

# Political System of the USA

## Group II: Legislative Branch – Congress

The Legislative Branch is also called the Congress.

There are two parts of Congress: 1) Senate and 2) the House of Representatives. Having two chambers of Congress is called “bicameral” legislature.



### **The Senate**

The Senate is sometimes called the “upper” house of the Congress. Each Senator is elected for a term of six years, but there are no limits as to how many terms a person can be a Senator. This means a person can be a Senator for as long as they keep getting elected.

### **Who can become a Senator?**

The requirements for being a Senator are described in Article I of the Constitution:

- 1) must be at least 30 years old
- 2) must have been a citizen of the U.S. for the last 9 years
- 3) must be a resident of the state that they represent

The Senate has 100 members. Each state has two Senators. It doesn't matter how big or small the state is.

Senators are elected every 6 years.

### **Special Senate Powers**

The main job of the Senate is to vote on new laws along with the House of Representatives. However, the Senate has some unique powers that the House does not have:

- They approve some appointments made by the President including Cabinet members, Supreme Court Justices, and high-ranking military commanders.
- They ratify treaties with foreign governments.
- They try cases of impeachment of federal officers that have been impeached by the House.

### **1) House of Representatives**

Representatives are elected every two years. They must be 25 years old, have been a US citizen for at least 7 years, and live in the state they represent.

The Speaker of the House is the leader of the House of Representatives. The House elects the member they want to be the leader. The Speaker is third in line in succession to the President.

How many Representatives are there?: There are currently 435 representatives in the House. In the very first Congress there were only 65 representatives. The total number grew over time as new states joined the country and the population grew. However, in 1911, the Congress decided that the House was getting too big. They passed a law limiting the total number of representatives to 435. The number of representatives from each state is determined by the population of the state. The more people that live in the state, the more representatives that state has. Every state has at least one representative no matter how small it is.

### How long can someone be a Representative?

Representatives are elected to a new term every two years. In order to remain a representative, a person must get re-elected each time. However, there are no term limits, so a person can be a representative for as long as they continue to get elected. Fun fact: The longest serving member of the House was John Dingell from Michigan who served for 59 years.

### Who can become a Representative?

The requirements for being a Representative are described in Article I of the Constitution:

- 1) they must be at least twenty-five years old
- 2) they must have been a U.S. citizen for the past seven years
- 3) they must live in the state they represent

### Where does the House of Representatives meet?

The House of Representatives meets in the House Chamber located in the south wing of the U.S. Capitol Building.

### Powers :

As per the Constitution, the U.S. House of Representatives makes and passes federal laws. The main job is to vote on new laws along with the Senate. There are a few powers, however, that are unique to the House: All tax bills and spending bills must start in the House. They also select the Vice President if there is no majority in the Electoral College.

### **House of Representatives and Senate: Making a Law**

For a law to be made it must go through different steps called the Legislative Process. The first step is for someone to write a bill. Anyone can write a bill, but only a member of Congress can present it to the Congress.

Next, the bill goes to a committee that is an expert on the subject of the bill. Here the bill may be rejected, accepted, or changed. The bill may go to a number of committees. Experts are often brought in to witness and give their opinions on the pros and cons of a bill. Once the bill is ready and the committee agrees, it goes before the entire Congress.

Both the House and the Senate will have their own debates about the bill. Members will speak for or against the bill and then the Congress will vote. A bill must get a majority of the votes from both the Senate and the House of Representatives to pass.

The next step is for the President to sign the bill. The president can sign the bill into law or choose to veto the bill. Once the president vetoes a bill, Congress can then try to override the veto by getting two thirds of the vote from both the House and the Senate.

### Tasks:

1. Explain the term "bicameral legislature".
2. Describe the differences between the House of Representatives and the Senate (different number of members; requirements to become a member; different responsibilities).
3. Describe the process of making a law.

#### Vocab box:

appointment - a meeting set at a specific time

succession - sequence

impeachment -  
Amtsenthebungsverfahren  
(dt.)

a bill- a law

to override- to veto/ to  
defeat