



Part 2: The United States Constitution

4

Article 1: Congress (Part 1)

Lesson 16 - To Serve in the House

Lesson 17 - Choosing the Senate

Lesson 18 - The Congress Shall Assemble

Lesson 19 - Who They Are and What They Do

Lesson 20 - Committee and Political Party Organization

Statue of George Washington Beneath the U.S. Capitol Dome, Washington, D.C.

Introduction

The Constitution begins by establishing Congress. The methods for choosing members of Congress have changed over the years. Congress has developed its own rules and traditions by which it operates. It is helpful to understand who the members of Congress are, what Congress does, and how it does it. The committee system and political party alignments are crucial to an understanding of how Congress works—and sometimes why it doesn't work.

Books Used

We Hold These Truths

Mornings on Horseback by David McCullough

Project (choose one)

1. Write 300 to 500 words on one of the following topics:
 - Imagine that you are serving in the United States House of Representatives. Compose a persuasive speech to deliver to your colleagues on a cause about which you are passionate.
 - Do you believe that elected positions should have term limits? Give examples of the limits you believe should apply to various offices and give reasons for your opinions.
2. Watch at least one hour of C-SPAN programming with one or both of your parents and discuss what you learned.
3. Choose one of your relatives that you think would make a good congressman or congresswoman. Design a campaign brochure for him or her, including photos, positions, and campaign promises.

Special Assignment

In addition to the other readings in *We Hold These Truths*, in Units 4-9 students will also read the U.S. Constitution. Portions are interspersed in the daily lessons. The U.S. Constitution begins on page 58 in *We Hold These Truths*.



Sign Outside the United States Capitol in Washington, D.C.

Lesson 16

To Serve in the House

You can not possibly have a broader basis for any government than that which includes all the people, with all their rights in their hands, and with an equal power to maintain their rights.

—William Lloyd Garrison (1889)

Read Sections 1 and 2 of Article I of the U.S. Constitution in *We Hold These Truths*, pages 58-59, before you study this lesson.

Article I, the first main section of the Constitution after the Preamble, is the longest section of the document. The framers expected Congress, as the branch of the federal government closest to and most representative of the people, to be the most important and most powerful part of the new national government. As a result, they outlined in great detail the duties, expectations, and limitations of Congress.

The Bicameral Congress

The Constitution vests the legislative or lawmaking power of the national government in Congress. Congress has two parts, the House of Representatives and the Senate. It is therefore bicameral. A legislative branch made up of two bodies or houses is called bicameral, from the Latin meaning two chambers.

Congress has two houses for several reasons. The first is tradition. The British Parliament and most

colonial governments set the precedent by having two houses. Only Pennsylvania and Georgia had unicameral legislatures before the United States adopted the Constitution. Both states switched to the two-house approach by 1790. Today Nebraska is the only state in the country that has one legislative house.

Second, the presence of the House and Senate reflects the political realities of the early national period. The two bodies gave representation both to the people as a whole and to the states. The support of both was critical for the success of the new government.

Third, bicameralism enables the two bodies to act as a check on each other as they consider legislation. Both houses of Congress are less likely to take impulsive action in the heat of the moment than a single legislative body might.

Voting for and Serving as a Member of the House of Representatives

The more numerous of the two houses of Congress is the House of Representatives. Its members are also called congressmen, or members of

the House. In the original Constitution, the House was the only element of the national government that the people elected directly.

Everyone who can vote for the most numerous branch of a state's legislature can vote for that state's representatives in the House. This qualification was significant in the early days of the country, when states placed more limits on voting rights; but today almost every citizen who is eighteen or older can vote in the United States. The Constitution uses the term electors to describe voters.

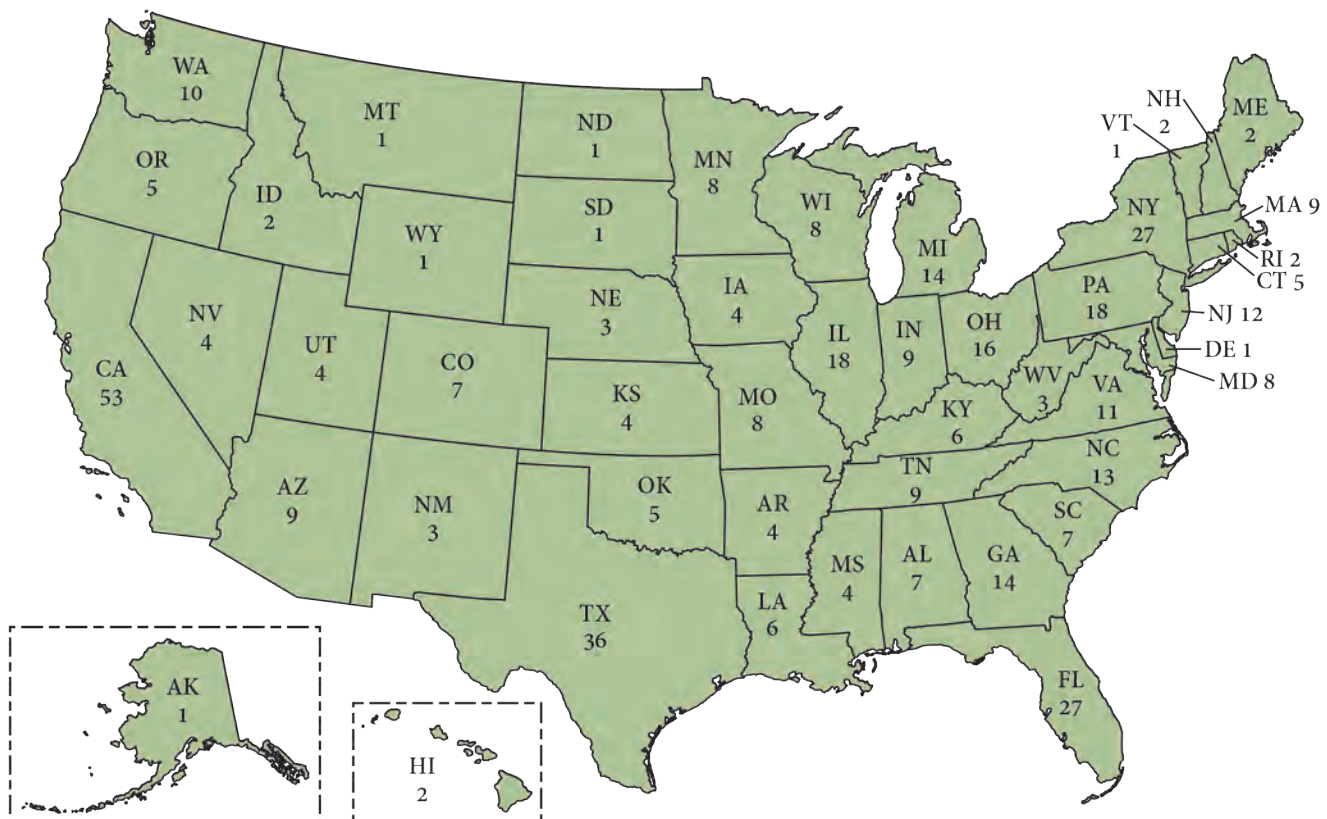
To serve as a member of the House, a person must be at least 25 years old and have been a citizen for seven years. The age provision is fairly young and probably reflects the relative youthfulness of the delegates to the Constitutional Convention. In actual practice, congressmen in their twenties have been rare. A representative does not have to have been born in the United States. He or she can be a naturalized citizen.

