

# The Senate and the House of Representatives

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# Congress

- Congress is the Law making Branch of the United States Government
- It is bicameral or has 2 houses called the:
  - Senate
  - House of Representatives

# The house of Representatives

- Has 435 members
- They are called Representatives
- The number of representatives a state can elect is based on its population
- Population is determined every 10 years when the US government does a census

# How membership is divided

- Congress determines how the seats of the house should be apportioned (or distributed)
- Originally a representative was elected for every 30,000 people
- In 1911 congress limited the number of seats to 435
- Today there is one representative for every 646,000 people

# Congressional districts

- Each representative is elected by the votes of a congressional district
- District boundaries must be drawn so that each has an almost equal population
- Sometimes lines are drawn in favor of a particular party, this is called gerrymandering



# Electing representatives

- Regular elections for members of the house are held in November of each even numbered year
- Representatives are elected for a 2 year term
- If a representative dies or resigns the governor must call for a special election

# The Senate

- Each state is represented in senate by 2 senators
- Today the senate has 100 members
- Senators are elected for a 6 year term
- 1/3 of the senate is elected in November of every even numbered year
- This means that the senate will always have people who are experienced in it
- The senior senator for the state is the one with th most experience
- There are no Term limits (number of terms a congressman can serve)



# Salary and benefits

- There is controversy over the salary of senators because for years they could set their own (this ended with the 27<sup>th</sup> amendment)
- Members of congress also receive many allowances including:
  - Free trips to their home state
  - Local district offices
  - Stationary allowance
  - Franking privileges (do not have to pay postage)

# Immunity

- They also have immunity or legal protection
- They can not be arrested on their way to a congressional meeting
- This is to ensure that members of congress are not unnecessarily kept from doing their job

# Rules of conduct

- Members of congress:
  - May not use campaign funds for personal expenses
  - Have a limit to how much income they can earn
  - Must make full disclosure of all their finances
- Serious misconduct may result in **expulsion** or removal from office
- Less serious offences may bring about a vote of censure or formal disapproval of a members actions

# The Powers of Congress

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# Powers Granted to Congress

- Financing Government
- Regulating and Encouraging American Trade and Industry
- Defending the Country
- Enforcing Laws
- Providing for Growth

# Implied Powers

- **Elastic Clause-** also called the necessary and proper clause, allows congress to stretch their delegated powers to cover many other subjects
- Powers that congress has claimed under the elastic clause are called “**implied powers**”

# Powers to Impeach

- **Impeach**- to formally accuse a person of a crime while they are in office
- Giving congress the power to impeach allows for a system of checks and balances for people holding a high public office
- The powers for impeachment are only to be used for serious crimes such as treason- an act that betrays ones country

# Special powers

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# Limits on Powers

- **Ex post facto laws-** congress can not punish someone for committing a crime before it was a crime
- **Bill of Attainder-** a law that sentences a person to prison without a trial
- **Writ of habeas corpus-** congress must bring people accused of a crime before a court
- **Taxing exports-** congress can not place tax on things being sold outside the country
- **Bill of rights-** congress can not pass a law that goes against the bill of rights
- **Trade of a state-** congress must treat all states equally
- **Titles of Nobility-** congress can not grant anyone a title of nobility
- **Withdrawing money without a law-** congress must pass a bill that explains how money will be spent prior to agreeing to its usage

# Other Roles of congress

- Over the years the responsibilities of congress have expanded to include roles that were not anticipated in the constitution
- One of the congress members most important jobs is to serve their **constituents**- people in their home districts
- They also have the power to conduct investigations