Orders are voted upon by voice vote of a majority of those present in the Chamber. If approved, the bill is placed on the Senate Calendar to be considered for final passage.

The last order of business, the thirteenth order, is Announcements of Senate Interest. Usually the Majority Leader announces the date and time for the next floor session. Occasionally, there are other announcements such as Senators informing their colleagues of changes in a committee’s schedule.

How a bill becomes a law

Now that you can follow the action on the Senate floor, it might be valuable to find out, in more detail, how a bill becomes a law.

The first step of the lawmaking process is to transform an idea into a specific proposal for a law. The proposal may be for a new law, for changing current law or for repealing an old law. The idea for a proposal may originate from a variety of sources: individuals, public interest groups, state agencies, businesses or legislators.

These proposals must be put in proper legal form before they can be introduced as bills in the Senate or House. It is the responsibility of the Revisor of Statutes to put the proposals in the correct form. Bills are drafted by a staff of attorneys and typed into a computerized bill printing system. Only Senators and Representatives can introduce legislation. Even the governor must find a legislator willing to sponsor gubernatorial proposals.

Once the bill has been drafted, the legislator sponsoring the bill is given three copies for introduction in the Senate and three copies for introduction in the House of Representatives. Assuming the legislator is a member of the Senate, the Senator will then sign the cover of the Senate File as chief author and may ask up to four other Senators to be co-authors. The Senator usually finds a member of the House to introduce the same bill, called a companion bill, in that body. The Representative who is the chief author may have as many as 35 members sign the bill as co-authors.

It is important to note the role the chief author plays in handling a piece of legislation. The chief author determines whether to request a committee hearing for the bill, when the bill will be considered in the Committee of the Whole, when the bill will be placed on final passage, and whether to concur in any House amendments placed on a Senate bill or whether to request a conference committee. The chief author’s support or opposition to proposed amendments will influence the actions of other members. Customarily, no action will be taken on a bill unless the chief author is present.

When ready for introduction, the bill is submitted to the Secretary of the Senate. An Assistant Secretary gives the bill a Senate File number and prepares it for introduction. The President of the Senate then refers the bill to the committee that has jurisdiction over the same subject area as the bill. For instance, a bill relating to fishing is referred to the Committee on Environment and Natural Resources. Titles of bills being introduced are printed in a “Gray Agenda” prepared for each daily session. The name(s) of the author(s) and the proposed committee referral are also indicated. It is at the point of introduction that the bill is given its first reading.

No further action is taken on the bill until the chief author requests a committee hearing. After a request is made, a hearing date is set and all interested persons who have asked to be notified are contacted. Notices are posted on bulletin boards found throughout the Capitol and State Office Building. Notice is also posted on the Legislative website (www.leg.mn) and distributed electronically via an e-mail listserv.

At the committee hearing, the chief author explains the bill and presents expert testimony, if needed. Proponents and opponents are allowed to state their views. Amendments, or changes to the bill, are often made that improve the quality of the bill or attract additional support. Very often a compromise is reached that makes the bill acceptable to opposing sides.

After all testimony and debate are completed, the committee members may either recommend that the bill, and any adopted amendments, be reported to the entire Senate for consideration, or that the bill be defeated and left in the committee. If a bill the committee members intend to recommend for passage is noncontroversial, the committee report may recommend that the bill be placed on the Consent Calendar. Most bills, however, are placed on General Orders. Sometimes, especially if the bill contains financial implications, the committee report will recommend that the bill be re-referred to another committee such as the Finance, Tax or Capital Investment Committees. Occasionally, bills are advanced “without recommendation.” The bills are placed on General Orders, but the committee has not necessarily recommended the bill be passed.

The Senate receives reports from the committees, and must formally adopt the recommended changes the committee made. Adoption of the committee report does not imply that a majority of the Senate will vote for the bill. After the reports have been adopted, the bills are either re-referred to another committee or read for the second time and are placed on General Orders or on the Consent Calendar.

In order to consider bills on General Orders, the Senate resolves itself into a Committee of the Whole. The Committee of the Whole is the entire Senate acting as one large committee. The rules are less formal than at other times during the daily session, and this is when bills on General Orders are discussed and amended.

Bills are taken up in the order of their listing on General Orders, unless the chief author is out of the Chamber or unless the chief author feels, for various reasons, that it is not the proper time to present the bill. The author explains the purpose of the bill and offers any amendments that will improve the quality of the bill or enhance its chances of gaining approval. Other Senators may ask questions and offer their own amendments. After all discussion and amendments have been considered—a process that may last three or four minutes or go on for several hours—the author will move that the bill be recommended to pass. If a simple majority favors the motion, the bill is placed on the Calendar the next day for final approval.

The Calendar is the last step before the bill is passed by the Senate and sent to the other body for its consideration, or if already passed by the other body, sent to the governor for signature or veto.