A congressman must also be a resident of the state from which he or she is elected. At first, some

states elected all of their congressmen on an at-large basis; in other words, all the voters in the state elected all of that state's representatives. Other states divided their population into districts and elected representatives on the basis of those districts. In 1842, Congress began requiring that all states elect congressmen by districts and gave state legislatures the responsibility for drawing district boundaries. Neither the Constitution nor federal law requires a representative to live in the district he or she represents. However, a candidate who does not live in a district would have a hard time convincing voters that he or she really understands their situation and their problems.

A congressman's term is for two years. This means that the entire membership of the House faces election every two years, in even-numbered years. When a vacancy occurs in a House seat between elections through death or resignation, the governor of that state calls a special election for the voters in that district to choose a new congressman.

Apportionment of House Seats as of 2016





President Barack Obama delivers the State of the Union address in the House Chamber of the U.S. Capitol, 2012.

Apportionment of House Seats

The Constitution assigns or apportions seats in the House to the states on the basis of state population. States with more people have more representatives and thus have more influence in the House. The Constitution said that states were originally to have no more than one representative for every thirty thousand people. The Constitution also set out the number of representatives for the thirteen original states and provided for a census to take place every ten years to determine how any changes in the states' populations would change their representation in the House. The first census took place in 1790, and the federal government has taken a census every ten years since then.

As the population of the country grew and new states came into the Union, the number of representatives in the House increased. The first Congress had 65 members. The first census increased that number to 106. By 1912, the House had grown to 435 members; and effective action with such a large group had become difficult. However, Congress

faced the dilemma of either adding more seats after the 1920 census or reapportioning the existing 435 seats. Reapportionment would have meant that some representatives from states growing more slowly or not at all would have lost their seats. Faced with the need to demonstrate political courage, Congress instead did nothing about the issue after the 1920 census. Finally, in 1929 (just before the 1930 census), Congress passed the Reapportionment Act. This law stated that the permanent size of the House would be 435 members and that the House would apportion those seats among the states as fairly as possible following each census.

The House has made one exception to this total since then. When Alaska and Hawaii became states in 1959, each new state received one House seat. This temporarily increased the membership of the House to 437. Following the 1960 census, the House reapportioned the regular 435 seats among the fifty states for the 1962 election. If the House still followed the original standard of one congressman for every thirty thousand people, the House would now have over 10,000 members!

State populations change constantly. Some change radically, while others change slowly. A general trend has been for urban areas to grow in population while rural areas shrink. Southern and western states have grown significantly in recent years while northern states have grown more slowly or lost population. Michigan lost population between 2000 and 2010, and West Virginia lost population between 2010 and 2014. The House has to take all these changes into account in apportioning its 435 seats among the fifty states. Changes on the basis of a census take effect in the congressional elections two years after a census. For example, apportionment changes based on the 2010 census took effect in the 2012 congressional elections.

The 2010 census showed a U.S. population of 308,745,538 on April 1, 2010. This means that, on average, each congressman represented 709,760 people. However, the Constitution guarantees that

This poster of Uncle Sam encouraged American citizens to participate in the 1940 census.



each state has at least one representative, and the populations of the states do not divide out that evenly. Wyoming, the least populous state with a 2010 census of 563,626, had one congressman. Delaware had 897,934 people, but it also had only one representative. California had the most congressmen with 53, meaning that the average district population there was 702,905. Michigan's congressmen each represented an average of 705,974 people. Georgia's district average was 691,975.

The Redistricting Process

Apportionment is the process of determining how many congressmen each state has, based on the census results. The U.S. Census Bureau uses a formula to determine how many congressmen each state will have and announces the apportionment of the House seats by the end of the census year.

Redistricting is the process within each state of determining the boundaries of the congressional districts it has. Each state's legislature is responsible for drawing the boundaries for that state's congressional districts. Since the least populous states only have one congressman, redistricting is not necessary in those states.

In theory, legislatures would simply draw district lines as fairly and equitably as possible; but politics is not always fair and equitable. Both Democratic and Republican parties within the states work especially hard to win majorities in the legislatures in census years, since the legislatures elected in those years oversee the redrawing of district lines for the states' congressional seats. Having a majority will give a party a better chance of passing a plan that will help that party. Reapportionment of the seats in the state legislature happens at the same time.

The majority party in the legislature wants to protect the congressional and legislative seats that it holds and to gain as many additional ones as possible. Thus, the legislative majority might draw district lines in such a way that scatters voters who might vote against their party into several districts; or the majority party might put as many friendly voters

into the same district as possible to concentrate and thus limit their impact. At the same time, some redistricting plans have resulted in congressmen already holding office (called incumbents) running against each other, sometimes from the same party.

The result of sharply partisan redistricting has been that many seats are safely in the hands of one party or the other. This discourages genuinely contested congressional and legislative races. It also means that many congressmen do not try to collaborate with members of the other party on legislation; but instead they simply vote the party line, knowing that they will likely win again in the next election.

Voters routinely challenge redistricting plans in court as violations of the Constitution's guarantee of equal protection of the law. Courts are generally reluctant to become embroiled in the political activities of legislatures unless they detect an obvious violation of voting rights. Sometimes the challenges can drag on for years and go all the way to the U.S. Supreme Court.

The practice of drawing oddly-shaped district lines for political advantage goes way back in American history. In Massachusetts in 1812, with Elbridge Gerry as governor, the legislature drew an oddly-shaped state senatorial district that looked like a snake or serpent on the map. A political cartoonist added a head, wings, and claws to make it look like a dragon or salamander and called it a "Gerry-mander."

Over the years, Congress and the courts have established guidelines for how legislatures should pursue redistricting. Congressional districts must have as even a population distribution as possible within a state. Each district must be contiguous; this means that a district cannot be separated into two or more areas that are not geographically connected. A district must have compactness, meaning that its borders should be as close together as possible. Districts must maintain community identity as much as possible. A legislature may not divide a city to put urban voters into two or more districts

