

# Wanted: A Just Right Government

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

## Independent Citizens Seek Awesome Government

When the American colonists gained their independence from the British after the Revolutionary War, the Americans were faced with a problem: What kind of government should they have? They'd lived for years under British rule, and they had lots of complaints. Now they would create a government from scratch, and they had a few requirements.

Independent citizens seek government that...

- Has enough power to do its job
- Doesn't give anyone too *much* power
- Considers the needs of all the states
- Lets citizens have a say
- Protects individual rights



*Benjamin Franklin worked on the Articles of Confederation before he helped write the Constitution.*

## Independent Citizens Seek <sup>Weak</sup> ~~Awsome~~ Government

Their experience under heavy-handed British rule left the newly independent Americans a little bit skittish. Basically, they wanted a government that couldn't do much. They started by drafting a document called the Articles of Confederation. A **confederation** is a group of individuals united together for a purpose—in this case, the 13 states that had been British colonies before the war. The **Articles of Confederation** explained how the 13 states would be governed as one nation. Here are the basics:

- Each state was independent and had its own government.
- Each state would send representatives to the "Congress of the Confederation," a lawmaking body.
- Congress was the only branch of government. (No president or courts.)
- In Congress, each state got one vote.

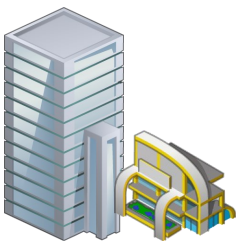
## A Rocky Start

On one hand, the Articles of Confederation had qualities that citizens appreciated. Because the Articles set up a weak government, states got to keep their power and independence. No strong, central government could tell them what to do.

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However, there were problems. The Articles gave Congress the power to pass laws about certain things—but not to enforce those laws. Congress could not create a military to protect the new nation. Instead, it had to ask the states to supply soldiers. Congress also relied on the states for money because it had no power to collect taxes. And in order to change the Articles, every single state had to agree to the changes. These and other problems meant that, in general, citizens felt like the relationship... er, the *government*, wasn't working.

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## Lots of Differences

With thirteen different states, there was no easy solution. Here's why:

- *States had different needs.* For example, some states depended on fishing, while others mostly grew crops.
- *States had different sizes.* Some states had many people; others had few.
- *People had different opinions.* Some people feared a central government, while others thought a central government was necessary.

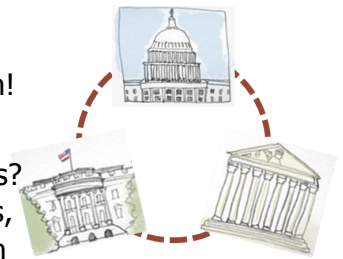
That last one was especially troublesome. Many people feared they would lose their freedom if a central government had too much power. Others were tired of the weak government created under the Articles of Confederation and felt like nothing would ever get done if nobody was in charge.

# Wanted: A Just Right Government Name:

## Let's Fix This Thing

In 1787, representatives from every state except Rhode Island met in Philadelphia to fix the Articles. We call this meeting the **Constitutional Convention** because they ended up doing more than just fixing the articles—they wrote the Constitution! But agreeing on a new way to structure the government wasn't easy.

Some states floated a new idea: Why not create a government with *three* branches? The new government could have a *legislative branch* with a congress to make laws, an *executive branch* led by a president to carry out laws, and a *judicial branch* with courts to interpret laws. It sounded good, but there was one major problem: How many votes would each state get in the Congress?



## Voting in Congress: Yes, It's a Big Deal



Why? Because some states have a large population and some have a small population. Under the Articles of Confederation, each state got one vote no matter how many people it had. That meant people in large states had less influence in Congress. Naturally, large states thought this wasn't fair. They thought they should get more votes because they had more people. Small states, however, thought it was a pretty good deal. Even though they were small, they had the same amount of power and influence as large states. They wanted to keep a one-vote-per-state system.

### Battle of the Plans

Two different plans emerged—one favoring small states and one favoring large states. Can you tell which is which?

<i><b>Virginia Plan</b></i>	<i><b>New Jersey Plan</b></i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Legislative branch has 2 chambers</li><li>• Number of votes for each state depends on the state's population</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Legislative branch has one chamber</li><li>• Each state gets one vote</li></ul>



*The Americans were a lot like Goldilocks in the story about the three bears: They had to try different governments until they found one that was "just right!"*

## The Constitution Solution

The two sides—large states and small states—finally reached a compromise. The **Constitution** was the second and final attempt to write a document that would govern the United States, and we still follow it today. Under the Constitution, Congress is divided into two chambers: the Senate and the House of Representatives. In the Senate, each state gets two votes no matter what size it is. This favors small states. In the House of Representatives, the more people a state has, the more votes it gets. This favors large states. The Constitution also solved some other problems found in the Articles of Confederation.

- The Articles didn't require states to treat citizens from other states the same as their own citizens, but the Constitution does.
- The Articles couldn't be changed unless all states agreed, but the Constitution can be changed if 3/4 of the states agree.
- The Articles didn't require states to follow the laws Congress passed, but the Constitution says federal laws are superior to state laws.