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THE POCKET VETO CASE *

* The docket title of this case is The Okanogan, Methow, San Poelis (or San Poil), Nespelem, Colville, and Lake Indian Tribes or Bands of the State of Washington v. United States.

No. 565

SUPREME COURT OF THE UNITED STATES

279 U.S. 655; 49 S. Ct. 463; 73 L. Ed. 894; 1929 U.S. LEXIS 364; 64 A.L.R. 1434

March 11, 1929, Argued
May 27, 1929, Decided

PRIOR HISTORY: CERTIORARI TO THE COURT OF CLAIMS.

CERTIORARI, 278 U.S. 597, to review a judgment of the Court of Claims dismissing a petition upon the ground that a bill passed by Congress, upon which the jurisdiction was dependent, had not become a law.

DISPOSITION: 66 Ct. Cls. 26, affirmed.

CASE SUMMARY:

PROCEDURAL POSTURE: Petitioners, various Indian tribes, obtained a writ of certiorari to the Court of Claims to review a judgment dismissing their petition upon the ground that a bill passed by Congress, upon which the jurisdiction was dependent, had not become a law. Respondent was the United States.

OVERVIEW: The Indian tribes predicated their claims upon a bill that was presented to the President, but which he did not sign. The Indians argued that U.S. Const. art. I, § 7 was the basis for finding that the bill became law. However, the Court determined that Congress, by its adjournment, prevented the President from returning the bill within 10 days after it had been presented to him. The Court held that the adjournment of the first session of the 69th Congress on July 3, 1926, prevented the President, within the meaning of the constitutional provision, from returning Senate Bill No. 3185 within 10 days, Sundays excepted, after it had been presented to him. As a result, the bill did not become law. The President neither signed the bill nor returned it to the Senate, and it was not published as a law. It was conceded that the President was necessarily prevented from returning a bill by a final adjournment of the Congress, since such adjournment terminated the legislative existence of the Congress and made it impossible to return the bill to either House. An interim adjournment at the end of the first session likewise prevented the President from returning it to such House.

OUTCOME: The court affirmed the judgment.

CORE TERMS: session, adjournment, originated, returning, constitutional provisions, sitting, excepted, approve, reconsideration, disapprove, reconsider, message, calendar, prescribed time, interim, amicus curiae, adjourned, resumes, disapproved, acquiesced, expired, adjourn, quorum, usage, veto, delivery, specified time, disapproval, proceeded, constitutional mandate

LexisNexis(R) Headnotes

Constitutional Law > Congressional Duties & Powers > Presentment & Veto

Constitutional Law > The Presidency > General Overview

Governments > Legislation > Enactment

[HN1] See U.S. Const. art. I, § 7, cl. 2.

Constitutional Law > Congressional Duties & Powers > Presentment & Veto

Constitutional Law > The Presidency > General Overview

Governments > Legislation > Enactment

[HN2] See U.S. Const. art. I, § 7, cl. 3.

Constitutional Law > Congressional Duties & Powers > Presentment & Veto

Constitutional Law > The Presidency > General Overview

Governments > Legislation > Enactment

[HN3] The U.S. Constitution in giving the President a qualified negative over legislation -- commonly called a veto -- entrusts him with an authority and imposes upon him an obligation that are of the highest importance, in the execution of which it is made his duty not only to sign bills that he approves in order that they may become law, but to return bills that he disapproves, with his objections, in order that they may be reconsidered by Congress. The faithful and effective exercise of this momentous duty necessarily requires time in which the President may carefully examine and consider a bill and determine, after due deliberation, whether he should approve or disapprove it, and if he disapproves it, formulate his objections for the consideration of Congress. To that end a specified time is given, after the bill has been presented to him, in which he may examine its provisions and either approve it or return it, not approved, for reconsideration. The power thus conferred upon the President cannot be narrowed or cut down by Congress, nor the time within which it is to be exercised lessened, directly or indirectly.

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[HN4] It is just as essential a part of the constitutional provisions, guarding against ill-considered and unwise legislation, that the President, on his part, should have the full time allowed him for determining whether he should approve or disapprove a bill, and if disapproved, for adequately formulating the objections that should be considered by Congress, as it is that Congress, on its part, should have an opportunity to re-pass the bill over his objections.

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Governments > Federal Government > U.S. Congress

[HN5] It will frequently happen, especially when many bills are presented to the President near the close of a session, some of which are complicated or deal with questions of great moment, that when Congress adjourns before the time allowed for his consideration and action has expired, he will not have been able to determine whether some of them should be approved or disapproved, or, if disapproved, to formulate adequately the objections which should receive the consideration of Congress. And it is plain that when the adjournment of Congress prevents the return of a bill within the allotted time, the failure of the bill to become a law cannot properly be ascribed to the disapproval of the President -- who presumably would have returned it before the adjournment if there had been sufficient time in which to complete his consideration and take such action -- but is attributable solely to the action of Congress in adjourning before the time allowed the President for returning the bill had expired. If by its action, after the presentation of a bill to the President during the time given him by the Constitution for an examination of its provisions and for approving it by his signature, Congress puts it out of his power to return it, not approved, within that time to the House in which it originated, then the bill falls, and does not become a law.

Constitutional Law > Congressional Duties & Powers > Presentment & Veto

***Constitutional Law > The Presidency > General Overview
Governments > Legislation > Enactment***

[HN6] The words used in the U.S. Constitution are to be taken in their natural and obvious sense and are to be given the meaning they have in common use unless there are very strong reasons to the contrary. The word "days," when not qualified, means in ordinary and common usage calendar days. This is obviously the meaning in which it is used in U.S. Const. art. I, § 7, and is emphasized by the fact that "Sundays" are excepted. There is nothing whatever to justify changing this meaning by inserting the word "legislative" as a qualifying adjective. And no President or Congress has ever suggested that the President has 10 "legislative days" in which to consider and return a bill, or proceeded upon that theory.

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Constitutional Law > The Presidency > General Overview
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[HN7] Under U.S. Const. art. I, § 7 the determinative question in reference to an "adjournment" is not whether it is a final adjournment of Congress or an interim adjournment, such as an adjournment of the first session, but whether it is one that "prevents" the President from returning the bill to the House in which it originated within the time allowed. It is clear that since the President may return a bill at any time within the allotted period, he is prevented from returning it, within the meaning of the constitutional provision, if by reason of the adjournment it is impossible for him to return it to the House in which it originated on the last day of that period. It is also conceded that the President is necessarily prevented from returning a bill by a final adjournment of the Congress, since such adjournment terminates the legislative existence of the Congress and makes it impossible to return the bill to either House.

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[HN8] U.S. Const. art. I, § 7, cl. 2, specifically provides that if the President does not approve a bill he shall return it, with his objections to that House in which it shall have originated, who shall enter the objections at large on their journal, and proceed to reconsider it. That is, it provides in the same phrase and with no change in definition, that the "House" to which the bill is to be returned is that which is to enter the objections on its journal and proceed to reconsider the bill. The "House" to which the bill is to be returned is the House in session.

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[HN9] Since under U.S. Const. art. I, § 7, a bill is to be returned to the same "House," and none other, that is to enter the President's objections on its journal and proceed to reconsider the bill -- there being only one and the same reference to such House -- it follows that under the constitutional mandate it is to be returned to the "House" when sitting in an organized capacity for the transaction of business, and having authority to receive the return, enter the President's objections on its journal, and proceed to reconsider the bill; and that no return can be made to the House when it is not in session as a collective body and its members are dispersed. This expression, a "House," or "each House," is several times employed in the Constitution with reference to the faculties and powers of the two chambers respectively, and it always means, when so used, the constitutional quorum, assembled for the transaction of business, and capable of transacting business. This same expression was employed by the committee when they provided for the mode in which a bill, once rejected by the president, should be again brought before the legislative bodies. They directed it to be returned to that House in which it shall have originated -- that is to say, to a constitutional quorum, a majority of which passed it in the first instance.

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[HN10] The journal is the record that each House is required to keep of its own proceedings. U.S. Const. art. I, § 5, cl. 3.

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[HN11] In order to enable the President to return a bill the Houses should be in session; and if by their own act they see fit to adjourn and deprive him of the opportunity to return the bill, with his objection, and are not present themselves to receive and record these objections and to act thereon, the bill can not become a law unless 10 days shall have expired during which the President will have had the opportunity thus to return it. There is no suggestion that he may return it to the Speaker, or Clerk, or any officer of the House; but the return must be made to the House as an organized body.