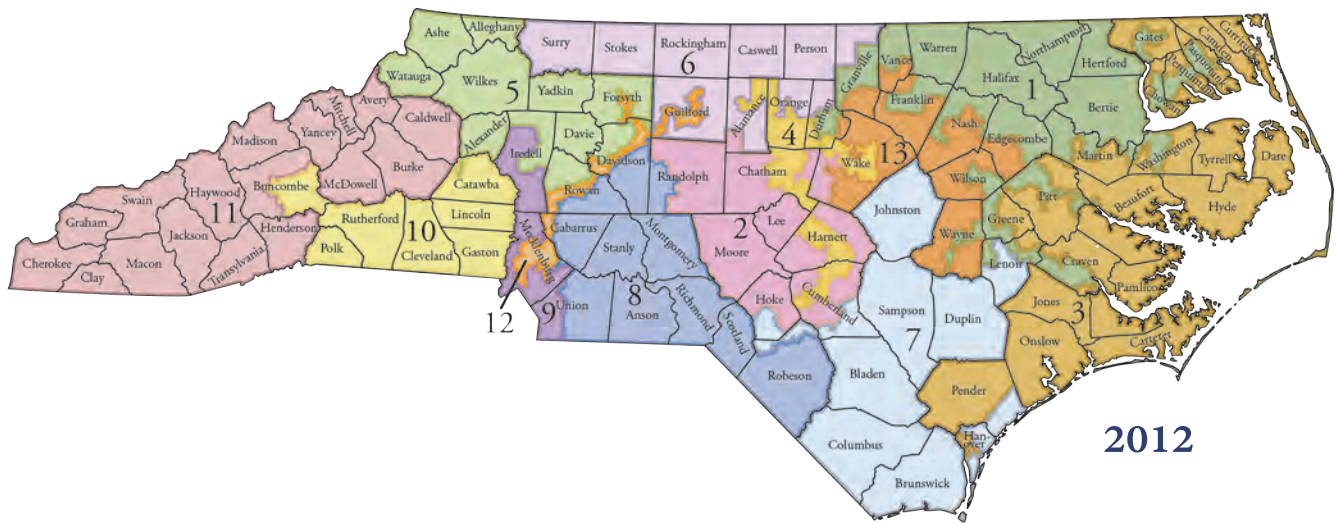


From the April 2, 1813, Issue of the Salem Gazette, Salem, Massachusetts

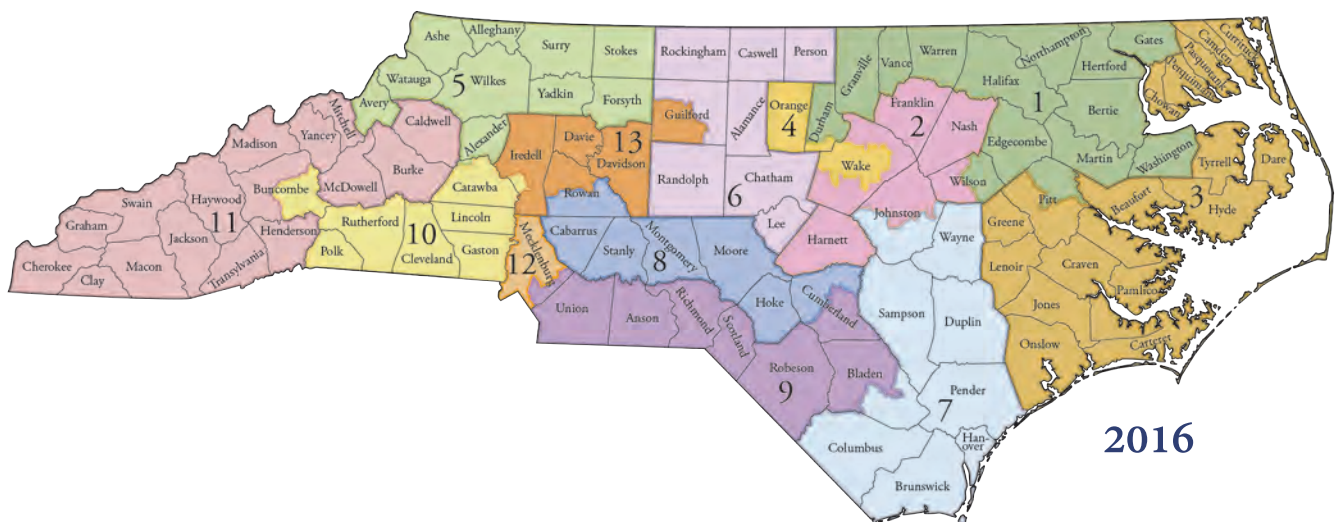
and thus weaken their impact or excessively divide counties. Legislatures generally try to conform to existing districts as much as possible to maintain the political divisions within a state. The 1965 Voting Rights Act required that district lines not dilute the voting power of racial or ethnic minority groups, either intentionally or unintentionally.

The redistricting process in North Carolina has been one of the most controversial in recent years. Several legal cases related to the process in the state since the 1990s have gone to the U.S. Supreme Court. Two districts have been principally at issue. The First District in northeastern North Carolina has included parts of as many as 24 counties but contains only about five entire counties. The Twelfth District in the central part of the state has been a narrow ribbon that connects several urban areas and in some places is only as wide as the Interstate that connects the cities. Both of these districts concentrate the impact of Democratic voters, a majority of whom are African American. This has created two examples of a majority-minority district, meaning that a racial minority in the state as a whole constitutes a majority of voters in that district.

House Districts in North Carolina



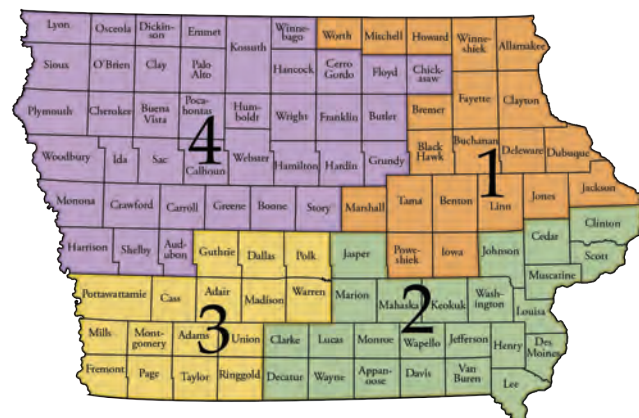
2012



2016

The impact has been that these districts consistently have Democratic congressmen, but Democratic voters have relatively less influence in nearby districts. In 2012 the total votes for Democratic and Republican congressional candidates were about equal, but Republicans won nine of thirteen congressional seats in North Carolina that year. In 2016 after yet another court decision, the North Carolina legislature significantly redrew the state's congressional districts. The legislature delayed congressional primaries that had been scheduled for March until early June. However, North Carolina is by no means the only state that has seen unusually-drawn districts.

House Districts in Iowa



On the other hand, in 1980 the Iowa legislature assigned the redistricting process to the Legislative Services Agency in the state government. The agency devises a plan in secret based primarily on population, trying to put a mix of rural and urban voters in each district. The legislature casts an up-or-down vote on the plan. If the legislature rejects it, the agency tries twice more before the process must go to court. So far, the process has not reached that point.

Several states have begun using some form of a non-partisan commission or agency to develop a

redistricting plan or to provide a last-gasp plan if the legislature fails to come up with one. Some of these plans are binding while others are only advisory. The rules for who qualifies as non-partisan vary from state to state, which means that in some places people who have been politically active have taken part in the redistricting commission.

Political parties often treat people outside of their party different from the way they treat party members. However, God teaches that His followers should be just to everyone.

My brethren, do not hold your faith in our glorious Lord Jesus Christ with an attitude of personal favoritism.

James 2:1

Assignments for Lesson 16

We Hold These Truths

Read excerpt from *Wesberry v. Sanders*, pages 76-79.

Literature

Continue reading *Mornings on Horseback* by David McCullough. Plan to be finished with it by the end of this unit.

Project

Choose your project for Unit 4 and start working on it.

Student Review

If you are using this resource, answer the questions for Lesson 16.



Senate Wing of the United States Capitol in Washington, D.C.

Lesson 17

Choosing the Senate

Although the Senate is much given to admiring in its members a superiority less obvious or quite invisible to outsiders, one Senator seldom proclaims his own inferiority to another, and still more seldom likes to be told of it.

Henry Adams, The Education of Henry Adams (1907)

Read Section 3 of Article I of the U.S. Constitution on page 59 and the Seventeenth Amendment on pages 71-72 in *We Hold These Truths* before you study this lesson.

Some have described the United States Senate as the greatest deliberative body in the world. Most people see it as the upper or more prestigious house of Congress since it has fewer members than the House and since senators serve six-year terms instead of two years as in the House. Although senators represent individual states, they often speak and act as though they represent national interests and not just those of one state.

