

The Role of the Philippine Congressional Library  
in  
Legislative Information Dissemination

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I. Introduction

A. Historical Background

The "People Power Revolution" of February, 1986 ushered in important changes in the Philippine government and politics. The most significant change was the adoption of a New Constitution known as the 1986 Constitution which, among others, reestablished a bi-cameral Congress.

After fourteen years of authoritarian rule, an election for the 200 members of the House of Representatives in the 73 legislative districts and for the 24 members of the Senate to be elected at large was held on May, 1987. In addition to the elected Members of the House, 50 seats were reserved under the provisions of the 1986 Constitution for appointive representatives to be apportioned among labor, peasants, urban poor, cultural minorities, women, youth, elderly and disabled.

The election of the first batch of legislators revived much enthusiasm in the restored electoral process. Significantly, we witnessed the election of new faces in the political arena as well as the emergence of a greater number of women legislators compared to the pre-Martial Law period. To these neophytes fell the task not only of rebuilding a nation, but also of establishing a new political order in place of the chaotic remnants of the old regime.

Governance was once again placed in three equal, independent and coordinating branches of government. The Legislative to enact laws, the Executive to execute laws, and the Judiciary to adjudicate cases brought before it concerning those laws.

B. Congressional Committees

In the Philippine Congress, as in other parliaments all over the world, the decision-making task in both Houses with regards to legislative process rests primarily on the Committees. The Committees are classified as follows: a) Permanent Standing Committees; b) Temporary or Special Committees; and c) Joint Committees. Permanent Standing Committees are further Sub-divided into Sub-Committees.

As provided in the Rules of the House, there are 43 Standing Committees. The election of Committee Members depend largely on the proportionate representations of political parties and preferences or expertise of members. The Chairmen of the various Committees are elected mainly from the Majority Party.

## II. Congressional Library

The restoration of the law-making power to Congress significantly opened the floodgates for information. Heightened interest for information resulted in the organization of library primarily to act as vital information support center in aid of legislation.

Thus, the Congressional Library was created as a bureau under the direct supervision of the Secretary-General of the House of Representatives. The placing of the Congressional Library under the Secretary-General was in accordance with the pertinent provisions of the Rules of the House mandating the Secretary-General to keep sufficient library materials for the need of the Members.

The Congressional Library is headed by a Director. Like any other Parliamentary Library, it is tasked to provide adequate and timely information, limited consultancy and reference services to Members, their staff and Secretariat researchers.

In the delivery of services, it is supported by two (2) divisions, namely a) the Legislative Library, and b) the Legislative Archives. These two divisions perform distinct functions but they provide complementary services to their clients.

### A. Legislative Library

The Legislative Library's primordial concern is to attend to the information needs of Members of Congress, their staff and Secretariat researchers. It is expected to anticipate information needs, verify facts as needed, package pertinent and relevant materials on subjects or topics of research and determine possible legislative implications which would have bearing on existing government policies.

The Legislative Library has been allotted a budget of approximately ₱4 million or US\$170,000.00 for library materials. This appropriation is sufficient for laying a good foundation for a research library, especially for a country where economic priorities vie for scarce resources.

The said budget allocation, which increased by over 50% in the past, allowed a shift in library policy from a pre-1987 dependence on donations to a post-1987 progressive policy of acquisition thru purchase to ensure a highly selective collection. There was a noted shift from the acquisition of purely legal or parliamentary materials to the acquisition of materials in other subject areas, particularly in the field of economics and economic development.

In 1988, a five-year program for the improvement of Congressional Library was prepared. In said program, computerization of library was projected for 1988-89. Currently, the Legislative Library utilizes nine (9) IBM Compatible units with hard disks and one (1) file server. All these units are linked together and are operated in a Local Area Network (LAN) environment. Mini-computers should have been preferred if the volume of records to be stored was given consideration. However, micro-computers were instead utilized because of fund limitations.

For Catalog Card preparation, two (2) IBM Wheel Writer 30 are presently being used. This equipment speeds up card preparation to hasten manual book service to researchers and clients.

The Congressional Library offers among others, reproduction services intended for reproducing important library documents. The library likewise extends research assistance to Senate researchers thru the use of FAX machine since the Senate is housed in a separate building in Manila about 20 kilometers from the House Building Complex in Quezon City.

