

Committees

In each House, there are two kinds of Committees: Standing Committees and Special Committees. In addition to these two, the House of Councillors has Research Committees.

The House of Councillors has the following 17 Standing Committees: (1) Cabinet; (2) general affairs; (3) judicial affairs; (4) foreign affairs and defense; (5) financial affairs; (6) education, culture and science; (7) health, welfare and labor; (8) agriculture, forestry and fisheries; (9) economy and industry; (10) land and transport; (11) environment; (12) fundamental national policies; (13) budget; (14) audit; (15) oversight of administration; (16) rules and administration; and (17) discipline.

Every Member must serve on at least one Standing Committee. Special Committees are established for each Diet session by vote of each House when the House regards it as necessary. Research Committees are unique to the House of Councillors and are established at the plenary sitting of the extraordinary session convoked after the regular election for the Members of the House of Councillors. Research Committees carry out long-term comprehensive studies relating to fundamental matters of state administration; however, they are not empowered to examine bills.

Membership of Standing Committees, Special Committees, and Research Committees is allocated to the various political parties and groups in proportion to the number of seats they each hold in the House. The appointment of Members to Committees is performed by the President based on recommendations from the political parties and groups.

No business may be transacted by a Committee unless at least one-half of its members are present, and all matters are decided by a majority vote of those present. No persons other than news reporters and others authorized by the Committee Chairman are permitted to observe a Committee meeting.

Committees conduct detailed examinations of the budget, treaties, bills, and petitions based on expert knowledge in preparation for the plenary sittings. They also conduct investigations into those aspects of government which come under their respective spheres of work. The Committee on Fundamental National Policies is unique in that it meets jointly with the House of Representatives' committee of the same name, and functions as a venue for debate between the Prime Minister and opposition party leaders.

Investigations in Relation to Government

Both Houses conduct general investigations in relation to government in order to effectively enact laws and oversee the administrative affairs of the government. To conduct investigations, Committees hear explanations from government authorities and others concerned, ask questions to the government, and request documents. They may also demand the presence and testimony of witnesses and voluntary testifiers, and dispatch members to conduct investigations. As a result of these investigations, they may propose bills and pass resolutions demanding that the government take measures.

Petitions

Petitions can be filed with either House. Presenting petitions to the Diet is a right guaranteed to every citizen by the Constitution. Any person wishing to make a petition should submit it to the Presiding Officer with an introduction of a House Member. The petition is then examined by the Committee concerned. Petitions which are considered appropriate are passed by the House and then sent to the Cabinet which then takes appropriate measures. The Cabinet must report annually to both Houses on the status of the review of petitions.

Relationship between the Two Houses

Establishment of the will of the Diet requires a concurrent decision of both Houses. For example, a bill which is passed by the House of Representatives and sent to the House of Councillors becomes a law when the latter passes it, and vice versa. When the House of Councillors amends a bill originally sent from the House of Representatives, the bill is referred back to the House of Representatives, and it becomes a law if the House of Representatives agrees to the amendment. If the two Houses do not agree, they may call a meeting of the Conference Committee of both Houses to make the necessary adjustments so that an agreement can be reached.

If no agreement can be reached between the two Houses on the budget, treaties, bills, or the designation of a Prime Minister, the superiority of the House of Representatives is recognized in accordance with the Constitution. For example, a bill which is passed by the House of Representatives, and upon which the House of Councillors makes a decision different from that of the former, becomes a law when passed once again by the House of Representatives by a majority of two-thirds or more of the Members present. In the case of the budget, treaties, and designation of a Prime Minister, when the House of Councillors makes a decision different from that of the House of Representatives and no agreement can be reached even through a meeting of the Conference Committee of both Houses, or when the House of Councillors fails to take final action within a certain time after receipt of the bill, the decision of the House of Representatives becomes that of the Diet. The budget bill is considered first by the House of Representatives.

Emergency Session of the House of Councillors

When the House of Representatives is dissolved, the House of Councillors is closed at the same time, and the functions of the Diet stop. In times of national emergency, however, the Cabinet may convoke an emergency session of the House of Councillors during the period between the dissolution of the House of Representatives and the convocation of a special session of the Diet following the general election of Members of the House of Representatives. Because the House of Councillors executes proxy for Diet functions at the emergency session, measures taken are provisional and become null and void unless confirmed by the House of Representatives within a period of 10 days after the opening of the next session of the Diet. Such emergency sessions have been convoked only two times in the past.

Judge Impeachment

The Diet has two organs that specialize in judge impeachment matters. The Judge Indictment Committee institutes dismissal suits against judges, and the Judge Impeachment Court tries judges against whom removal proceedings have been initiated. Both organs are composed of Members of the two Houses.

Secretariat and Legislative Bureau

Each House has a Secretariat which conducts the clerical affairs of the House. Within the Secretariat, some staff conduct research necessary for Committee activities under the direction of the Committee Chairmen. Each House also has a Legislative Bureau to assist Members in drafting bills.