When considering bills on the Calendar the author presents summarizing arguments, the bill is given its third reading and placed on final passage. No amendments may be offered without the unanimous consent of the body. The bill must receive 34 votes in the Senate and 68 votes in the House in order to pass.

After the Calendar is considered, the Senate takes up the Consent Calendar. The bills on the Consent Calendar are noncontroversial and bypass the Committee of the Whole. The chief author will explain the bill, offer any amendments necessary and respond to any questions. Usually there are no questions, and the bill is given its third reading and placed on final passage.

If a Senator objects to the presence of a bill on this noncontroversial calendar, and the objection is supported by two other Senators, the bill will be placed at the bottom of General Orders. Another motion may also place a bill at the top of General Orders.

Once a bill has passed the Senate or the House, it is sent over to the other body to be substituted for its companion bill and to be considered by the members of that body. When a House File is sent to the Senate, it is substituted for its companion Senate File but the language remains the same as the Senate File.

It is important to remember that in order for a bill to become law in Minnesota, it must be reported three times in each body. Thus, when a House File is sent to the Senate, it is given its first reading when it is received from the House on a message, its second presentation when reported out of committee or substituted for a companion Senate File already on the floor, and its third report just before final passage. The same procedure is followed by the House for Senate Files.

If the Senate amends a House File or the House amends a Senate File, and then passes the bill, it must go back to its original body for further consideration. This is because both bodies must give final passage to the same bill with exactly the same language in order for the bill to become law.

For example, if the House returns a Senate File with an amendment attached to the bill, the Senate may either adopt the amendment and repass the bill as amended, or the Senate may request that a conference committee be appointed to resolve the differences. The choice is made by the chief author with the agreement of the Senate.

In cases of disagreement between the Senate and the House, a conference committee consisting of three or five members from each body will be appointed. The conference committee must meet and try to reach a compromise on the differences. If the committee fails to agree, it may be discharged and new members appointed. Once the differences have been settled, the conference committee makes a report to each body. When the conference committee report is adopted, the bill, as amended by the conference committee, is repassed by both bodies and sent to the governor for approval or veto.

Secretary of the Senate

The Secretary of the Senate, located in Room 231 of the Capitol, directs the Senate's public information functions, including Senate Media Services and the Senate Information Office.

Media Services

The Minnesota Senate televises coverage of Senate floor sessions, committee hearings, press conferences and special events. To watch the coverage on television, tune in the Minnesota Channel, available statewide from your local Minnesota Public Television Station (check your local listings for channel locations). To watch the programming online, go to www.senate.mn/media for live and archived video.

Senate Media Services also produces Capitol Report, a weekly public affairs program featuring legislators' views on pressing state issues. Check your local PBS listings for broadcast time or visit www.senate.mn/media for archived video of the program.

Senate Media Services is located in Room B-44, State Capitol. The phone number is 651-296-0264.

Information Offices

Both the Minnesota Senate and House of Representatives have Information Offices to help keep the public informed of legislative happenings.

The Senate Information Office is located in the Secretary of the Senate's Office, in Room 231 of the Capitol (phone number 651-296-0504 or toll free 1-888-234-1112). The office serves as a central clearinghouse for all information about Senate activities. Staff members help individuals determine who represents them in the Senate, distribute literature about the Senate, distribute directories, provide daily meeting schedules, and answer questions about bill status, authorship and file numbers. You may also obtain copies of bills, calendars, journals and agendas from the Information Office. Staff members are available to answer general questions about the operations of the Senate. Computer terminals are available for members of the public to use to determine bill status, Senate File numbers and bill authorship.

The Minnesota Senate also offers TTY service for the hearing impaired. Located in Senate Index, the TTY telecommunications service allows deaf or hearing-impaired persons to communicate with Index staff in order to find out bill status, bill content and bill authorship. The telephone number for the TTY service is 651-296-0250 or toll free 1-888-234-1216.

The House Public Information Services Office is located in Room 175 of the State Office Building (phone number 651-296-2146 or toll free 1-800-657-3550). The office publishes Session Weekly, a report of the week's committee meetings and floor action along with the next week's committee schedule. In addition, the House Public Information Services Office publishes various brochures and pamphlets about the House of Representatives. A daily calendar is also published by the House Public Information Office. At the end of session, the office publishes New Laws, an online summary of what was approved by the Legislature and signed into law, what was vetoed and what was considered but not approved. Staff members are available to answer questions about the operations of the House of Representatives and to help individuals determine who represents them in the House.

Office of the Chief Clerk of the House

The Chief Clerk's Office is located in Room 211 of the Capitol (phone 651-296-2314). The office provides copies of bills for the public. In addition, the office distributes calendars and agendas for each day of the legislative session. The Journal of the House of Representatives is also available from the Chief Clerk's Office.