Presently, the Library Division has three experienced and professional Librarians. Assisting them in their gargantuan tasks are able staff members who are mostly graduates of either law, economics or social science with strong background in computer. All library personnel are recruited in accordance with Civil Service Rules and regulations. After recruitment, quite a number of them enroll in universities to acquire the required Library Science units. To further enhance their skills, In-House Trainings have been provided in the last two (2) years.

#### B. Legislative Archives

Pursuant to the Rules of the House of Representatives, the Legislative Archives is the official depository of permanent valuable legislative record of the country. All papers relating to completed business are delivered to, kept by and preserved in the Legislative Archives. Housed therein are the complete collections of original documents and materials of the Philippine Congress from 1946, when the Philippines acquired its independence from the United States,

as well as tapes of proceedings of plenary sessions concerning the same period. However, it has very limited collection of printed proceedings and documents from 1907, when the 1st Philippine Assembly was organized, to 1945. Efforts have been exerted to retrieve these missing records from local as well as foreign sources.

The documents and records of the proceedings of three Constitutional Conventions held in 1935, 1972 and 1986 are likewise stored in the Legislative Archives.

Last year, a Legislative Gallery was organized. On display thereat are limited memorabilia from past Congresses and a photo exhibit of important events in Philippine legislative history.

The Legislative Archives offers access to Congressional documents in their original form to the Members of the House and their researchers. These documents are properly abstracted and indexed for easy access and retrieval, and stored in computers and microfilms. Dubbing services are also extended to House Members who would want copies of taped speeches delivered on the floor.

Archival management is relatively a new field in the Philippines. Because the work activities in the Legislative Archives closely resembles that of the Legislative Library, requirements in the selection and recruitment of its manpower are similar.

### III. The Automation System Installed

Technological advancement of library services is not only to be realized in automating what already is being done, but in making possible things previously unimagined.

In 1988, Congressional Library conceptualized an in-house automated system which was designed from the five technical subsystems of every library organization, namely Selection, Acquisition, Processing, Organization, Management, and Servicing. SAPOMS, an acronym, is a comprehensive plan of the entire library processing system. As a database system, it originally operated on four IBM Compatible Microcomputers, each installed with a set of programs designed for a specific module. Under the set-up, the Library Masterfile was physically transferred from one subsystem to the next to meet the basic requirements of updating records until it becomes available for use by the Library clientele.

From the SAPOMS system, other end products resulted. To date, four major publications were completed; to wit:

a) the Compendium of Philippine Laws, which is a compilation of all laws passed from 1900 to 1988, including

its source in the Official Gazette;

b) the Roster of Philippine Legislators who served Philippine Legislatures from 1907 to 1987;

c) the Bibliography of Philippine Laws, a publication of all law books, monographs and legal materials the Legislative Library has acquired, and;

d) the Congressional Library Bulletin, a quarterly publication of newly acquired library materials.

In preparation for future networking among units in the Secretariat, Congressional Library initiated the publication of a Thesaurus of Legislative Terms. This project, aims to unify common terminologies in the processing of information handled by the various divisions of the House Secretariat. The Congressional Library works in collaboration with three other Bureaus of the Secretariat namely: Plenary Affairs, Reference and Research, and Committee Affairs.

#### IV. Conclusion

Notwithstanding budgetary constraints and the initial obstacles met in automating a library, the House Congressional Library has demonstrated justifiably that it can "modernize" with a few computer hardwares with the help of highly competent technical personnel.

The next three years should be exciting years for us, as we look forward to the acquisition of an optical disk, in which full texts of laws can be scanned and stored in a single and unique database file, and indexed for easy retrieval and reproduction.

Limited budget allocation is not really a hindrance to the automation of library. It is with this thought in mind that the Congressional Library has taken a big leap toward the attainment of its goal for an ideal Library service.

## VISION OF HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

To be an active, ethical and high-minded Congress which is responsive to the needs of the country.

## SECRETARIAT MISSION

"To provide the Members of House of Representatives with adequate, timely, relevant and efficient administrative and technical assistance and support to enable them to perform their law-making tasks and discharge constituencies responsibilities."

## OBJECTIVES

1. Develop cohesive organization.
2. Ensure delivery of timely and accurate information.
3. Achieve a higher level of efficiency in the delivery of services.
4. Enhance professionalism and inculcate high moral values and ethical standard.
5. Enhance the public image of House of Representatives.