Constitutional Law > The Judiciary > Case or Controversy > Constitutional Questions > General Overview

[HN12] Long settled and established practice is a consideration of great weight in a proper interpretation of certain constitutional provisions. A practice of at least 20 years duration on the part of the executive department, acquiesced in by the legislative department, while not absolutely binding on the judicial department, is entitled to great regard in determining the true construction of a constitutional provision the phraseology of which is in any respect of doubtful meaning.

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[HN13] The adjournment of the first session of the 69th Congress on July 3, 1926, prevented the President, within the meaning of U.S. Const. art. I, § 7, from returning Senate Bill No. 3185 within 10 days, Sundays excepted, after it had been presented to him, and it did not become a law.

LAWYERS' EDITION HEADNOTES:

[***LEdHN1]

pocket veto. --

Headnote:[1]

A bill passed by Congress does not become a law where the President is prevented from returning it to the House in which it originated by an adjournment terminating the session before the expiration of ten calendar days (Sundays excepted) after it has been presented to him.

[***LEdHN2]

CONSTITUTIONAL LAW, §25

construction -- natural meaning of words. --

Headnote:[2]

The words used in the Federal Constitution are to be taken in their natural and obvious sense, and are to be given the meaning they have in common use, unless there are very strong reasons to the contrary.

[***LEdHN3]

meaning of "days." --

Headnote:[3]

The word "days," when not qualified, means in ordinary and common usage calendar days.

[***LEdHN4]

disapproval by President -- time for return to Congress. --

Headnote:[4]

The ten days allowed by 7, art. 1, of the Federal Constitution for the consideration by the President of a bill passed by Congress and the formulation of his objections thereto, are calendar days, and not days during which Congress is in legislative session.

[***LEdHN5]

CONSTITUTIONAL LAW, §22

construction -- established usage. --

Headnote:[5]

Long settled and established practice is a consideration of great weight in interpreting constitutional provisions relating to the machinery of government.

SYLLABUS

1. Under the second clause in § 7 of Article I of the Constitution, a bill which is passed by both Houses of Congress during the first regular session of a particular Congress and presented to the President less than ten days (Sundays excepted) before the adjournment of that session, but is neither signed by the President nor returned by him to the House in which it originated, does not become a law. P. 672.
2. The Constitution in giving the President a qualified negative over legislation -- commonly called a veto -- entrusts him with an authority and imposes upon him an obligation that are of the highest importance, in the execution of which it is made his duty not only to sign bills that he approves in order that they may become law, but to return bills that he disapproves, with his objections, in order that they may be reconsidered by Congress. P. 677.
3. The faithful and effective exercise of this duty necessarily requires time in which the President may carefully examine and consider a bill and determine, after due deliberation, whether he should approve or disapprove it, and if he disapproves it, formulate his objections for the consideration of Congress. To that end a specified time is given, after the bill has been presented to him, in which he may examine its provisions and either approve it or return it, not approved, for reconsideration. P. 677.
4. The power thus conferred upon the President cannot be narrowed or cut down by Congress, nor the time within which it is to be exercised lessened, directly or indirectly. P. 677.
5. It is just as essential a part of the constitutional provisions, guarding against ill-considered and unwise legislation, that the President, on his part, should have the full time allowed him for determining whether he should approve or disapprove a bill, and if disapproved, for adequately formulating the objections that should be considered by Congress, as it is that Congress, on its part, should have an opportunity to re-pass the bill over his objections. P. 678.
6. When the adjournment of Congress prevents the return of a bill within the allotted time, the failure of the bill to

become a law cannot properly be ascribed to the disapproval of the President -- who presumably would have returned it before the adjournment if there had been sufficient time in which to complete his consideration and take such action -- but is attributable solely to the action of Congress in adjourning before the time allowed the President for returning the bill had expired. P. 678.

7. The phrase "within ten days (Sundays excepted)" in the clause of the Constitution here in question, refers not to legislative days, but to calendar days. P. 679.

8. The term "adjournment," as used in this constitutional provision, is not limited to the final adjournment of the Congress. P. 680.

9. The determinative question in reference to an "adjournment" is not whether it is a final adjournment of Congress or an interim adjournment, such as an adjournment of the first session, but whether it is one that "prevents" the President from returning the bill to the House in which it originated within the time allowed. P. 680.

10. An interim adjournment of Congress at the end of the first session, as the result of which, although the legislative existence of the House in which the bill originated has not been terminated, it is not in session on the last day of the period allowed the President for returning the bill, prevents him from returning it to such House. P. 681.

11. The "House" to which the bill is to be returned is a House in session -- sitting in an organized capacity for the transaction of business, and having authority to receive the return, enter the President's objections on its journal, and proceed to reconsider the bill; and no return can be made to the House when it is not in session as a collective body and its members are dispersed. P. 682.

12. This accords with the long established practice of both Houses of Congress to receive messages from the President while they are in session. P. 683.

13. There is no substantial basis for the suggestion that, although the House in which the bill originated be not in session, the bill may nevertheless be returned, consistently with the constitutional mandate, by delivering it, with the President's objections, to an officer or agent of the House, for subsequent delivery to the House when it resumes its sittings at the next session, with the same force and effect as if the bill had been returned to the House on the day when it was delivered to such officer or agent. P. 683.

14. The above construction is confirmed by the practical construction given to this provision of the Constitution by the Presidents through a long course of years, and in which Congress has acquiesced. P. 688.

COUNSEL: Mr. William S. Lewis, with whom Messrs. A. R. Serven and John G. Carter were on the brief, for petitioners.

Each Congress is a single entity and its sessions have practical unity.

The ten days for the consideration and return of the bill may be construed as ten "legislative" days, and under such construction return may be made when the Congress resumes active legislative sittings after adjournment. Opinion of the Justices, 3 Mass. 567; State v. Joseph, 175 Ala. 579; State v. Norwalk, 77 Conn. 258.

The distinction between all adjournments of Congress (other than final adjournment) is one of duration and nomenclature only.

The only adjournment that will prevent the return of the bill with the President's objections, is such adjournment as wholly defeats the revisionary intent and purpose of the veto clause.

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The language of the New York constitution (1777), which was the model for the exception clause, reads: "Unless the legislature shall, by their adjournment, render a return of the bill within ten days impracticable," and the idea of those who framed and adopted the Federal Constitution was clearly such an adjournment as made any return of the bill for revision impracticable and wholly futile. And see Opinion of the Justices, 3 Mass. 567.

While return is to be made to a particular House; the adjournment referred to is not the adjournment of a particular House; it is an adjournment of "the Congress" -- the whole law-making and legislative power of the country. A separate recess of but one House alone, taken by that House in which the bill originated, is not within the plain meaning or strict construction of the language.

The Executive must return the bill during the tenth day, although "that House" is not sitting, the Congress being yet in session. If he cannot, it is equivalent to saying that he is bound to return the bill in a lesser period, and if he fail, the bill becomes a law within ten days despite his objections.

An adjournment by "that House" for the remainder of the tenth day, not coming within the language of the exception clause and "the Congress" being still in existence, then the bill must be constructively returned to that House, during its temporary recess, by delivery to the presiding or recording officers thereof during the remainder of the tenth day, else the bill becomes a law. All that is required of such officers is that they receive and care for the same in like manner as the other records of "that House," to be taken up with its other unfinished business when that House again resumes its active legislative sittings.

The legislative power is solely in Congress. The Executive, under the veto provisions, is simply made an instrumentality for the revision of hasty or ill-considered enactments. It was never the intention that the President's inaction should defeat legislation. It was to guard against that very abuse that the ten day clause was inserted, and the single exception is limited to an act of the Congress itself defeating the revisionary purpose of the whole veto clause and any return of the bill and objections by a final adjournment of the Congress within the allotted ten days. The effect is to leave the bill not a law, but as unfinished business which dies with the final adjournment of the Congress.

If return may be made to "that House" during its temporary recess, then the same return may be made and the whole object and purpose of "the return" may still be accomplished, though "the Congress" be in adjournment for a day, or over a holiday, or over the Christmas holidays, or for the summer recess. Within the spirit and intent of the instrument, inability to make return, on account of adjournment of the Congress, should be co-existent with inability of the Congress thereafter to consider the objections.

The presentation of bills to the President, and his return of the same for revision, are simply a process in legislative procedure like the handling of bills in committee, or in conference, or by the separate Houses. It is not necessary that each House be actually sitting in active legislative session during every hour or day that the other House sits, or while its committees function, or while the Executive considers its legislation.

