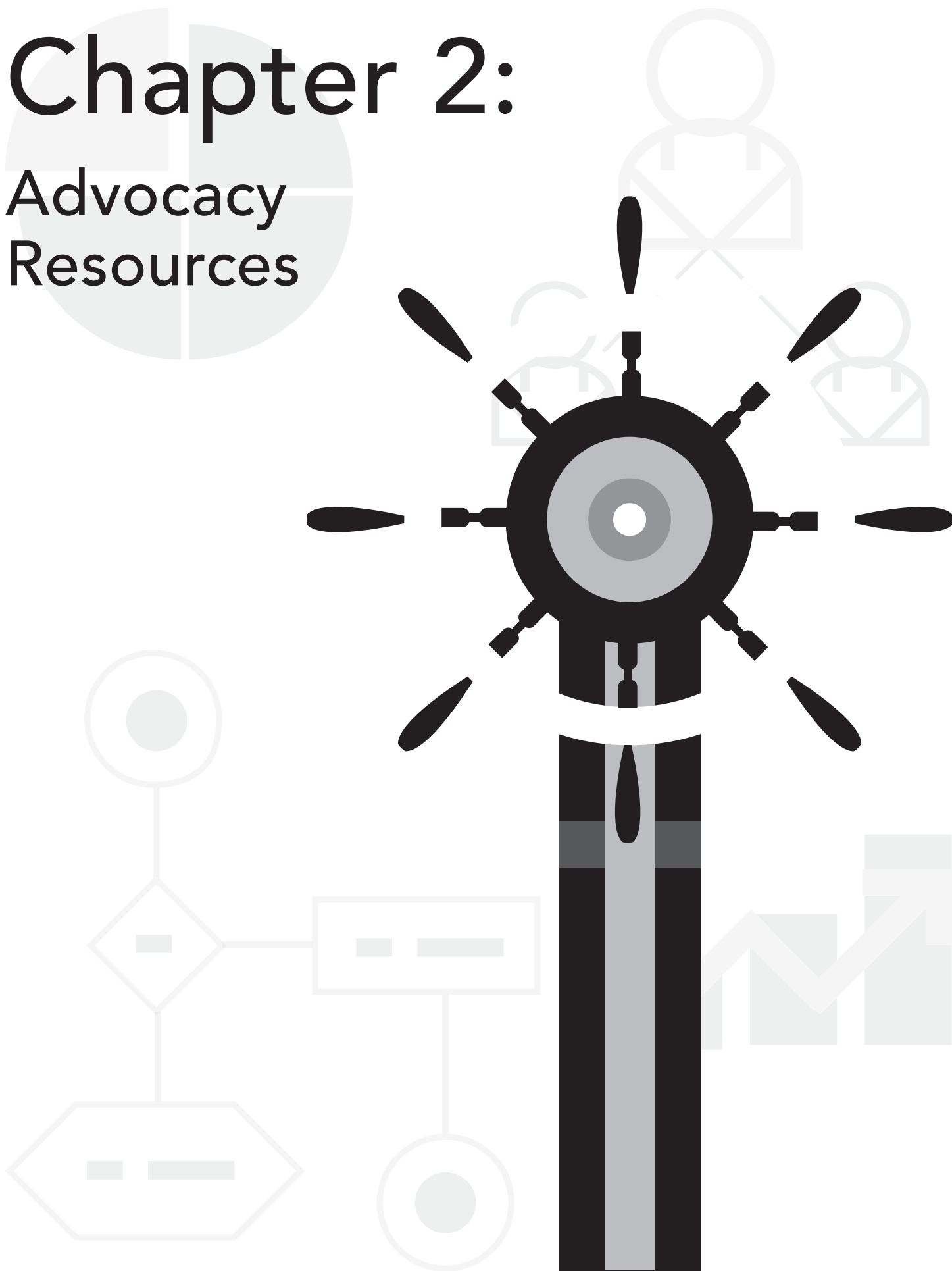
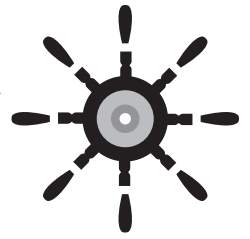


Chapter 2:

Advocacy Resources



How Laws Are Made



The House and Senate lawmaking processes are replete with rules and procedures to ensure that the bills Congress passes are vetted thoroughly and represent the dominant opinion of Members of Congress. Each chamber has its own set of rules and procedures that a skilled lawmaker can use to hasten or thwart legislative proposals. Both a Member's facility with these rules and his or her political power can prove critical to the successful passage of a bill.

