

A bill's name is *chosen* to persuade — its *text* is what actually *governs*

One mechanism of federal lawmaking, examined in depth — how a law's short title and its actual legal text can pull in different directions.

BEFORE YOU BEGIN

How This Guide Works

This is part of **Incognati Civics**, applying the field-guide format to the mechanics of federal lawmaking — the parliamentary process most people never see explained. Each specimen goes deep on one mechanism, with the heavier sourcing a legal or procedural claim actually requires: official records, primary-source rules, and peer-reviewed or nonpartisan scholarship, listed in full on the references page.

INCOGNATI CIVICS – HOW FEDERAL LAWS ACTUALLY GET CREATED

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Bill Title vs. Bill Content

Titulus Fallax

Governing precedent / case 2022 Status Ongoing legislative practice

OBSERVED SPECIMEN

INFLATION REDUCTION ACT, PUB. L. 117-169 (2022)

*The **Inflation Reduction Act** was signed into law in August 2022. Nonpartisan scoring by the Congressional Budget Office and a separate analysis from the Penn Wharton Budget Model both found the bill's effect on near-term inflation would be negligible — the bulk of its roughly \$400 billion in spending addressed climate, energy, and prescription-drug provisions, not price levels directly.*

THE HOOK

A short title is written to be repeated in headlines and campaign ads — it's chosen for what it signals, not to summarize hundreds of pages of legal text.

THE MECHANISM

The title has no legal force of its own; only the text that follows “Be it enacted...” governs anything. A title can be accurate, aspirational, or largely disconnected from the bill's actual mechanics, and courts don't consult the title to interpret the law.

Field mark: before assuming what a bill does from its name, check what a nonpartisan scorer (CBO, Joint Committee on Taxation) or the bill text itself actually says the provisions do.

See the full references page for complete citations.

References

every source checkable at the link provided; DOIs given where the source has one

PRIMARY SOURCE · PUBLIC LAW

Inflation Reduction Act of 2022, Pub. L. No. 117-169, 136 Stat. 1818.

<https://www.congress.gov/bill/117th-congress/house-bill/5376>

Official text and legislative history via Congress.gov.

PRIMARY SOURCE · CBO SCORING

Congressional Budget Office, "Estimated Budgetary Effects of H.R. 5376" (2022).

<https://www.cbo.gov/publication/58455>

Nonpartisan cost and revenue estimate; no separate finding of a significant near-term inflation effect.

RESEARCH SOURCE

Penn Wharton Budget Model, "Budgetary and Economic Effects of the Inflation Reduction Act."

<https://budgetmodel.wharton.upenn.edu/issues/2022/8/12/budgetary-and-economic-effects-of-the-inflation-reduction-act>

University research model; no DOI assigned (policy brief, not a journal article).

Reading This Mechanism: A Gut Check

four questions before a headline changes what you think happened in Congress

1 Read past the name

A short title is chosen to persuade — check the bill text or a nonpartisan summary for what it actually does.

2 Find a nonpartisan scorer

CBO, JCT, and similar offices score bills without a stake in how the title lands.

3 Compare title to spending

Where does the bulk of the money or authority in the bill actually go? That's a better guide than the name.

4 Watch for acronym titles

A title engineered to spell something memorable is a title optimized for messaging first.

INCOGNATI CIVICS

The Series Continues

This is Specimen No. 2 of Incognati Civics. The full queue of twelve specimens on federal lawmaking is listed on the cover, and four further Civics subprojects — local government, elections, official data reporting, and institutional communications — are planned beyond this one. The Incognati Atlas catalogs the underlying patterns across all of it.

Civics Field Edition · Specimen No. 2

All specimens independently sourced