A concession that the exception clause does not apply to adjournment of "that House" alone, the Congress being yet in session, and that, in such case, return must yet be made to "that House" in its temporary recess for the remainder of the day, or for several days, as the case may be, is a concession that a like return may be made to "that House" wherein the bill originated, during the concurrent adjournment of the other House or of the Congress; and is a concession that the only adjournment which can prevent the President's return of the bill is the final adjournment of the Congress.

That a return to and receipt by a journal clerk of the House is a sufficient return, see *United States v. Allen*, 36 Fed. 174-6. In actual practice bills are often presented to the President by delivery to his secretary or executive clerk, who receipts for the same on behalf of the President.

The courts of last resort of several States, where the same question of construction has been raised as to similar or

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identical language in state constitutions, have been unanimous in holding that the adjournment contemplated in the quoted clause of the constitution is a final adjournment. Citing *Wolfe v. McCaull*, 76 Va. 876, and other cases which appear in the argument of Mr. Sumners, *infra*.

Absolute veto power, based upon the return of a bill, is wholly unknown under any constitution, state or federal, and cannot be upheld without doing violence to the Constitution. *The Federalist*, No. 73; *Madison Papers*, *passim*.

Executive precedents involving exercise of and asserted right of pocket-veto power contrary to the policy and language of the Constitution and in direct derogation of other rights and powers conferred thereby, are not authority for the construction of the language here under consideration. *Union Pacific R. Co. v. United States*, 10 Ct. Cls. 548; *s. c.* 91 U.S. 72; *Story*, *The Constitution*, § 407; *Cooley*, *Constitutional Law*, pp. 85, 86; *Pingree v. Auditor*, 120 Mich. 95; *State v. Weightson*, 56 N. J. L. 128; *State v. Veacon*, 66 Ohio St. 491; *Harrison v. Willis*, 7 Heisch. (Penna.) 35; *McPherson v. Secretary*, 92 Mich. 377; *Henry v. Cherry*, 30 R. I. 13; *Waite v. Macey*, 246 U.S. 606; *United States v. United Verde Copper Co.*, 196 U.S. 207; *Morrill v. Jones*, 106 U.S. 466; *United States v. Merriam*, 263 U.S. 187.

Executive precedents of asserted inability to exercise revisionary power over or to return legislation presented within ten days of the temporary recess of a Congress, arose from a misconception of the nature of a Congress, and of the character of its sittings, and of the effect of its temporary adjournments.

The executive precedents are not unanimous.

Attorney General Mitchell, with whom Mr. Robert P. Reeder, Attorney in the Department of Justice, was on the brief, for the United States.

The only exception is of Sundays, and there is no basis for inserting the word "legislative" after the word "ten." Besides, an adjournment of Congress would not prevent return within the specified time if the ten days mean ten days in which Congress is in session. No President has ever acted on the assumption that he had ten legislative days to consider a bill.

It is clear that the clause "unless the Congress by their Adjournment prevent its Return" means a return within ten days, Sundays excepted. It follows that the return by the President must be made within ten calendar days, Sundays excepted, after the bill is presented to him. A bill returned without his approval to a subsequent session commencing more than ten days after presentation of the bill to the President, is not a return within ten days. The President has ten days, Sundays excepted, after the bill shall have been presented to him in which to consider it, and if on the tenth day he is ready to return it without his approval, and is unable to return it because of an adjournment, it does not become a law. If Congress has adjourned, how is a bill to be returned?

Returning it to an officer of either House after adjournment of Congress is not returning the bill to Congress. There has never been any statute authorizing any officer of either House to receive bills returned by the President during adjournments, and there is no rule to that effect in either House. It has been the universal practice of the Houses of Congress to receive messages from the President, or messages from one House to the other, only while in session. *Hinds' Precedents*, Vol. 5, c. CXXXVIII. The rules of each House contemplate that messages from the President or from one House to the other shall be received while the House to which the message is directed is in session; but a quorum need not be present. See Rule XL, House of Representatives; Rule XXVIII, Standing Rules of the Senate; *Jefferson's Manual*, XLVII; *Curtis, Const. Hist.*, Vol. I, p. 486, footnote.

In 1868 the Judiciary Committee of the Senate reported a bill to authorize the President to return bills to the Secretary of the Senate or the Clerk of the House, as the case might be, and to authorize the Secretary or the Clerk to endorse on a bill the date of its receipt and hold it until the House reassembled. That bill was not passed. We can not improve on the argument then made against it. *Cong. Globe*, 40th Cong., 2d Sess., Pt. 2, pp. 1372, 1373, 1405; *id.*, p. 1941.

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There is no basis in the Constitution for the contention that the word "adjournment" relates only to an adjournment of a final session. That the word "adjournment" has no such narrow meaning is shown by the fourth clause in § 5 of Article I.

In the 69th Congress, 2d Session, the Judiciary Committee of the House made a report (House Rep. No. 2054, 2d Session) in which it expressed the conclusion that a bill became a law, although there was a final adjournment on July 3, 1926, of the first session of the 69th Congress, and the President did not approve the bill nor did he disapprove it and return it to the House in which it originated, or make any return to either House. On the strength of that report, and adopting it as the law, the Chairman of the Committee of the Whole, considering the statute to have become law, overruled a point of order made against the inclusion in an appropriation bill of an appropriation to provide funds to carry the statute into effect. Cong. Rec., Vol. 68, Part 5, pp. 4932, 4937.

We feel confident that if there had been presented to the Committee the constitutional difficulties in the way of returning a bill to a House not in session, and the overwhelming practical construction of the Constitution afterwards disclosed, in House Doc. 493, the Committee's conclusion would have been the other way. The House of Representatives has itself always used the word "adjournment" as describing the adjournment taken at the end of a session as well as the final adjournment of a Congress. Rule XXVI.

The only decision of this Court having any bearing on this subject is *La Abra Silver Mining Co. v. United States*, 175 U.S. 423.

It is probable that the logic of our position leads to the conclusion that there is no distinction between an adjournment and a "recess."

The practical construction is controlling, and it completely sustains the respondent's position. See House Doc. No. 493, 70th Cong., 2d Session, showing the results of an exhaustive research of governmental archives for the purpose of disclosing the practical construction placed upon the constitutional provisions here involved.

With the exception of the action of the House to which we have referred, occurring in the 69th Congress, we have been unable to find any case where either House of Congress has ever proceeded on the theory that a bill so pocketed had become a law.

No such bill has ever been spread on the statute books, or afterwards recognized as law. In some cases new legislation has been enacted on the subject. In a case like this, practical construction is controlling. *Myers v. United States*, 272 U.S. 52.

To hold with petitioners in this case would be to resurrect 120 bills, pocketed, as was this one, at various dates since the adoption of the Constitution and place them on the statute books.

Decisions of state courts furnish little aid in the decision of this case. See Massachusetts constitution, 1780, c. 1, § 1; Art. II; *Opinion of the Justices*, 3 Mass. 567; *The Soldiers' Voting Bill*, 45 N. H. 607; *Hequembourg v. Dunkirk*, 49 Hun. (N. Y.) 550; *Corwin v. Comptroller General*, 6 S. C. 390; *Miller v. Hurford*, 11 Neb. 377; *People v. Hatch*, 33 Ill. 9; *State v. South Norwalk*, 77 Conn. 257; *State v. Joseph*, 175 Ala. 579; *Johnson City v. Eastern Electric Co.*, 133 Tenn. 632.

Some of the state courts have held that when a legislature is not in session, a bill may be returned to officers of the legislature. *The Soldiers' Voting Bill*, supra; *Corwin v. Comptroller General*, supra; *Johnson City v. Eastern Electric Co.*, supra. See also *Harpending v. Haight*, 39 Cal. 189; *Hequembourg v. Dunkirk*, supra.

Other courts have held that a bill may be returned only when the legislature is in session. *People v. Hatch*, supra; *State*

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v. South Norwalk, supra; State v. Joseph, supra; People v. Bowen, 21 N. Y. 517; 30 Barbour 24. Cf. United States v. Allen, 36 Fed. 174; Tuttle v. Boston, 215 Mass. 57.

In the state decisions there is no preponderance of opinion in favor of the position that a bill may be returned to officers of the legislature when the legislature itself is not in session.

Mr. Hatton W. Sumners, as amicus curiae, on behalf of the Committee on the Judiciary of the House of Representatives, by special leave of Court.