Although, Members of Congress conceive of legislation, introduce bills, and maneuver legislation through the lawmaking process, Congressional staff also play an essential role in the process. Members of Congress have staff in their personal offices, and the Members who serve as Congressional committee and subcommittee leadership—in both the majority and the minority—have separate committee staff as well. Both personal and committee staff have significant input in the legislative process.

The lawmaking process can be initiated in either chamber of the Congress—the House of Representatives or the Senate. The exception is for bills related to revenue, which must originate in the House of Representatives. Legislators can initiate the lawmaking process by crafting a bill or a joint resolution. The following, from the Government Printing Office (GPO), describes the process of enacting a bill into law that is introduced in the House of Representatives. Enacting a joint resolution into law requires the same steps as a bill.

ENACTING A BILL INTO LAW

1. When a Representative has an idea for a new law, he or she becomes the sponsor of that bill and introduces it by giving it to the clerk of the House of Representatives, or by placing it in a box, called the hopper. The clerk assigns a legislative number to the bill, with H.R. for bills introduced in the House of Representatives (and S. for bills introduced in the Senate). GPO then prints the bill and distributes copies to each Representative.
2. The bill is assigned to a committee by the Speaker of the House so that it can be studied. The House has standing committees, each with jurisdiction over bills in certain areas. The standing committee, or often, a subcommittee, studies the bill and hears testimony from experts and people interested in the bill. The committee then may release the bill with a recommendation to pass it, or revise the bill and release it, or lay it aside so that the House cannot vote on it. Releasing the bill is called reporting it out, while laying it aside is called tabling.
3. If the bill is released, it then goes on a calendar, which is a list of bills awaiting action. Here the House Rules Committee may call for the bill to be voted on quickly, may limit the debate, or may limit or prohibit amendments. Undisputed bills may be passed by unanimous consent or by a two-thirds majority vote if members agree to suspend the rules.
4. The bill then goes to the floor of the House for consideration and begins with a complete reading of the bill. Sometimes this is the only complete reading. A third reading, title only, occurs after any amendments have been added. If the bill passes by simple majority (218 of 435), the bill moves to the Senate.
5. In order to be introduced in the Senate, a Senator must be recognized by the presiding officer and announce the introduction of the bill. Sometimes, when a bill has passed in one chamber, it becomes known as an Act; however, this term usually means a bill that has been passed by both chambers and becomes law.
6. Just as in the House, the bill is then assigned to a committee in the Senate. It is assigned to one of the Senate's standing committees by the presiding officer. The Senate committee studies, and either releases or tables the bill just like the House standing committee.
7. Once released, the bill goes to the Senate floor for consideration. Bills are voted on in the Senate based on the order in which they come from the committee; however, an urgent bill may be pushed ahead by leaders of the majority party. When the Senate considers the bill, it can be debated indefinitely. When there is no more debate, there is a vote on the bill. In many

cases, a simple majority (51 of 100) passes the bill.

8. The bill now moves into a conference committee, which is made up of Members from each chamber of Congress. The conference committee works out any differences between the House and Senate versions of the bill. The revised bill is sent back to both chambers for their final approval. Once approved, the bill is printed by the GPO in a process called enrolling. The clerk from the introducing chamber certifies the final version.
9. The enrolled bill is now signed by the Speaker of the House and then the vice president. Finally, it is sent for presidential consideration. The president has 10 days to sign or veto the enrolled bill. If the president vetoes the bill, it can still become a law if two-thirds of the Senate and two-thirds of the House then vote in favor of the bill and override the veto.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

How a Senate Bill Becomes a Law, from the U.S. Senate: <http://1.usa.gov/151DcBm>

The Legislative Process, from the U.S. House of Representatives: <http://1.usa.gov/151Dfx7> ■