

1. What Is Congress?

The Congress of the United States is the lawmaking body of the national government. It is made up of 535 members elected from all of the states of the Union. As you know, it is divided into two parts, or houses—the Senate and the House of Representatives. Members are known as Senators and Representatives. No idea can become a law unless it is passed by both houses of Congress. Some of the important facts about each house are discussed in this section.

The House of Representatives

Size. The House of Representatives is the larger of the two houses. At present, it consists of 435 members. The number of members, or seats, which a state is given is determined by its population. You will recall that this was agreed upon in one of the famous compromises at the Constitutional Convention. The larger a state's population, the more seats it has in the House of Representatives. If a state's population increases or decreases, it will gain or lose seats. However, the Constitution guarantees every state at least one seat in the House.

Currently, there is one Representative for about every 550,000 persons in our country. Some people argue that, as the population of the United States increases, the total membership of the House should increase. This could happen, but most people do not think it will. The House of Representatives is already one of the largest lawmaking bodies in the world.

Qualifications. A Representative must be at least 25 years old. He or she must have been a United States citizen for at least seven years. Also, the Representative must be a legal resident of the state from which he or she is elected.

Term. Each Representative serves for a term—a period of two years. There is no limit to the number of terms a Representative may serve if he or she is reelected.

Election. Elections for members of the House are held on the Tuesday following the first Monday in November of every even-numbered year. A member's term begins on January 3 following the November election.

Vacancies. Sometimes a Representative dies, resigns, or is expelled from the House before his or her two-year term has ended. The governor of the state must call a special election to fill the vacancy (empty seat) in the House.

Districts. The legislature in each state divides the state into congressional districts. Congressional districts are particular areas of a state with clearly defined boundaries and approximately equal populations. The people in each district elect one

Representative to the House. In states which have only one representative, the whole state is considered a single congressional district. Candidates in states with only one district are said to run "at large."

After each census (a count of the number of people in the United States), the state legislature is required by law to reshape the state's congressional districts if the state's population has increased or decreased. As a result of the 1980 census, Texas gained three seats in the House of Representatives, but New York lost five seats.

The Senate

Size. The Senate is a much smaller body than the House of Representatives. It is made up of two Senators from each state. As there are currently 50 states in the United States, there are 100 Senators.

Qualifications. A senator must be at least 30 years old. He or she must have been a United States citizen for at least nine years. The Senator must also be a legal resident of the state from which he or she is elected.

Term. Senators are elected for six-year terms. The terms are staggered, however, so that one-third of the Senators are elected

every two years. Because of the staggered terms, the Senate is sometimes referred to as a continuous body.

Election. Before 1913, Senators were chosen by the state legislatures. In 1913, the Seventeenth Amendment to the Constitution was adopted. This amendment states that all Senators are to be chosen by the voters in statewide elections. Senatorial elections occur in November of even-numbered years. Only one Senator is elected from a state at any one election, unless the other Senator has died, resigned, or been expelled. Senators are sworn into office when the Congress meets in January following the November election.

Vacancies. If a Senator resigns, dies, or is expelled before his or her term has ended, the governor of the state can do one of two things. He or she can call a special election to fill the vacancy or make a temporary appointment until the next election. In 1978, the governor of Minnesota appointed Muriel Humphrey to complete the term of her husband, Senator Hubert Humphrey, who had died earlier in the year.

The Nuts & Bolts of Congress

Which house of Congress must pass a bill before it becomes law?

The House of Representatives

1. How large is the House of Representatives?
2. How does a state gain or lose representatives?
3. What is the proportion of representatives to constituents?
4. What are the qualifications to be a Representative?
5. What is the term for a Representative? Is there a limit to the number of terms a Representative may serve?
6. When are elections held for representatives?
7. What are congressional districts and how do they affect elections?
8. When and how are congressional districts determined?

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The Senate

1. How many Senators are there? How many does each state have?
2. What are the qualifications for the Senate?
3. What is a Senator's term?
4. When are Senators elected? Why?

Define:

1. Enumerate: _____
2. Power: _____
3. General: _____
4. Welfare: _____
5. Clause: _____
6. Necessary: _____
7. Proper: _____
8. Specific: _____
9. Situation: _____
10. Regulate: _____
11. Impose: _____
12. Balance: _____
13. Noble: _____
14. Debate: _____
15. Delegation: _____
16. Suspicious: _____
17. Resistance: _____
18. Endanger: _____
19. Language: _____
20. Alternative: _____

Write two sentences from two words above.

1. _____
2. _____