To have the President examine bills and indicate his opinion was deemed important, but not so important as delay beyond the ten days specified in the Constitution.

The construction insisted upon by the Government, in effect, would eliminate the word "prevent." "Prevent" is the heart and substance of the provision. Construed as not limiting delivery of a bill with the President's objections to the House of its origin when in actual session, the provision under consideration harmonizes with and safeguards, and makes workable in every situation, the general plan of the Constitution, leaving to both the President and to the legislative bodies an opportunity to utilize appropriate and necessary agencies in the discharge of their respective duties with regard to bills, and to proceed without friction or uncertainty, and with the minimum of interference with the discharge of their general duties.

If the words "unless the Congress by their adjournment prevent its return" had not been incorporated, the ordinary rules of construction would probably have excused the President from returning a bill to the House of its origin within the time fixed if prevented from so doing, not only by this act specified, but by any act of the Congress or of that House. These words become, therefore, under the ordinary rules of construction, not words of addition, but words of limitation, and of exclusion.

If delivery of the bill with the President's objections can only be made to the House of its origin in actual session, when Congress is in session, the President is limited where he ought not to be limited, and the Congress is limited where it ought not to be limited, in each instance interfering with the discharge of their constitutional duties under the general plan. To say that Congress by any act other than final adjournment of the Congress may prevent the delivery of a bill, and thereby without a reconsideration make law an act to which the President objects, would be utterly unreasonable. But under the construction invoked to support the pocket veto, if the President's messenger should arrive after the adjournment of the House in which the bill had originated, upon the last of the ten days, the other House being still in session, the bill could not be returned, and yet, the Congress not being adjourned, the bill would become a law contrary to the general plan. A situation would develop under which the bill would become a law despite the President's objections and without the reconsideration of the Houses of Congress, notwithstanding the fact that the President had formulated his objections and within the limit of time fixed by the Constitution had attempted to return the bill to the House of its origin.

There is no language in this provision, nor any recognized rule of construction which, -- while permitting the Congress in the first instance to send bills to the President by a messenger, as is done without question, and the President to receive such bills through an appropriate agent, -- even though he himself be absent from his office, and even though the Constitution declares "he," the President, shall return it, -- which would prevent the House of origin from receiving these same bills through a proper agent if that House were engaged in other business or temporarily absent from their chambers. It is against all reason and every recognized rule of construction, when the avoidance of unnecessary delay is so clearly manifest in the provision sought to be construed, that a construction should be superimposed which would make for delay regardless of every desire and of every effort of the President and of the Congress in the situation indicated.

Why, after the States by a unanimous vote had refused to vest the President with an absolute veto, adopt a construction

of this provision contrary to its language which would give to the President, under certain circumstances, an absolute veto in effect, when there is a rule of construction, recognized alike by the courts and common sense, which would avoid these consequences?

In view of the provision directing the writing and recording of the President's objections to a bill, a construction can not be maintained which would permit the President during the life of a Congress to kill a bill by his silence and thus keep his reasons and his motives for so doing from the Congress and from the country.

The sole exception in the provision which prevents a bill from becoming law when the President refuses to take any action on it for ten days, is where the Congress prevents, that is to say renders impossible, its return by their adjournment. There is but one adjournment, the final adjournment, which marks the death and dissolution of a Congress, that can have that effect.

Where choice may be had between two constructions, that is to be adopted which is most in harmony with the whole instrument. And it is the substantive and not the adjective provisions which control. It was the act of preventing delivery, of making delivery impossible, and its consequence, to which the Convention gave consideration, and not the act of adjournment per se. The Convention was not engaged in fixing forms of procedure, or in placing upon future generations details of procedure, which might be suited to the present, but not to future conditions.

The construction sustaining the pocket veto, introduces another anomaly. It unnecessarily gives to the President a greater power over bills presented to him near the end of a session of Congress, or near temporary adjournment during a session, than at other times.

Unnecessary retention of bills by the President is not in harmony with the intent of the Constitution. If unnecessary detention be deliberate, for the purpose of denying to Congress an opportunity to pass the bill notwithstanding the President's objections, it is an abuse of discretion amounting to usurpation.

It is not in keeping with the public interest that any individual, however high his station, should have the sole power by action or inaction to kill important legislation and hide his reasons under a blanket of secrecy. Every reasonable construction should be invoked to minimize such a possibility. Nothing is more calculated to prevent unwarranted suspicion, and to promote efficiency and integrity in official conduct, than publicity given to the reasons for official action.

The President is commanded to put his reasons in writing, and the House to which the return is made is commanded to record those reasons, in their entirety, upon their permanent record books.

There is no inherent necessity for bills to die short of final adjournment.

The tendency of the practice under the claim of pocket veto power is to give the President an absolute veto. When the Constitution was framed, in all the world where enlightened judgment had impressed itself, this sort of power had been excluded. Today such a power is not to be found in exercise in the constitution of any of the nations whose culture and governmental institutions are akin to ours. Actual tests have convinced statesmen everywhere that it has no place in the structure of democratic government.

The Houses of Congress have officers and agents of great power and responsibility who act in their stead, and who are constantly in their places when the Houses are in session, and when they are not in session. From the organization of a Congress until the end of its existence this is true. There is nothing in the Constitution which denies the right to the use of these agents in effecting the return of objected-to bills. Such a right is acknowledged, and is practiced everywhere in governments, in business, and in all human relationships. A rule of construction or of official action which would require in every instance the persons who constitute the Houses of Congress to be in formal session in order to receive

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bills from the President, would also require the person who is President personally to return such bills. And the Congress would be required to go in a body to the President (because the command is clearly to the Congress) to present each bill, not to some appropriate agent of the President, but to the President in person. And it would become the duty of the President, under such construction, regardless of the press of important duties, to receive the bill in person.

The delivery of the message to the Speaker by a messenger is all the President does as compliance with the provision of the Constitution that he (the President) shall return the bill to that House in which the same shall have originated. The receipt by the Speaker is correctly regarded as receipt by the House, but only upon the theory that he is an appropriate agent of the House to receive it. It is in a sealed envelope addressed to the Speaker and delivered to the Speaker. That ends the President's contact with the matter. He has no control over what the Speaker may do with the bill and message. The President's messenger goes back to the White House, leaving the message with the Speaker. If delivery to the Speaker when Congress is in session is delivery to the House, delivery to the Speaker when the House is in adjournment would be delivery to the House.

Upon an adjournment of Congress, committees, under a rule of the House, deliver all unfinished bills and other documents to the Clerk to be preserved by him for the House until its reconvening. He is the keeper of all its archives. He is entrusted with the enrolling of all bills and other legislative action. He certifies the bills. Upon his selection by the House his name is sent to the President so that the President may recognize him as their agent, and give due weight to acts certified by him. The Clerk is the disbursing officer of the contingent fund, salaries of the House employees, and of the Members' secretaries. He makes up the roll of the incoming House, passing in the first instance upon the regularity of credentials, and presides over the meeting of the Members of the incoming House before and during the election of a Speaker. Can it be questioned that this high officer of the House, from whose office the identical bill was enrolled and certified on behalf of the House, is an appropriate agency for the receipt of such returned bill and objections?

The right of constructive delivery is necessary not only to facilitate legislative procedure, prevent delay, and to hold the President's powers within the limits imposed by the Constitution, but it is also necessary in order to hold the Congress within proper bounds by preventing bills to which the President may object from becoming law without reconsideration by the Congress. The adjournment of a House for not more than three days, without the consent of the other House, is not an adjournment of Congress. If the Senate should be in executive session, on a matter of the highest public importance, refusing to be interrupted, on the last day of the period in which return may be made, that would not even be an adjournment of one House of the Congress; and yet return could not be made if constructive delivery is not permitted.

The pocket veto is of gradual development and unknown in the early history of the Government. To permit practices, especially practices originating out of a misconception, to fasten erroneous interpretations upon our written Constitution, would be a fatal policy. It would seem a sound doctrine that no generation, or number of generations, by a disregard of the plan of the Constitution, or confusion as to it, can deprive those who come after them of the full benefit of its provisions. The practical difficulty of inaugurating a reverse practice once it is recognized that an earlier practice has crystallized itself into a controlling constitutional construction, warns with compelling persuasion against such a recognition. It would seem a sound proposition that in the construction of a written Constitution it should never be held that practice can effect that which practice cannot change. These considerations bear with determinative force against any suggestion on the part of the Government that the length of time during which the pocket veto has been practiced has a bearing upon the constitutionality of the pocket veto.