## STRATEGIES/ACTIVITIES

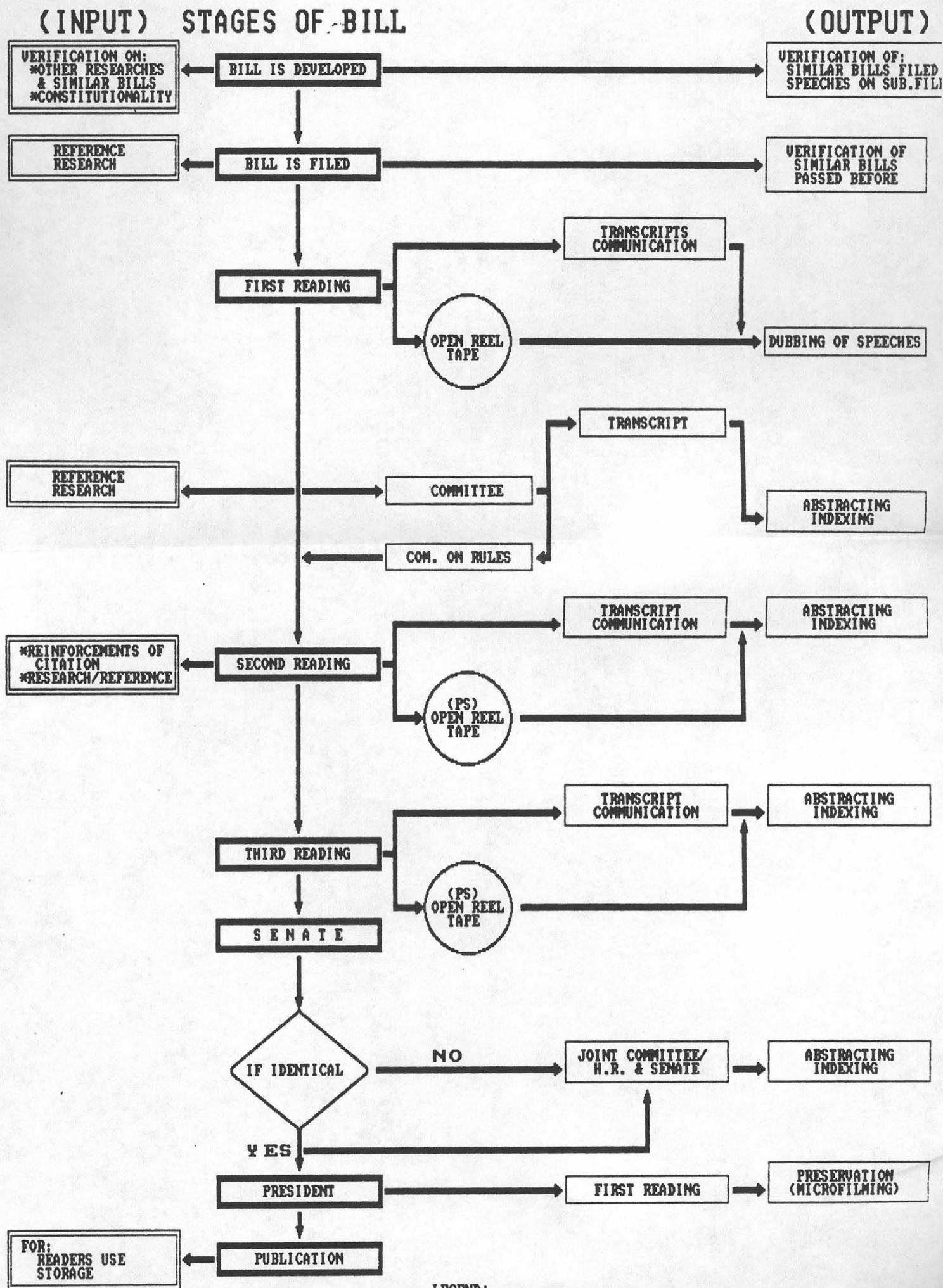
### LEGISLATIVE LIBRARY

1. Maintain and upgrade computerized information storage and retrieval service.
2. Expand subject coverage of acquisition and accelerate processing thereof.
3. Organize skills enhancement and work attitude training programs.

### LEGISLATIVE ARCHIVES

1. Establish computerization of archival documents.
2. Acquire/retrieve retrospective archival documents from local and international sources.
3. Upgrade standard of processing and preserving of archival documents.
4. Organize skills enhancement and work attitude training programs.