A person must be a little older to serve in the Senate than in the House. A senator must be at least 30 years old and an American citizen for nine years. He or she must also be a resident of the state he or she represents. Each state has two senators. This gives states with fewer people the same power in the Senate as more populous states. Senators from less populous states have often been leaders in the

Senate and have sometimes used their positions in that body to gain national prominence.

The Constitution created the Senate to be a continuing body. When the Senate first met, it divided itself into three classes. One class served for only two years, another class served for four years, and a third class served the full six years. As more states joined the Union, the Senate continued this process of placing each senator into one of the three classes. This staggered the election of senators so that one-third of the seats are elected every two years, as opposed to the House, where all 435 seats go before the voters every two years. This provides for greater continuity in the Senate than in the House.

The Election of Senators

In the original Constitution, state legislatures chose U.S. senators. This provision gave state governments a direct role in the national government. It also gave an inducement for state political leaders to support the ratification of the Constitution. This approach also supposedly provided for more reasoned

deliberation in the selection of senators than if the senators had been chosen by popular vote. As we have seen in this curriculum, state legislatures played an important role in the early national government.

However, during the nineteenth century an increasing number of Americans supported the direct election of U.S. senators by popular vote. Many people believed that this change would be in keeping with the trend toward greater democracy. Moreover, state legislatures did not always handle well their responsibility for naming senators. State political battles sometimes were more important than the selection of the best person to be a U.S. senator. Occasionally, political wrangling in state legislatures caused Senate seats to remain unfilled for as long as two years. In Delaware around the turn of the twentieth century, a vacancy continued for four years.

The Populist and Progressive Movements of the late 1800s and early 1900s promoted several ideas for reform in business and government. One item in the agendas of these movements was the direct

election of senators. These groups maintained that the selection of senators by state legislatures kept the process out of the hands of the people and left it in the hands of politicians, lobbyists, and special interest groups. State legislatures often proved themselves to be the protectors not of people's rights but of their own power and privileges. Direct election of senators, it was argued, would make the upper house of Congress more responsive to the people and less responsive to the intrigues of politicians.

In the years leading up to 1912, twenty-nine states adopted a form of popular election of senators in which they held primaries or referendums, the results of which were binding on state legislators. During those years, Congress considered an amendment to the U.S. Constitution which provided for senators to be elected by the people of their state rather than by state legislatures, but the U.S. Senate consistently defeated the amendment.

111th United States Senate in the Senate Chamber of the United States Capitol in Washington, D.C., 2010



In 1912, however, the number of senators elected by the people had increased to the point that Congress approved the amendment and sent it to the states. The required number of states ratified the Seventeenth Amendment in 1913, and it took effect in the 1914 election.

It would be difficult to determine whether, on the whole, state legislatures or the voting public have chosen better senators. Both methods have elevated good people as well as rascals to the U.S. Senate. We can say with certainty, however, that the direct election of senators has lessened the influence of state legislatures in the national government.

Filling Vacancies in the Senate

If a Senate seat becomes vacant through death or resignation during a term, the process for filling that vacancy varies from state to state. Section 3 of

Article I of the U.S. Constitution provides for the governor to appoint a senator, but the Seventeenth Amendment gives state legislatures the option to have a role in the process; and the legislatures have passed various laws to refine the process. In most states the governor appoints someone to fill the seat until the next congressional election. This appointed senator is a full member of the Senate, but he or she is the most junior member of the body and has little power. Often the governor gives the appointment to a long-time public servant as a reward for his or her service. Usually the governor appoints someone from his or her own political party, even if the previous senator had been from another party. Occasionally a governor has appointed himself to fill a Senate seat.

At the next congressional election after a Senate seat has become vacant, candidates run to fill the remaining two or four years of the term. If the appointed senator wants to run in the next election, he or she has at least some of the power and prestige of an incumbent during the campaign. On rare occasions a state elects two senators at the same

Inside the Senate Wing of the United States Capitol



time. This happens if one senator's six-year term is ending and a special election is filling the remainder of the other senator's term. When that partial term comes to an end, the next campaign for that Senate seat is for the full six-year term.

In fourteen states at present, the state holds a special election sooner than the next congressional election to fill the seat. Some of these states allow the governor to make an interim appointment while others do not. Four states require that the interim appointment go to someone from the same political party as the previous senator. Hawaii requires the governor to choose one of three nominees that the state political party organization submits to the governor.

Advice and Consent Role

Article II, Section 2 of the Constitution gives the Senate a special check-and-balance role with regard to certain actions of the president. The Senate must ratify by a two-thirds majority treaties that the president makes with other countries; otherwise the treaties do not apply to the United States. In addition, the Senate must give a simple majority approval to important appointments that the president makes: ambassadors, federal judges, Supreme Court justices, heads of the executive departments (also known as Cabinet members), and certain other appointments. These make up the advice and consent role of the Senate.

The Senate's most controversial consideration of a treaty involved the Treaty of Versailles that ended World War I. Democratic President Woodrow Wilson saw to it that the treaty included the creation of a League of Nations, a forerunner of the United Nations, in an attempt to prevent such a terrible war from ever happening again. The Republican majority in the Senate, however, wanted to withdraw from world affairs as much as possible and did not want the United States to take part in a world organization that might require another costly foreign involvement. The Senate defeated the

Treaty of Versailles, the United States never joined the League of Nations (which proved to be incapable of preventing World War II), and the United States concluded separate peace treaties with the nations against whom it had fought in World War I.

Generally the Senate approves a president's nominees, unless a nominee proves to be involved in a scandal or unless a majority of senators oppose a nominee for political reasons. Senators who are not from the president's party might still rake a nominee over the coals before the Senate gives its approval. In recent years, when the majority in the Senate has not been from the president's party, that majority has tended to delay or even refuse to hold votes on the president's nominees for judges in federal courts. The Senate's role in confirming or rejecting the president's nominees to the Supreme Court has become one of the most controversial aspects of the Senate's advice and consent role. We will discuss this more in Lesson 39.

One issue that aroused a fair amount of political conflict in the early years of the nation was whether the president could remove from office someone whom he had nominated and the Senate had confirmed. This issue arose during the presidency of Andrew Jackson, who fired a Cabinet member that the Senate had approved. Jackson said that he had the right to get rid of those who served under him, while Jackson's political opponents said that the Senate's power to confirm also gave it the power to determine whether someone stayed on the job. The same issue was at the heart of the conflict between President Andrew Johnson and Congress over the Tenure of Office Act following the Civil War. In 1926, the Supreme Court in *Myers v. U.S.* declared the Tenure of Office Act to be unconstitutional. The Court ruled that the president had the right to remove an appointee without the Senate's approval.

The Constitution does give the president the power to make appointments during a recess of Congress (Article II, Section 2, Paragraph 3). The president can make these appointments any time that Congress is in recess, even if that recess is only

for a few days or weeks. The appointed person may serve until the end of the next session of Congress. During that time, the president can choose to submit that person's nomination to the Senate to hold the position permanently. This provision had more practical importance when Congress was not in session for long periods of time during the year. Fifteen Supreme Court justices began their tenure as recess appointments. Recess appointments are politically risky for the president. They allow him to

fill a post with someone he wants who might have a hard time winning confirmation by the Senate, but they tend to anger the opposition party in the Senate who might try to make confirmation more difficult.

The Latin root word from which the English word senate derives was *senex*, meaning old man. Therefore, the word senate has been used for a council of elders. In the early days of the church, the apostles appeared before the Senate of the sons of Israel.