Mr. Sumners cited the following cases in support of his position: *Opinion of the Justices*, 3 Mass. 567; *Soldiers' Voting Bill*, 45 N. H. 607; *Harpending v. Height*, 39 Cal. 189; *Corwin v. Comptroller*, 6 S. C. 390; *Miller v. Murford*, 11 Neb. 377; *Wolf v. McCaull*, 76 Va. 876; *Hequembourg v. Dunkirk*, 49 Hun. (N. Y.) 550; *Crawford v. Summerset*, 73 Md. 105; *State v. Joseph*, 175 Ala. 579; *Tuttle v. Boston*, 215 Mass. 57; *Johnson City v. Electric Co.*, 133 Tenn. 637.

JUDGES: Taft, Holmes, Van Devanter, McReynolds, Brandeis, Sutherland, Butler, Sanford, Stone

OPINION BY: SANFORD

OPINION

[*672] [**463] [***894] MR. JUSTICE SANFORD delivered the opinion of the Court.

This case presents the question whether, [***895] under the second clause in Section 7 of Article I of the Constitution of the United States, a bill which is passed by both Houses of Congress [**464] during the first regular session of a particular Congress and presented to the President less than ten days (Sundays excepted) before the adjournment of that session, but is neither signed by the President nor returned by him to the House in which it originated, becomes a law in like manner as if he had signed it.

At the first session of the 69th Congress Senate Bill No. 3185, entitled "An Act authorizing certain Indian tribes and bands, or any of them, residing in the State of Washington, to present their claims to the Court of Claims," having been passed by both Houses of Congress and duly authenticated, was presented to the President on June 24, 1926. On July 3 the first session of the 69th Congress was adjourned, under a house concurrent resolution.¹ The Congress was not again in session until the commencement of the second session on the first Monday in December.² And neither House of Congress was in session on July 6 -- the tenth day after the bill had been presented to the President (Sundays excepted).

¹ 67 Cong. Rec., pt. 11, pp. 12770, 12885, 13009, 13018, 13100. By the terms of this resolution the House of Representatives adjourned *sine die*; and the Senate adjourned to November 10 -- this being the date to which, sitting as a court of impeachment, it had previously adjourned for the trial of certain articles of impeachment. 67 Cong. Rec., pt. 8, pp. 8725, 8733. And on that date the Senate, sitting as a court of impeachment, met and adjourned *sine die*. 68 Cong. Rec., pt. 1, pp. 3, 4.

That the adjournment on July 3 was in effect an adjournment of the first session of the Congress is not questioned.

² 68 Cong. Rec., pt. 1, p. 7; Constitution, Art. 1, Sec. 4, Cl. 2.

[*673] The President neither signed the bill nor returned it to the Senate. And it was not published as a law.

Taking the position that the bill had become a law without the signature of the President, the Okanogan and other Indian tribes residing in the State of Washington in March, 1927, filed a petition in the Court of Claims setting up certain claims in accordance with the terms of the bill. The United States demurred to the petition. The court sustained the demurrer and dismissed the petition, on the ground that under the provisions of the Constitution the bill had not become a law. 66 C. Cls. 26.

In view of the public importance of the question presented we granted the petitioners a writ of certiorari. 278 U.S. 597. And for like reason, at the request of the Committee on the Judiciary of the House of Representatives, we granted Mr. Summers, a member of that Committee, leave to appear as *amicus curiae*. He has aided us by a comprehensive and forcible presentation of arguments against the conclusion of the court below.

The clause of the Constitution here in question reads as follows: [HN1] "Every Bill which shall have passed the House of Representatives and the Senate, shall, before it become a Law, be presented to the President of the United States; If he approve he shall sign it, but if not he shall return it, with his Objections to that House in which it shall have originated, who shall enter the Objections at large on their Journal, and proceed to reconsider it. If after such Reconsideration two thirds of that House shall agree to pass the Bill, it shall be sent, together with the Objections, to the other House, by which it shall likewise be reconsidered; and if approved by two thirds of that House, it shall become a Law. . . . *If any Bill shall not be returned by the President within ten Days (Sundays excepted) after it shall have been*

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*presented to him, the Same shall be a Law, in like Manner as if he had signed it, [*674] unless the Congress by their Adjournment prevent its Return, in which Case it shall not be a Law."*³

³ The third clause reads as follows: [HN2] "Every Order, Resolution, or Vote to which the Concurrence of the Senate and House of Representatives may be necessary (except on a question of Adjournment) shall be presented to the President of the United States; and before the Same shall take Effect, shall be approved by him, or being disapproved by him, shall be repassed by two thirds of the Senate and House of Representatives, according to the Rules and Limitations prescribed in the Case of a Bill."

[**LEdHR1] [1]The specific question here presented is whether, within the meaning of the last sentence -- which we have italicized -- Congress by the adjournment on July 3 prevented the President from returning the bill within ten days, Sundays excepted, after it had been presented to him. If the adjournment did not prevent him from returning the bill within the prescribed time, it became a law without his signature; but, if the adjournment prevented him from so doing, it did not become a law. This is unquestioned.

In support of the position that the adjournment [***896] did not prevent the President from returning the bill within the prescribed time, counsel for the petitioners and the *amicus curiae* urge that the only "adjournment" which prevents the President from returning a bill within the prescribed time is the final adjournment of the Congress, terminating its legislative existence and making it impossible for the President to return the bill for its reconsideration; and that an adjournment of the first session of the Congress does not prevent the President from returning the bill within the prescribed time since the legislative existence of the Congress is not terminated, and he may within that time return the bill to the House in which it originated, although not then in session, by delivering it, with his objections, to the Secretary, Clerk, or other appropriate agent of that House, to be held by such agent [*675] and presented to the House when the Congress resumes its sitting at the next session -- thereby enabling the Congress to proceed with the reconsideration [**465] of the bill as a part of the unfinished legislative business carried over from the first session. And it is also said, by counsel for the petitioners, that the "ten days" allowed for the return of the bill, may be construed as meaning "legislative days," that is, days on which the Congress is in legislative session, and not calendar days, thereby enabling the President to return the bill within ten days, Sundays excepted, exclusive of all days on which the Congress was not in legislative session, even although, by reason of an adjournment, this period does not expire until after the Congress has resumed its legislative sittings at the second session.

In support of the position that Congress by the adjournment on July 3 prevented the President from returning the bill within the prescribed time, the Attorney General maintains that the word "adjournment" includes an interim adjournment as well as the final adjournment at the end of a Congress; that the words "ten days" mean calendar days, and not legislative days; that the President cannot return a bill with his objections to the House in which it originated except by returning it to the House while in session; that if, by reason of an adjournment taken by Congress within the prescribed time, the House in which the bill originated be not in session on the last of such days and the bill cannot be thus returned, the President is thereby prevented from returning the bill within the prescribed time; and that this view is supported by the practical construction given to the constitutional provision by the President through a long course of years, in which Congress has acquiesced.

No light is thrown on the meaning of the constitutional provision in the proceedings and debates of the Constitutional Convention; and there has been no decision of [*676] this Court dealing directly with its meaning and effect in respect to the precise question here involved. And while we have been cited to various decisions of state courts construing similar provisions in state constitutions, an examination of them discloses such a conflict of opinion -- due in some part to differences in phraseology or their application to the procedure of the state legislatures -- that, viewed as a whole, they furnish no substantial aid in the determination of the question here presented and a detailed consideration of them here would not be helpful. For that reason we shall cite in this opinion only some that seem most apposite and persuasive in their reasoning.

