

THE LEGISLATURE

(New 2/98)

The California State Legislature is a two-house (bicameral) body composed of an Assembly, whose 80 members are elected to two-year terms; and a Senate, whose 40 members are elected for four-year terms. The California Legislature meets for two-year sessions and each house conducts business in its own chamber within the Capitol, often referred to as the Senate and Assembly "floors."

Each house of the Legislature has established a number of standing committees with differing purviews. When a legislative measure is sent to a committee for review, it is said to be "referred" to that committee. It is the job of the committees to review legislation and to recommend amendments to the floor of the house if the committee believes them warranted. A committee may also "hold" a measure by making no recommendation to the floor to pass or amend it. Technically, only the house floors can (by majority vote) amend a piece of legislation. However, the recommendations of the committees are nearly always carried out by the floors as a matter of course.

There are basically two types of committees: "policy" committees and "fiscal" committees. The vast majority of measures are sent to a policy committee for review of the proposed programmatic or public policy change. If a measure would have a fiscal impact on the state, then it is also sent to a fiscal committee for review of financial implications of the measure.

In the Senate, there are two fiscal committees, Appropriations and Budget and Fiscal Review. The Budget and Fiscal Review Committee deals primarily with the Budget Bill. However, it will also conduct hearings on other pieces of legislation which would directly amend or otherwise significantly affect the Budget Act. The Appropriations Committee hears all non-Budget Bill legislation that would have a fiscal impact. The Assembly has two fiscal committees, Appropriations and Budget, whose functions are the same as their Senate counterparts.

Each house also has a Rules Committee which is considered neither a policy nor a fiscal committee since it deals with "housekeeping" and other matters internal to that house. It is the Rules Committees that assign bills to the various standing committees.

There also are a number of "joint" committees comprised of members from both houses. Some examples of these are the Joint Legislative Budget Committee (which oversees the operation of the Legislative Analyst), and the Joint Rules Committee (which develops rules that govern the two houses in addition to the individual houses' rules).

Each house may also establish "special" and "select" committees. These committees generally are established to conduct research into or provide oversight on narrow areas of subject matter for the purpose of providing special expertise and advice to the house which created them. They generally do not hear bills and meet infrequently.

A complete listing of all committees and their memberships can be found in each "Daily File."