*Upon hearing this, they entered into the temple
about daybreak and began to teach.
Now when the high priest and his associates came,
they called the Council together,
even all the Senate of the sons of Israel,
and sent orders to the prison house for them to be brought.
Acts 5:21*

Assignments for Lesson 17

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| We Hold These Truths | Read letters concerning the election of Hattie Caraway, pages 80-81. |
| Literature | Continue reading <i>Mornings on Horseback</i> by David McCullough. |
| Project | Continue working on your project for Unit 4. |
| Student Review | If you are using this resource, answer the questions for Lesson 17. |

DIRKSEN

SENATE OFFICE BUILDING

Senate Office Building in Washington, D.C.

Lesson 18

The Congress Shall Assemble

A decent and manly examination of the acts of government should be not only tolerated, but encouraged.

—William Henry Harrison (1841)

Read Sections 4, 5, and 6 of Article I of the U.S. Constitution on pages 59-60 and the Twentieth and Twenty-Seventh Amendments on pages 72-73 and 75 in *We Hold These Truths* before you study this lesson.

Section 4: Elections and Sessions of Congress

The Constitution left the carrying out of elections in the hands of the states. The states already had a framework for conducting elections that they could expand to include choosing federal officials; and, after all, the congressmen and senators were representatives from the states. The Constitution did give Congress the right to legislate on elections except on the subject of the place where senators were chosen. As stated above, the Constitution specifically stated that the state legislatures would choose senators.

Terminology about American government can be confusing because sometimes the same word describes two different things. For example, the word Congress describes America's two legislative

bodies, the Senate and the House of Representatives. However, the word Congress can also mean a particular two-year period in which Congress meets. For example, the first Congress convened in 1789; the 114th Congress began on January 6, 2015. The swearing in of the members of the House of Representatives every two years marks the beginning of a new Congress.

The Constitution also uses the word session in two ways. The document requires that Congress meet at least once every year. The meetings of Congress in a given year are called a session. Therefore, each Congress has two sessions, one for each of the two years in which a particular Congress meets. The first session of the first Congress convened in 1789; the second session of the first Congress began in 1790. The first session of the 114th Congress began on January 6, 2015; the second session of the 114th Congress convened on January 4, 2016. The word session is also used to describe the meeting of Congress on a given day.

Originally, a session of Congress began on the first Monday in December. However, not all states held elections at the same time. Some states

conducted their elections in the odd-numbered years and others in even-numbered years. In the early years of the country, over a year passed from the time that many members of Congress won their elections until the new Congress began. For instance, senators and representatives elected in the fall of 1866 did not actually take office until December of 1867. This lengthy passage of time was necessary when travel and communication were slow and when elections took place at different times in the various states.

Over time, however, travel and communication became faster and states began to hold their elections at the same time of year. The Twentieth Amendment, ratified in 1933, called for the inauguration of the president and the convening of Congress to take place much more quickly after an election. Instead of the president having to wait four months after the election until March 4 to take office, as he did originally, the inauguration now takes place a little over two months later, on January 20. The new Congress now convenes on January 3 (unless they appoint a different day) following the election,

Congressman Percy Gassaway of Oklahoma takes a break in the heat of the summer at his office in Washington, D.C., during a recess of Congress, 1935.



instead of the members having to wait over a year after their election.

Congress adjourns a session when congressional leaders decide that the body can or should not attempt to accomplish any further work. In the early days of the country, Congress met for only a few months out of the year and almost always was in recess during the hot days of summer in humid, swampy, Washington, D.C. Today, Congress meets for almost the entire year but takes long breaks from time to time. In election years, members of Congress try to be finished (or at least plan to take an extended recess) in time for the fall campaign. Meetings of Congress that occur after an election and before a new Congress begins are called lame-duck sessions. Lame ducks cannot do very much, and expectations for a lame-duck session of Congress are low since some members will be retiring and others have lost their bids for re-election.

The Constitution allows for the president to adjourn Congress and to call it into special session in extraordinary circumstances (Article II, Section 3). Since Congress is now almost always in session, special sessions are rare. No president has ever adjourned Congress. Presidents have sometimes called the Senate into special session to consider pending treaties or appointments.

Section 5: Proceedings

Fitness of Members. The Constitution gives each house of Congress the right to judge the fitness of its own members. The House does not sit in judgment on the Senate, nor vice versa, nor do the president or the Supreme Court have the right to question who sits in Congress. This means that neither the House nor the Senate has to bow to the wishes of any other branch of government regarding who its members are. It also means that the members of each body are extremely reluctant to question the fitness of fellow congressmen or senators. If the members of one party go after a member of another party and call for his or her expulsion, the same process might come down on one of their own at



some later time. Only with a two-thirds majority can a body expel one of its members. In other words, the evidence must be clear and convincing to expel a member.

Quorum. Each house must have a majority of members present to conduct business. This is called a quorum, the number needed to take official action. Any member may request a roll call to determine if a majority is present. The quorum requirement prevents a small group from meeting to do something that the majority would not want to do. However, the minority has rights too. It can compel members to come to the chamber to conduct business. This is known as a quorum call. The right to call a quorum enables the minority to compel at least the possibility of taking action that it sees as necessary, if the majority is trying to avoid doing so. Each house can compel its members to be present.

If you have ever watched the proceedings of Congress on C-SPAN (discussed on page 108) or visited the Capitol while Congress was in session, you will have noticed that the House and Senate spend much time with few members actually present on the floor of either chamber. This happens because the House and Senate play a little game with themselves. Each body assumes that a quorum

View of the U.S. Capitol from the Longworth House Office Building in Washington, D.C.

is present, unless a member requests a roll call or a quorum call to find out the actual situation. In other words, they just don't bother to count unless someone makes it happen. Members usually want to get along with each other, so few congressmen or senators will demand a roll call or a quorum call except in unusual circumstances. Because of this arrangement, members can make speeches from the floor that they can tell their constituents back home about and that will go into the public record, but the other members don't have to listen to them.

Neither house may adjourn for more than three days during a session without the consent of the other. This keeps one body from paralyzing the work of Congress by simply refusing to meet. In actual practice, the leaders of both houses work together to determine the length of the sessions, when Congress will recess for vacations, and when the House and Senate will adjourn to end a session. The House and Senate may not decide to meet in a location other than where both have agreed to meet. This again prevents one body from meeting secretly or pulling away to disrupt business.

Congressional Record

Each house keeps a journal of its proceedings and must publish the journal on a regular basis. The House and Senate Journals record the actions and votes of each body, but they do not record speeches and debates.

These journals are a different publication from the *Congressional Record*. From the earliest meetings of Congress under the Constitution, members of Congress, the press, and the public have had an interest in a written account of what the members of each chamber said and did. At first, reporters provided these records in newspapers. However, partisan newspapers did not always provide an accurate and balanced account of what took place in Congress. The Senate did not allow reporters to attend for several years, so published accounts focused on House proceedings.

In 1824 two reporters established the *Register of Debates* to provide a summary of members' statements from the floor of the two chambers. Two other reporters founded the *Congressional Globe* in 1833. This became the semi-official record of congressional activities, but at first the reports were not truly neutral. The *Globe* became more even-handed or non-partisan in later years, but its staff

found it increasingly difficult to keep up with the volume of debates and other activities, especially during the Civil War.