1. It is earnestly insisted by counsel for the petitioners and by the *amicus curiae*, as the underlying basis of their contentions, that since clause 2 gives the President merely a qualified negative over legislation and requires him, if he disapproves a bill, to return it with his objections to the House in which it originated so that Congress may have an opportunity to reconsider it in the light of such objections and pass it by a two-thirds vote of each House, the provision as to the return of a bill within a specified time is to be construed in a manner that will give effect to the reciprocal rights and duties of the President and of Congress and not enable him to defeat a bill of which he disapproves by a silent and "absolute veto," that is, a so-called "pocket veto," which neither discloses his objections nor gives Congress an opportunity to pass the bill over them. This argument involves a misconception of the reciprocal rights and duties of the President and of Congress and of the situation resulting from an adjournment of Congress which prevents the President from returning a bill with his objections within the specified time. This is illustrated in the use of the term "pocket veto," which does not accurately describe the situation, and is misleading in its implications in that it suggests that the [*677] failure of the bill in such case is necessarily due to the disapproval of the President and the intentional withholding of the bill from reconsideration. [HN3] The Constitution in giving the President a qualified negative over legislation -- commonly [***897] called a veto -- entrusts him with an authority and imposes upon him an obligation that are of the highest importance, in the execution of which it is made his duty not only to sign bills that he approves in order that they may become law, but to return bills that he disapproves, with his objections, in order that they may be reconsidered by Congress. The faithful and effective exercise of this momentous duty necessarily requires time in which the President may carefully examine and consider a bill and determine, after due deliberation, whether he should approve or disapprove it, and if he disapproves it, formulate his objections for the consideration of Congress. To that end a specified time is given, after the bill has been presented to him, in which he may examine its provisions and either approve it or return it, not approved, for reconsideration. See *La Abra Silver Mining Co. v. United States*, 175 U.S. 423, 455. ⁴ [**466] The power thus conferred [*678] upon the President cannot be narrowed or cut down by Congress, nor the time within which it is to be exercised lessened, directly or indirectly. ⁵ [HN4] And it is just as essential a part of the constitutional provisions, guarding against ill-considered and unwise legislation, that the President, on his part, should have the full time allowed him for determining whether he should approve or disapprove a bill, and if disapproved, for adequately formulating the objections that should be considered by Congress, as it is that Congress, on its part, should have an opportunity to re-pass the bill over his objections.

⁴ Compare *The People v. Bowen*, 30 Barb. (N. Y.) 24, 32, 34; *Lankford v. County Commrs. of Somerset County*, 73 Md. 105, 110, 111; *Tuttle v. Boston*, 215 Mass. 57, 58, 60; and *The People v. Hatch*, 33 Ill. 9, 129, 135, 136, in which it was aptly said, in a concurring opinion: "The convention which framed our Constitution designed to provide for the enactment and enforcement of salutary laws in the mode best calculated to promote the general welfare. They supposed, as one of the means of best attaining this end, that the executive of the State should not only be intrusted with the enforcement of all laws, but should also be vested with a voice in their adoption. In distributing the powers of government, they could, if they had chosen to do so, have authorized the general assembly to adopt laws independent of all executive action. But to prevent the evils of hasty, ill considered legislation, they conferred upon the governor the power to arrest the passage of a bill until his objections could be heard, and the bill be again considered and adopted. As the best means of accomplishing this, and of preventing the adoption of injurious measures, they gave to the governor ten days, exclusive of Sundays, in which to bestow that careful examination and consideration, so essentially necessary to determine the effects and consequences likely to flow from the adoption of a new measure. This is the duty imposed, and it is one that must be performed. And the time allowed for the purpose cannot be abridged, or the provision thwarted, by either accident or design. The use of the whole time given to the governor must be allowed. The Constitution has spoken and it must be obeyed."

⁵ Compare *Tuttle v. Boston*, *supra*, 60; *The People v. Hatch*, *supra*, 136.

[HN5] It will frequently happen -- especially when many bills are presented to the President near the close of a session, some of which are complicated or deal with questions of great moment -- that when Congress adjourns before the time allowed for his consideration and action has expired, he will not have been able to determine whether some of them should be approved or disapproved, or, if disapproved, to formulate adequately the objections which should receive the consideration of Congress. And it is plain that when the adjournment of Congress prevents the return of a bill within the allotted time, the failure of the bill to become a law cannot properly be ascribed to the disapproval of the President --

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who presumably would have returned it before the adjournment if there had been sufficient time in which to complete his consideration and [*679] take such action -- but is attributable solely to the action of Congress in adjourning before the time allowed the President for returning the bill had expired. Thus, in *La Abra Silver Mining Co. v. United States*, *supra*, 454, this Court said that "if by its action, after the presentation of a bill to the President during the time given him by the Constitution for an examination of its provisions and for approving it by his signature, Congress puts it out of his power to return it, not approved, within that time to the House in which it originated, then the bill falls, and does not become a law." ⁶

⁶ And if Congress so desires the same bill may be re-introduced and passed when Congress resumes its session, and after receiving the due consideration of the President, if returned with his objections, may be then passed by the requisite vote in both Houses.

[***898] [***LEdHR2] [2] [***LEdHR3] [3] [***LEdHR4] [4]2. There is plainly no warrant for adopting the suggestion of counsel for the petitioners -- which is not urged by the *amicus curiae* -- that the phrase "within ten Days (Sundays excepted)," may be construed as meaning, not calendar days, but "legislative days," that is, days during which Congress is in legislative session -- thereby excluding all calendar days which are not also legislative days from the computation of the period allowed the President for returning a bill. [HN6] The words used in the Constitution are to be taken in their natural and obvious sense, *Martin v. Hunter's Lessee*, 1 Wheat. 304, 326, and are to be given the meaning they have in common use unless there are very strong reasons to the contrary. *Tennessee v. Whitworth*, 117 U.S. 139, 147. The word "days," when not qualified, means in ordinary and common usage calendar days. This is obviously the meaning in which it is used in the constitutional provision, and is emphasized by the fact that "Sundays" are excepted. There is nothing whatever to justify changing this meaning by inserting the word "legislative" as a qualifying adjective. And no President or Congress has ever suggested that the President [*680] has ten "legislative days" in which to consider and return a bill, or proceeded upon that theory.

3. Nor can we agree with the argument that the word "adjournment" as used in the constitutional provision refers only to the final adjournment of the Congress. The word "adjournment" is not qualified by the word "final;" and there is nothing in the context which warrants the insertion of such a limitation. On the contrary, the fact that the word "adjournment" as used in the Constitution is not limited to a final adjournment, is shown by the first clause in section 5 of Article I, which provides that a smaller number than a majority of each House may "adjourn" from day to day, and by the fourth clause of the same Article, which provides that neither House, during the session of Congress, shall, without the consent of the other, "adjourn" for more than three days. And the Standing Rules of the Senate refer specifically to motions to "adjourn to a day certain" (No. XXII); and the Rules of the House of Representatives, to an "adjournment" at the end of one session (No. XXVI). ⁷

⁷ The view that the "adjournment" contemplated in the constitutional provision is the final adjournment of Congress, and not an interim adjournment, appears to have been expressed in behalf of Congress, for the first and only time, in a report made by the Judiciary Committee of the House of Representatives in 1927 (H. Rep't. No. 2054, 69th Cong., 2d sess.). This was followed by the Chairman of the Committee of the Whole in overruling a point of order made against a provision in an appropriation bill that presented this question; and no appeal was taken from this ruling. 68 Cong. Rec., pt. 5, pp. 4932-4937.

4. [*467] We think that [HN7] under the constitutional provision the determinative question in reference to an "adjournment" is not whether it is a final adjournment of Congress or an interim adjournment, such as an adjournment of the first session, but whether it is one that "prevents" the President from returning the bill to the House in which it originated within the time allowed. It is clear, and, as [*681] we understand, is not questioned, that since the President

may return a bill at any time within the allotted period, he is prevented from returning it, within the meaning of the constitutional provision, if by reason of the adjournment it is impossible for him to return it to the House in which it originated on the last day of that period. It is also conceded, as we understand, that the President is necessarily prevented from returning a bill by a final adjournment of the Congress, since such adjournment terminates the legislative existence of the Congress and makes it impossible to return the bill to either House. And the crucial question here presented is whether an interim adjournment of Congress at the end of the first session, as the result of which, although the legislative existence of the House in which the bill originated has not been terminated, it is not in session on the last day of the period allowed the President for returning the bill, likewise prevents him from returning it to such House. This brings us to the specific question whether, in order to return the bill to the House in which it originated, within the meaning of the constitutional provision, it is necessary, as the Attorney General insists, that it be returned to the House itself while it is in session, or whether, as urged by counsel for the petitioners and by the *amicus curiae*, it may be returned to the House, although not in session, by delivering it to an officer or agent of the House, to be held by him and delivered to the House when it resumes its sittings at the next session.

Clause 2 [HN8] specifically provides that if [***899] the President does not approve a bill "he shall return it, with his Objections to that House in which it shall have originated, who shall enter the Objections at large on their Journal, and proceed to reconsider it." That is, it provides in the same phrase and with no change in definition, that the "House" to which the bill is to be returned is that which [*682] is to enter the objections on its journal and proceed to reconsider the bill.