House Index

The House Index Office is the place to get information on specific House bills. The House Index Office is also located in Room 211 of the Capitol (phone 651-296-6646). You may obtain the House File number, the chief author and bill status from the House Index Office. In addition, a computer terminal is available to look up the information yourself.

Legislative Information on the Internet

The Minnesota Legislature provides legislative information on the Internet (<http://www.leg.mn>). The Legislative website, a joint effort of the Legislative Reference Library, the Office of the Revisor of Statutes, and the Senate and House of Representatives, serves as a convenient point for obtaining frequently requested information. A quick trip through the website yields telephone numbers and mailing addresses for legislators and legislative staff, membership lists for each legislative committee, full texts of bills and statutes, schedules of upcoming legislative meetings, summaries of current legislative action, online editions of publications and archived video of Senate and House floor sessions and of some committee hearings.

Another service makes it possible for the public to directly receive information about Senate committee schedules. The Senate Information Systems Office has developed a listserv that automatically sends the comprehensive daily committee schedule, or notices from individual committees, to subscribers with e-mail access.

To subscribe to Senate listservs, simply point your web browser to:

<http://www.senate.mn/schedule/subscribe.php>

Using the MyBills bill tracking system, members of the public can add House and Senate bills to personalized lists by bill number, subject, or author, and view the legislative status of their bills, with items with significant current floor action highlighted. Users can modify their lists at any time. The MyBills system is available from the Legislative website at: <http://www.house.mn/leg/billslogin.asp>

Legislative Reference Library

Located in Room 645 of the State Office Building (phone 651-296-3398), the library has a range of services available to the public. Chief among these services is the collection of audio tapes of legislative committee hearings and House and Senate floor sessions. For convenient access to the tapes, there is a special listening room on the Ground Floor of the State Office Building. In addition, the legislative history of specific bills may be researched with the help of library staff.

Capitol Tours

Tours of the Capitol are conducted by the Minnesota Historical Society. The tours, which include historical and architectural highlights, are conducted on the hour from 9 a.m. to 4 p.m. Saturday tours leave on the hour from 10 a.m. to 3 p.m., and Sunday tours are conducted on the hour from 1 p.m. until 3 p.m. Groups of ten or more must make reservations by calling 651-296-2881.

Cafeterias

During the legislative session, cafeterias operate in the basement of the Capitol Building and State Office Building. Also, a quick lunch counter is set up on the second floor of the Capitol Building, during the legislative session. Cafeterias located in the Transportation, Judicial and Centennial Buildings operate throughout the year.

Senate Galleries and committee hearings

Visitors are allowed in the Senate Galleries during sessions. The entrance is located on the third floor of the Capitol Building. No passes are necessary except during the opening day of the legislative session. Joint sessions of the House and Senate, held in the House Chambers, may also have restricted seating. No flash cameras or smoking are allowed in the Galleries. Visitors are not allowed on the Senate floor.

Committee hearings are open to the public and citizens are encouraged to attend. Each of the Senate committees has a regular schedule for meetings. However, seating is limited by the capacity of the room and is most often on a first-come, first-served basis. Senate committee meetings are held in the Capitol Building, while House committee meetings are usually held in the State Office Building. Rooms 15, 107, 112, 123, and 125 in the Capitol Building are the main Senate hearing rooms.

Parking

Parking is a perennial difficulty in the capitol area. Metered spaces are available along the side streets adjacent to the capitol complex.

Assistance for persons with special needs

The Minnesota Legislature is committed to making the legislative process open and available to everyone, including persons with special needs. Toward that end, the Legislature has initiated a number of services designed to enable individuals with disabilities to participate in legislative activities, programs and services.

The Senate offers TTY service, participates in the Minnesota Relay Service, and has assistive listening devices in hearing rooms, the House Chamber, and the Senate Chamber. For assistance with any other special needs, please call the Senate Sergeant at Arms at (voice) 651-296-1119 or toll free 1-888-234-1112; or (TTY) 651-296-0250 or toll free 1-888-234-1216. The House of Representatives Sergeant at Arms can be contacted at (voice) 651-296-4860 or toll free 1-800-657-3550; or (TTY) 651-296-9896 or toll free 1-800-657-3550.

The Minnesota Legislature is committed to complying with the provisions of the Americans with Disabilities Act and supports the goal that individuals with disabilities shall not be excluded from participating in or be denied the benefits of any program, service or activity offered by the legislature. Effective communication is a necessary step in meeting that goal. Thus, the legislature welcomes comments and suggestions from the public on services that will improve communication between the legislature and individuals with special needs. Please direct comments to the Director, Legislative Coordinating Commission, Room 72, State Office Building, St. Paul, MN 55155-1280.