In 1873 Congress established the *Congressional Record*, printed by the Government Printing Office (GPO). The *Record* reports the proceedings of the two houses of Congress and congressional committees, as well as some further remarks as noted below. The GPO prints the *Record* in the evening of a day when either or both houses of Congress are in session, and printed copies are available the next morning. It is also available on the Internet.

The *Congressional Record* consists of four parts. The House and Senate sections report in detail the proceedings of each chamber and their committees. In the Extensions of Remarks, House members may publish remarks that they did not actually present on the floor of the House. The *Daily Digest* provides a summary of actions by the two chambers and their committees and a preview of upcoming activities.

C-SPAN

C-SPAN (Cable-Satellite Public Affairs Network) is a non-profit, advertising-free broadcasting company that receives support by a small fee charged to cable and satellite subscribers. C-SPAN receives no government funding and strives to be non-partisan. The network began in 1979 with telecasts of the U.S. House of Representatives. C-SPAN2 debuted in 1986 and provides coverage of Senate sessions (the Senate had resisted allowing television cameras in the chamber until then). C-SPAN3 began in 2001 and broadcasts other public affairs programming and archived programs from the first two C-SPAN channels. C-SPAN Radio took to the airwaves in 1997 as a local station in Washington, D.C., and simulcasts many C-SPAN programs. The C-SPAN channels provide coverage of congressional committee hearings; speeches by political figures; talk and interview shows; various



C-SPAN Cameraman at Work in Washington, D.C.

Lesson 18 - The Congress Shall Assemble

educational programs; and special events such as the annual State of the Union address, dedication of national monuments, and coverage of national political conventions. C-SPAN provides coverage of major news events without commentary or analysis by reporters. BOOK-TV, broadcast on C-SPAN2 on weekends, offers presentations by and interviews with authors of new books. The C-SPAN website (www.c-span.org) provides streaming video and audio of its broadcasts.

Section 6 (Part One): Salary

Members of Congress receive a salary and the payment of their expenses from the United States Treasury. Under the Articles of Confederation, the states paid their own representatives in Congress. At first, members of Congress received \$6.00 per day while Congress was in session. In 1815 Congress increased its members' pay to \$1,500 per year. As of 2016, the salary for a member of Congress was \$174,000 per year. The majority leader and minority leader in each house was paid \$193,400, while the speaker of the House received \$223,500. Congress has provided for a cost of living adjustment each year unless Congress votes not to accept it. Congress often rejects these automatic increases. These are good salaries, but salary is not by any means the entire picture of the financial benefits that a member of Congress receives.

Each member of the House receives an allotment of about \$1.2 million per year to hire staff workers, pay for office expenses in Washington and in their home states, and pay for other expenses related to their roles. This allotment is called the Members' Representational Allowance (MRA). Senate allotments vary based on the population of their state and its distance from Washington, D.C. The average expense allotment for a senator, called the Senator's Official Personnel and Office Expense Account (SOPOEA), is more than \$3 million. Included in the expense account is the mail or franking privilege, which allows congressional mail



Russell Senate Office Building in Washington, D.C.

to be sent at government expense. In addition to regular correspondence and responses to constituent requests, the franking privilege allows for what are called informative mailings from members of Congress to addresses in their districts. These mailings inform residents (i.e., voters) about what a senator or congressman has accomplished. Voters might especially notice these in the mail as election time draws near; it's one of the perks of being an incumbent. However, members may not use these expense accounts for purely personal or political expenses.

The Twenty-Seventh Amendment to the Constitution, which Congress first proposed in 1789 and which enough states finally ratified in 1992, says that a pay raise that Congress passes (a "law varying the compensation for the services of the Senators and Representatives") cannot go into effect until a congressional election has taken place. The amendment was an attempt to prevent a sitting Congress from giving itself a pay increase. Private citizens challenged in federal court the automatic cost of living increases that Congress can receive every year (enacted by Congress in 1989) as a violation of this amendment, but the courts have held that such

adjustments are not new salary laws and therefore do not violate the amendment. Of course, Congress sets the salaries for federal judges; and pensions for retired federal judges are based on the pensions for retired members of Congress.

Congress employs thousands of staff personnel. By law each of the 435 members of the House of Representatives may hire eighteen full-time staff members and four part-time. The political leaders (speaker, majority and minority leaders, and so forth) in the House have even more staff available to them. The staff of each senator is much larger than that of a congressman and is based on his or her SOPOEA. Additional staff members work for the standing House and Senate committees, serve as security and maintenance personnel, are employees of the Library of Congress, and work in other jobs directly related to Congress.

In addition, members of Congress receive health insurance coverage and participate in the Federal Employees Retirement System. If someone serves in Congress for at least five years, he or she is eligible to receive a pension. Members can receive a pension beginning at age 50 if they have twenty years of service, or at any age after twenty-five years of service, or after the age of 62 regardless of his length of service. The pension is based on years of service and the highest three years of salary. The starting pension cannot be more than 80 percent of the retiree's final salary. In 2014, 601 retired members of Congress were receiving government pensions based at least in part on service in Congress (some had held other positions in the federal government as well). These pensions averaged about \$4,980 per month each.

For many years, Congress exempted itself from some of the laws that it passed. For instance, members of Congress were not part of the Social Security system until 1984. They participated instead in the Civil Service Retirement System, which went into effect fifteen years before Social Security began. The landmark 1964 Civil Rights Act exempted members of Congress from its provisions

in terms of racial discrimination in employment. When Republicans regained control of Congress in 1994 after forty years of one or both houses having Democratic majorities, the first law passed by the new Congress in 1995 made Congress subject to the same laws that it enacts for the American people.

Members of Congress may earn up to fifteen percent of their salary from outside sources, such as speaking fees and legal fees; and they have no limit on what they can make from book royalties. Senators and congressmen also enjoy many unofficial financial benefits from contributors, lobbyists, and special interest groups that want to influence how he or she votes. Congress has passed laws that eliminate blatant bribery, but the laws also carefully allow certain benefits (such as a company or contributor paying for a vacation as long as it is disclosed). Some former members of Congress work for Washington lobbying or consulting groups after their tenure in Congress, and these former members do quite well financially.

Section 6 (Part Two): Immunity and Limitations

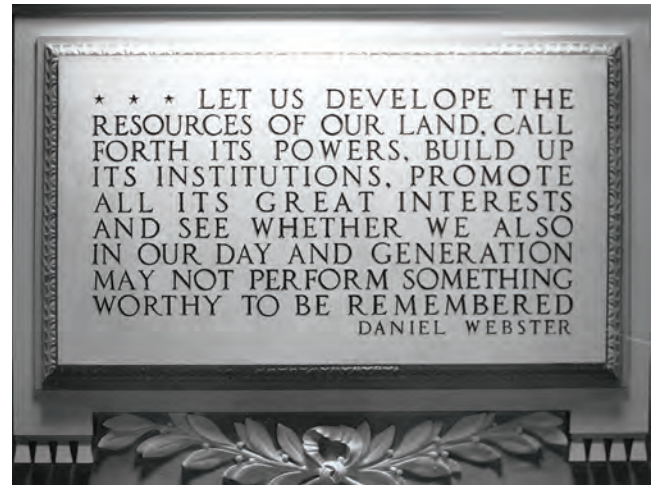
History tells of many kings who ordered their political opponents arrested and executed. The framers wanted to protect members of Congress from this kind of political intimidation. As a result, senators and representatives cannot be arrested while attending a session of Congress or while going to or returning from such sessions, except if the charge is treason, felony, or breach of the peace. In addition, they do not have to face any criminal charges for anything they say in any speech or debate in Congress. As a result, members of Congress express some outrageous statements, accusations, and outright lies on the floor of Congress with complete impunity.