From a consideration of the entire clause we think that the "House" to which the bill is to be returned, is the House in session. In *Missouri Pac. Ry. Co. v. Kansas*, 248 U.S. 276, 280, 281, 283, this Court, in holding that the provision in this clause requiring a vote of two-thirds of each House to pass a bill over the President's objections, means two-thirds of a quorum of each House and not two-thirds of all its members, said *arguendo*, that "the context leaves no doubt that the provision was dealing with the two houses as organized and entitled to exert legislative power," that is, the legislative bodies "organized conformably to law for the purpose of enacting legislation"; and, after stating that the identity between this provision and that in Article V of the Constitution, giving "two-thirds of both Houses" the power to submit amendments, makes the practice as to one applicable to the other, quoted with approval the "settled rule . . . clearly and aptly stated" by the Speaker, Mr. Reed, in the House, on the passage of the amendment to the Constitution providing for the election of Senators by the vote of the people, as follows: "What constitutes a House? A quorum of the membership, a majority, one-half and one more. That is all that is necessary to constitute a House to do all the business that comes before the House. Among the business that comes before the House is the reconsideration of a bill which has been vetoed by the President; another is a proposed amendment to the Constitution; and the practice is uniform in both cases that if a quorum of the House is present the House is constituted and two-thirds of those voting are sufficient in order to accomplish the object. . . ."

[HN9] Since the bill is to be returned to the same "House," and none other, that is to enter the President's objections [*683] on its journal⁸ and proceeded to reconsider the bill -- there being only one and the same reference to such House -- it follows, in our opinion, that under the constitutional mandate it is to be returned to the "House" when sitting in an organized capacity for the transaction of business, and having authority to receive the return, enter the President's objections on its journal, and proceed to reconsider the bill; and that no return can be made to the House when it is not in session as a collective body and its members are dispersed. This is the view expressed in 1 Curtis' Constitutional History of the United States, 486, n. 1, in which it is said: "This expression, a 'house,' or 'each house,' is several times employed in the Constitution with reference to the faculties and powers of the two chambers respectively, and it always means, when so used, the constitutional quorum, assembled for the transaction of business, and capable of transacting business. This same expression was employed by the committee when they provided for the mode in which a bill, once rejected by the president, should be again brought before the legislative bodies. They directed it to be returned '*to that House in which it shall have originated*' -- that is to say, to a constitutional quorum, a majority of which passed it in the first instance. . . ."

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8 [HN10] The journal is the record that each House is required to keep of its own proceedings. Const., Art. I, sec. 5, cl. 3.

[468]** This accords with the long established practice of both Houses of Congress to receive messages from the President while they are in session. See Senate Standing Rule XXVIII, cl. 1; House Rule XL; 5 Hind's Precedents of the House of Representatives, ch. CXXXVIII, especially sec. 6591, p. 812.

We find no substantial basis for the suggestion that although the House in which the bill originated is not in session the bill may nevertheless be returned, consistently **[*684]** with the constitutional mandate, by delivering it, with the President's objections, to an officer or agent of the House, for subsequent delivery to the House when it resumes its sittings at the next session, with the same force and effect as if the bill had been returned to the House on the day when it was delivered to such officer or agent. Aside from the fact that Congress has never enacted any statute authorizing any officer or agent of either House to receive for it bills returned by the President during its adjournment, and that there is no rule to that effect in either House, the delivery of the bill to such officer or agent, even if authorized by Congress itself, would not comply with the constitutional mandate. The House, not having been in **[***900]** session when the bill was delivered to the officer or agent, could neither have received the bill and objections at that time, nor have entered the objections upon its journal, nor have proceeded to reconsider the bill, as the Constitution requires; and there is nothing in the Constitution which authorizes either House to make a *nunc pro tunc* record of the return of a bill as of a date on which it had not, in fact, been returned. Manifestly it was not intended that, instead of returning the bill to the House itself, as required by the constitutional provision, the President should be authorized to deliver it, during an adjournment of the House, to some individual officer or agent not authorized to make any legislative record of its delivery, who should hold it in his own hands for days, weeks or perhaps months, -- not only leaving open possible questions as to the date on which it had been delivered to him, or whether it had in fact been delivered to him at all, but keeping the bill in the meantime in a state of suspended animation until the House resumes its sittings, with no certain knowledge on the part of the public as to whether it had or had not been seasonably delivered, and necessarily causing delay in its reconsideration which the Constitution evidently intended to avoid. In short, it was plainly the object **[*685]** of the constitutional provision that there should be a timely return of the bill, which should not only be a matter of official record definitely shown by the journal of the House itself, giving public, certain and prompt knowledge as to the status of the bill, but should enable Congress to proceed immediately with its reconsideration; and that the return of the bill should be an actual and public return to the House itself, and not a fictitious return by a delivery of the bill to some individual which could be given a retroactive effect at a later date when the time for the return of the bill to the House had expired.

Thus Attorney General Devens, in a memorandum to President Hayes, said: "All these provisions indicate that [HN11] in order to enable the President to return a bill the Houses should be in session; and if by their own act they see fit to adjourn and deprive him of the opportunity to return the bill, with his objection, and are not present themselves to receive and record these objections and to act thereon, the bill can not become a law unless ten days shall have expired during which the President will have had the opportunity thus to return it. There is no suggestion that he may return it to the Speaker, or Clerk, or any officer of the House; but the return must be made to the House as an organized body." ⁹

⁹ Quoted in an opinion of Attorney General Miller, 20 Op. Att. Gen. 503, 506.

It is significant that only one attempt has ever been made in Congress to authorize the President to return a bill when the House in which it originated was not in session; and that this failed. In 1868 a bill was reported by the Senate Judiciary Committee for regulating the return of bills by the President. ¹⁰ While this specifically declared that the constitutional provision allowed the President ten calendar days (Sundays excepted) in which to return a bill not approved by him, and

that the return [*686] of a bill would be prevented by "the final adjournment of a session" of Congress, although not by an adjournment to a particular day, it provided that if at any time within such ten days the President desired to return the bill to the house in which it originated when such house was not sitting, he might return it to the office of the Secretary of the Senate or Clerk of the House of Representatives, as the case might be, who should endorse thereon the day on which such return was made, and make an entry of the fact of such return in his journal of the proceedings, and that such return should be deemed a return of the bill to all intents and purposes. In the debate in the Senate strong opposition was expressed to this feature of the bill on constitutional grounds;¹¹ and [*687] although [**469] it passed the Senate by a majority [***901] vote, it was never reported from the Judiciary Committee of the House of Representatives, to which it was referred, and thus failed to pass the Congress. It does not appear that this suggestion has ever been renewed in Congress.

10 S. 366, 40th Cong., 2d sess.

11 In the debate in the Senate the constitutional objections to the provision authorizing the President to return a bill to an officer of the Senate or the House of Representatives when they were not sitting, were clearly and, as we think, convincingly expressed.

Thus Senator Davis said: "(The) Constitution requires that if the President does not approve a bill he shall return it with his objections to the House in which it originated; this bill provides a different mode of disposing of that bill in case Congress has temporarily taken a recess or an adjournment. It dispenses with the requisition of the Constitution that the bill shall be returned to the House, and directs that it be returned to the officer of the House, if the body is not in session. I do not believe it is competent for Congress to make any such change as that. . . . Of course, if (the President) is to return the bill to the House, the House must be in session, because it is not a House unless in session in the sense in which the Constitution requires the bill to be returned to the House by the President with his objections. . . . I think it is the duty of the President, in the plain language of the Constitution, to return the bill, not to the Secretary or Clerk of either House, but to the House itself. That is the unambiguous and plain language of the Constitution. . . . It is returning it to the Senate or the House of Representatives in session, because when it is returned it is to be at once considered again. The Constitution contemplates that simultaneously with the return of the bill to the House in which it originated the House may take up the matter for consideration. . . . I take the position that to return the bill to the Clerk of the House of Representatives, if it originated there, or to the Secretary of the Senate, if it originated in the Senate, when those bodies are not in session, is not a return of the bill to the House in which it originated. It is the duty and the right of the President to communicate to the House and not to a ministerial officer of the House. To enable him to communicate to the House it must necessarily be in session, because he can not communicate with either House when it is in any other situation than in actual session. It must be assembled and in actual session. . . . I think, sir, that the Executive may not only claim it as a right, but the House in which a bill originates may claim it as the performance of a duty by him to that House, and the people of the country may claim it as the performance of a duty by him, that he shall return the bill with his objections, not, in vacation, to the Clerk or to the Secretary of the Senate or House of Representatives, but to the body itself, and to enable him to perform that duty that body must necessarily be in session." Cong. Globe, 40th Cong., 2d. Sess., Pt. 2, pp. 1372, 1374, 1405.