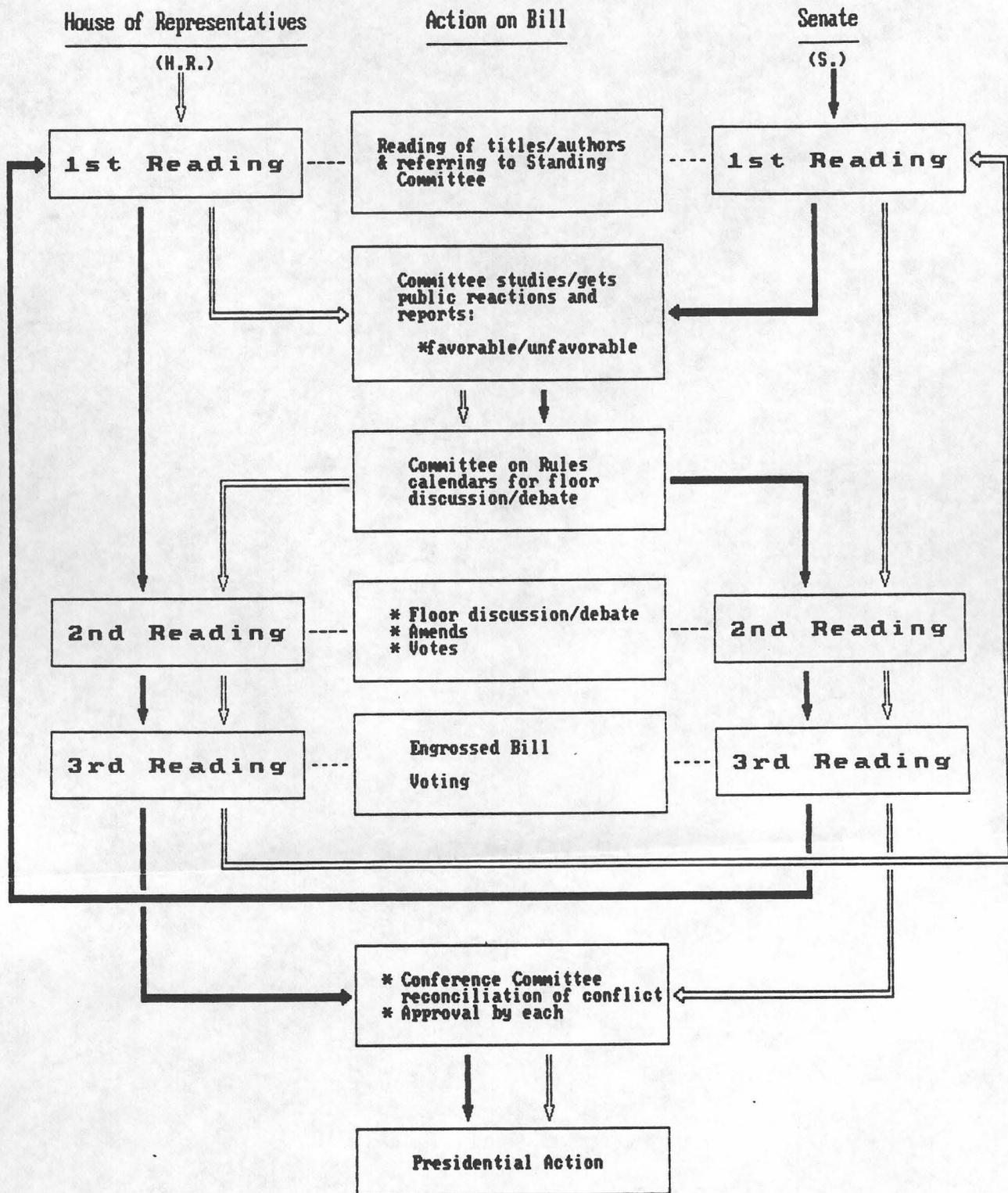
# CONGRESSIONAL LIBRARY IN LEGISLATIVE PROCESS



**LEGEND:**

- Legislative Library
- Legislative Archives

**HOW A BILL BECOMES A LAW**



**LEGEND:**

----- Action in Plenary Session

==== House of Representatives

===== Senate

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HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES  
ORGANIZATIONAL CHART