While in office, a senator or representative may not hold an appointed government position that Congress created or a position for which the pay was increased while he or she was in office. This prevents

a member of Congress from helping to create a position or increasing the pay of a position and then filling that position. Likewise, no government employee may serve as a congressman or senator.

It is not unusual, however, for a president to appoint a former member of Congress to a post in the executive branch. Bill Brock, for instance, was a congressman and senator in the 1960s and 1970s. He later served as secretary of Labor and then as U.S. Trade Representative during the administration of President Ronald Reagan. President Bill Clinton named former senator Jim Sasser as Ambassador to China after Sasser lost a bid for re-election.

Congress has defined the rules regarding what members of Congress may and may not do more carefully in recent years. In the past, the regulations were not so clear-cut. Daniel Webster, for instance, while serving in Congress, argued cases before the U.S. Supreme Court as a private attorney. In addition, the Bank of the United States retained his services as an attorney with pay. His role with the Bank came as the result of his support for the Bank as well as his national prominence. His income from the Bank (not to mention several favorable loans he received from the Bank) no doubt influenced his continued support of the Bank in Congress. Neither of these roles that Webster held actually violated the



This plaque with a quote from Daniel Webster decorates the House chamber in the Capitol.

terms of this section of the Constitution, but the possibility for conflict of interest in such a situation does exist.

Members of Congress certainly deserve just compensation for their services and reasonable reimbursement for legitimate expenses. However, as the people who write their own financial rules and who enact the laws that affect the financial status of their fellow citizens, congressmen and senators would do well to set the proper example for financial responsibility. As Proverbs warns:

*He who profits illicitly troubles his own house,
but he who hates bribes will live.
Proverbs 15:27*

Assignments for Lesson 18

Literature Continue reading *Mornings on Horseback* by David McCullough.

Project Continue working on your project for Unit 4.

Student Review If you are using this resource, answer the questions for Lesson 18.



A stray dog sits at the desk of Texas Representative Charlie Wilson, 1991.

Lesson 19

Who They Are and What They Do

Government is too big and too important to be left to the politicians.

—Chester Bowles (Twentieth century American diplomat and economist)

Congress is not a cross-section of the American public in terms of race, gender, and wealth. Of course, the Constitution does not say that they have to be. Leaders are often the exception to the norm. By and large, senators and representatives are people who can afford long and expensive campaigns and who have accomplished a great deal in the legal, business, and political fields.

Statistics About the Members

The average congressman is about 57 years old. The average senator is about 61. Both of these averages are many years older than the minimum age requirements in the Constitution. Democrats are slightly older on average than Republicans.

Of the 435 representatives in the 114th Congress which convened in January 2015, 84 were women; of the 100 senators, 20 were women. About three-fourths of the women in the House and two-thirds of the women in the Senate were Democrats.

The 535 members of the House and Senate included 46 African Americans, 33 Hispanics, twelve Asian Americans, and two Native Americans. About 92 percent of the members of the House and

Senate listed their religious preference as Christian; about a third were Roman Catholic. There were 28 Jews, 16 Mormons, five Orthodox Christians, two Buddhists, two Muslims, and one Hindu.

About 200 congressmen or senators had been lawyers, and about 270 listed their profession as businessman, although some had been involved in more than one occupation previous to being elected to Congress. Over half of the members of the House and Senate were millionaires, some of them multi-millionaires. It is highly unusual for a salaried or wage-earning man or woman to be elected to Congress. They usually don't have the time or money to conduct a campaign that can last for as long as a year.

Most members have held elective office prior to being chosen to serve in Congress. Fifty-three senators once served in the House of Representatives, and about 250 members of Congress formerly served in state legislatures. Ten former governors served in the 114th Congress.

Incumbency and Length of Service

Congress usually sees little turnover in its membership. The general pattern is that incumbents

almost always win. Over the years, voters have re-elected about 90 percent or more of incumbents.

Most political observers consider many House districts and Senate seats safe for one party or the other. In a safe seat, the incumbent often has no or only token opposition because the opposition party does not want to waste its resources on what it sees as a hopeless cause. Even when an incumbent retires from a safe seat, someone from his or her party usually wins the next election. The drama that unfolds on election night concerning which party will control Congress usually centers on a relatively few races. A change in the party that holds a House or Senate seat often occurs (1) when a congressman or senator retires, creating what is called an open seat, (2) if a controversy has weakened the popularity of an incumbent, (3) if one political party targets a seat for defeat and works especially hard to win it, or (4) if a presidential candidate enjoys a landslide victory and carries his party's congressional candidates along on his coattails.

In the 114th Congress, 59 representatives and 13 senators were freshmen (in their first term). The average length of service was almost nine years in the House and almost ten years in the Senate. Congress has seen slightly more turnover in recent years than it had in the previous generation.

Term Limits

A frequent topic of political discussion is whether members of Congress and other elected officials should have term limits, a maximum number of terms or years that they can serve. The offices of president and many state governors have term limits; but the legislative bodies, not the executives, propose term limits, usually in the form of constitutional amendments. Legislators are not likely to vote themselves out of a job.

The arguments in favor of term limits include the fact that incumbents have a great advantage over challengers in elections in terms of name recognition and in terms of what they can do and what they can promise to do for voters. This makes a real contest between an incumbent and a challenger quite rare. In addition, incumbents can become more concerned about taking care of themselves and their power than about doing what is best for the people. Long-term service is a far cry from the citizen-representative ideal that the founders envisioned in which everyday people would serve only a few years, doing what they believe is genuinely best for the people as a whole, without building a personal power base for themselves.

Amy Kloubuchar (left), Democratic incumbent senator, and Kurt Bills (right), her Republican opponent, campaign at the Plymouth Parade in Plymouth, Minnesota, 2012.





New York Senator Charles Schumer speaks at a candlelight vigil for victims of a shooting in New York City, 2015

Against the idea of term limits is the argument that voters should have enough sense and enough freedom to elect whom they want. If they want to re-elect the same person campaign after campaign, they should be able to do so. Previously holding an office should not disqualify a person from holding that office. In addition, representatives with long tenure have the seniority within Congress to hold important positions and to get things done. All else being equal, an elected official who has been in office for a long time can do more for his home state or home district than a freshman official can. Another argument against imposing term limits is that we already have term limits. They are called elections. Every term of every elected office has a limit to it, and the person who holds that office has to run again or retire from it. The best solution to problems in Congress is for voters to stay informed and involved and to support good candidates.

What Representatives and Senators Do

Senators and congressmen represent their constituents in Congress and in the operation of the federal government. This involves speaking and voting in official sessions, but it also means helping their constituents.

The most obvious work that a senator or congressman does involves considering and voting on legislation that comes before them on the chamber floor, but that is not all that they do. Much of their time is spent in committee work: attending hearings and considering research for bills that are before their committees. They also have informal discussions with their staff and with other members of their chamber (especially those of the same party) as they consider the merits of legislation and suggest changes. Members of Congress want to make sure that proposed expenditures in the federal budget include their districts, so they or their staff take time to talk with other members who have introduced bills or members of the committees that formulate the federal budget. They also meet with lobbyists who want to influence how he or she votes on a particular piece of legislation.