Senator Bayard said: "But, Mr. President, there is an additional objection which to my mind is all powerful. The committee propose . . . that if Congress is not in session during the ten days or at the end of the ten days the President may send the bill to the office of the Secretary of the Senate or the Clerk of the House of Representatives, according to the House in which the bill may have originated. There is no such provision in the Constitution; and the settled usage of this Government, without a single exception from its foundation, is that no communication is made by the Executive to either House except to the House in session, and that usage ought to have a controlling influence to exclude the idea which is contained in the provision of the bill that I am now referring to. . . . But further, the very object of the clause looks to the fact that the bill should be returned during the session of the House in which it originated. It looks, if I may so speak, to immediate action on the part of Congress -- at all events it looks to giving to Congress the right of immediate action as soon as the objections of the President are received. The Houses are to proceed to consider the objections; they are to spread them at large on the Journal; there is to be a reconsideration of the measure formerly under debate. The whole clause looks to speedy action, at all events, upon objections made by the President, and the language employed providing for a return to the House does not imply filing a document with the Clerk or the Secretary when the House is not in session, whether it be the Senate or the House of Representatives. . . . Here the usage of the Government of the United States, from its origin to the present day, is, that in no single case has a President of the United States, on the return of a bill to the Senate or House of Representatives, ever undertaken to file his message with the Clerk of the one or the Secretary of the other; but the action of the Executive has uniformly been by message sent to the House when in session. That is the settled usage; and when you look to the language of the Constitution, that the bill is to be returned to the House, it is certainly forcing language to say that a return to the House means filing a paper with the Secretary or Clerk when the House is not in session." Cong. Globe, 40th Cong., 2d Sess., Pt. 2, pp. 1941, 1942.

Senator Buckalew said: "I should like to know how the Secretary can make entries and make up a Journal when the Senate is not in session. I can understand that when the Senate reconvenes the Clerk may hand to the President of the Senate, just as any member might or any outsider might, the particular paper, and it may then be presented to the Senate, and it may be entered in the Journal. But this bill contemplates that our Secretary shall make and keep a Journal when the Senate is not here at all, when there can be no Journal of its proceedings. . . . (The)

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Constitution provides that the Senate shall keep a Journal of its proceedings, of what it does itself. In another clause it is provided that when the President returns a bill with his objections that message thus containing his objections shall be entered upon the Journal of the Senate. The fact of receiving such a message and the entry of that message upon the Journal must, in the very nature of the case, be when the Senate itself is in session . . . The Journal is to be kept by the Senate, and it is to be a Journal of what it does, a Journal of its proceedings. . . . The reception of a message from the President of the United States is a proceeding by the Senate; it is an act by the Senate itself. . . . I think, therefore, it is manifest that under the Constitution of the United States this Journal and the entries upon the Journal are matters which relate to a session of the Senate, an actual session, the personal presence of the body, and that it is not competent for the Senate to commit to one of its own officers, or to any officer of the Government, or to any citizen, the performance of a duty which is by the Constitution charged upon itself and to be performed by itself. . . . Now, one objection which applies to the bill . . . is that it is against the practice of the Government. From the time that Congress first convened together in 1789 down to this time it has been held, and held uniformly, that if the two Houses of Congress adjourned by a concurrent resolution before the expiration of ten days from the presentation of a bill to the President a bill which should then be left in his hands would fail. . . . They have failed upon repeated occasions, not only during recent years, but far back in former times. . . . This bill proposes, in the absence of both Houses of Congress to provide a substitute for the House to which the bill is to be returned. Instead of being returned to the House in which it originated, as the Constitution says, this bill proposes to enact that it shall be returned to the Secretary here alone . . . and that upon the paper . . . being given to that particular person it shall be considered that it has been returned to the House in which it originated. . . . Can anything more flatly contradict common sense, deny the plain fact? Can we constitute our Secretary into the Senate, and can we make the Clerk of the House of Representatives the House for the purpose of doing any official act whatever? You propose that he shall receive the communication from the President as if he were the Senate or the House; that he, sitting anywhere, responsible to nobody, with no check upon him, shall make up a Journal as if he were the Senate or the House for the occasion." Cong. Globe, 40th Cong., 2d. Sess., Pt. 3, pp. 2076, 2077.

And Senator Morton said: "The Constitution . . . contemplates that the bill shall pass from the custody of the President to the custody of the House in which it shall have originated; and we have no power, in my judgment, to say that it shall be sufficient to return it to the President of the Senate or the Speaker of the House or to the Secretary or Clerk. . . . What has become of the bill? The Constitution does not contemplate such a condition of things. . . . It would be just as good for the private Secretary of the President to retain a bill as for the Secretary of the Senate; just as much a compliance with the provision of the Constitution; and it would be just as satisfactory to my mind for the President to retain it during the odd days as for the Secretary of the Senate to do so." Cong. Globe, 40th Cong., 2d Sess., Pt. 3, pp. 2077, 2078.

[*688] [***902] [***LEdHR5] [5]5. The views which we have expressed as to the construction and effect of the constitutional provision here in question are confirmed by the practical construction that has been given to it by the Presidents through a long [*689] course of years, in which Congress has acquiesced. [HN12] Long settled and established practice is a consideration of great weight in a proper interpretation of constitutional provisions [**470] of this character. Compare *Missouri Pac. Ry. Co. v. [**690] Kansas*, *supra*, 284; *Myers v. United States*, 272 U.S. 52, 119, 136; and *State v. South Norwalk*, 77 Conn. 257, 264, in which the court said that a practice of at least twenty years duration "on the part of the executive department, acquiesced in by the legislative department, while not absolutely binding on the judicial department, is entitled to great regard in determining the true construction of a constitutional provision the phraseology of which is in any respect of doubtful meaning."

A memorandum prepared in the office of the Attorney General showing the results of an exhaustive research of governmental archives for the purpose of disclosing the practical construction placed upon the constitutional provision here involved in reference to so-called "pocket vetoes," was transmitted by the President to Congress in December 1928. ¹² This memorandum -- the accuracy of which is not questioned -- cites more than 400 bills and resolutions which were passed by Congress and submitted to the President less than ten days before a final or interim adjournment of Congress, which were not signed by the President nor returned with his disapproval. Of these, 119 were instances in which the adjournment was that at the end of a session of Congress, as distinguished from the final adjournment of the Congress. None of these bills or resolutions was placed upon the statute books or treated as having become a law; nor does it appear that there was any attempt to enforce them in the courts until the present suit was brought. Of these instances 11 occurred [*691] before the end of President Lincoln's administration, and the remainder from the end of that administration to the present time. They arose under the administration of all the Presidents except ten. These 119 bills and resolutions are thus classified in the brief [***903] of the *amicus curiae*: Private relief bills, 36; pension bills, 19; obsolete purposes, 10; relating to District of Columbia, 9; relating to personal status, 8; right of way over Indian and government land, 8; river and harbor bills, 7; disposition of war stores and government property, 5; reduction

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of national debts, 3; and general legislation, 14. It does not appear that in any of these instances either House of Congress in any official manner questioned the validity and effect of the President's action in not returning the bill after the adjournment of the session, or proceeded on the theory that it had become a law, although neither signed nor returned, until the action was taken in the House Committee of the Whole in 1927 to which we have referred.¹³ And in some instances new bills were introduced in place of those that had not been returned. Without analyzing these 119 instances in detail, we think they show that for a long series of years, commencing with President Madison's administration and continuing until the action of the House Committee of the Whole in 1927, all the Presidents who have had occasion to deal with this question have adopted and carried into effect the construction of the constitutional provision that they were prevented from returning the bill to the House in which it originated by the adjournment of the session of Congress; and that this construction has been acquiesced in by both Houses of Congress until 1927.

12 Ho. Doc. No. 493, 70 Cong., 2d sess.

13 Note 7, *supra*.

6. For these reasons we conclude that [HN13] the adjournment of the first session of the 69th Congress on July 3, 1926, prevented the President, within the meaning of the constitutional [*692] provision, from returning Senate Bill No. 3185 within ten days, Sundays excepted, after it had been presented to him, and that it did not become a law.

The judgment of the Court of Claims is

Affirmed.