Contact with their constituents is an important part of the work of a senator or representative. The offices of representatives and senators receive thousands of letters, phone calls, and emails every week from the folks back home. Many times a congressman's or senator's staff members handle these contacts by constituents. Some of the letters, phone calls, and emails give praise while others offer criticism or ask questions. The percentage of

people who care enough about issues to write their representatives is very small; and these genuine contacts do have an impact.

Often a constituent seeks help from his congressman or senator about a problem involving a federal agency. For example, someone might not have received an expected Social Security payment, or someone needs help with an application for a loan from the Small Business Administration. Congressional offices can provide passes to the visitor galleries of the House or Senate if a constituent is planning a visit to Washington.

Always in the back of a member's mind is the next election. Members of Congress have to be involved in fund-raising; making calls and sending letters to stay in touch with party workers back home; developing publicity for newspapers, mailings, and websites; and meeting with visiting groups.

A member of Congress can spend a considerable amount of time traveling between the home state and Washington. Members sometimes go on international trips (called junkets) to meet with foreign political leaders, visit troops stationed at overseas bases, or engage in fact-finding work regarding trade, immigration, or other topics. Congress has established rules regarding the length and cost of these trips, but a congressman can extend a trip at his or her own expense. Several members traveling together make for a congressional delegation trip. Congressional rules allow for private companies to pay for some travel by members. For example, if a company wants to build a factory in another country, it can pay for a trip by the relevant committee chairmen in Congress to get their support if the deal will require any regulations or treaties.

Library of Congress Main Reading Room in the Thomas Jefferson Building, Washington, D.C.



Library of Congress

The Library of Congress (LOC) was one of the first agencies that the federal government created. It began with a \$5,000 appropriation in 1800 to purchase “such books as may be necessary for the use of Congress—and for putting up a suitable apartment for containing them therein. . . .” The Capitol building served as the first home for the library, but the British destroyed that structure along with the books when they burned Washington during the War of 1812.

After the fire, former President Thomas Jefferson offered to sell Congress his extensive personal library as a replacement. His collection included a wide range of books, which began the tradition of the LOC gathering books on all kinds of subjects. Congress accepted Jefferson’s offer in 1815 and paid \$23,950 for the former president’s collection of over 6,000 books.

Ainsworth Rand Spofford served as the Librarian on Congress for most of the last half of the nineteenth century. He set the Library of Congress on the course of making it the major institution that it is today.

By his urging, Congress passed a copyright law in 1870 that required applicants for official copyright to send two copies of their work to the LOC. This caused an avalanche of publications, music, maps, and photographs to descend on the Library; and it led to Spofford’s request for a new, separate building for the collection. Congress authorized construction in 1886, and the LOC finally moved out of the Capitol building and into its beautiful new home across the street in 1897.

Today the LOC holds over 162 million items (including 38 million books and other publications, 70 million manuscripts, and 14 million photographs) on 838 miles of shelves. It continues its primary role as the research headquarters for Congress, but it also effectively serves the nation as a whole. The LOC maintains a website (www.loc.gov) that provides information about the Library and the activities of Congress as well as pictures and articles on many topics in American history.

Congressmen and senators often acquire great fame and status, considerable influence, and even a large amount of wealth. However:

*A good name is to be more desired than great wealth,
favor is better than silver and gold.*

Proverbs 22:1

Assignments for Lesson 19

We Hold These Truths

Read “On a Visit to the Senate When He Was Twelve” by Henry Adams, page 82.

Literature

Continue reading *Mornings on Horseback* by David McCullough.

Project

Continue working on your project for Unit 4.

Student Review

If you are using this resource, answer the questions for Lesson 19.



Senate Judiciary Committee Hearing, 2006

Lesson 20

Committee and Political Party Organization

Anyone who is unfamiliar with what Congress actually does and how it does it, with all its duties and all its occupations, with all its devices of management and resources of power, is very far from a knowledge of the constitutional system under which we live.

— Woodrow Wilson, *Congressional Government* (1885)

Two realities, neither of which the Constitution mentions, have a profound influence on the way Congress operates. These realities are political parties and the congressional committee system.

The House chooses its speaker or chairman. The vice president of the United States is the president or chairman of the Senate, and the Senate elects a president *pro tempore* (Latin for “for a time”) or temporary presiding officer. Nothing in the Constitution suggests that these positions of leadership are to be political prizes, but that is what they quickly became and what they remain today. In fact, many of the Founding Fathers feared the influence of what they called factions, or groups that organize themselves to promote a certain candidate or agenda. Today we call those factions political parties.

The Party Spirit

Party alignment developed in the earliest days of the government. Representatives and senators who favored a strong central government looked to

men such as John Adams and Alexander Hamilton for ideas and leadership. They took the name of Federalists. Those who favored strictly limiting the power of the central government and who promoted the power of the states gathered around Thomas Jefferson and took the title of Republicans. The Federalists began to lose power after Thomas Jefferson became president in 1801, and the party eventually faded away. As the idea of democracy became more acceptable, the Republicans took the name of Democratic Republicans. For a time the Republicans or Democratic Republicans were the only major party, but factions within the party still allowed for plenty of political competition.

By the time of Andrew Jackson’s election as president in 1828, members of the Democratic Republican party called themselves Democrats. Opponents of Jackson came together as the Whig party in the 1830s. A major issue dividing the two parties was slavery. The Democrats generally favored protecting slavery in the states where it already existed, and they wanted people to have the freedom to expand slavery into the territories. The Whigs, on



This political cartoon from 1908 shows the Democratic donkey and the Republican elephant seeking campaign funding for the upcoming election.

the other hand, opposed the expansion of slavery outside of the states where it already existed. In the 1850s the Whig Party fell apart and a new party, the Republicans, came into existence. Republicans took a firmer stance against the expansion of slavery than the Whigs had.

From just before the Civil War until today, the two major political parties in the United States have been the Republicans and the Democrats. Minor parties have occasionally emerged; and several exist today, including the Constitution Party, Green Party, and Libertarian Party; but they have not as yet been able to challenge the power of the two main parties.

The Role of Political Parties in Congress

The strength of political parties has come to be the dominant factor in how the House and Senate organize themselves and how they consider legislation. The speaker of the House is an influential member (though not necessarily the longest-serving

Unit 4 - Article 1: Congress (Part 1)

member) of the majority party in the House. Each party has a leader (called the majority leader and the minority leader) and assistant leaders (called the majority and minority whips) in the House and in the Senate. These leaders try to influence the members of their respective parties on what legislation to support or oppose.

Party leaders in each chamber discuss their plans at meetings of the party's members in that chamber. Such a meeting is called a caucus (House Democratic Caucus, Senate Republican Caucus, and so forth). To encourage members to vote the party line on a bill, party leaders might appeal to party principles (or to the dire consequences if the opposition were to succeed). They might offer to see about funding a program for a congressman's district, or they could agree to appoint a senator or representative to a particular committee in exchange for his vote. If a member decides not to vote the way that the majority of his party votes, party leaders might overlook him or her when they plan funding for programs or when a committee position becomes vacant.

The Speaker of the House

The House elects its speaker at the beginning of every new Congress. The speaker is the most powerful member of the House. Since the representatives generally vote along party lines, the majority party in the House is able to name the speaker. As the framers designed the position, the speaker is to preside and maintain order during House sessions. In actuality, however, the speaker does not usually spend his or her time this way. The speaker might preside during an important debate or if members are voting on an important bill, but most of the time the House elects a temporary chairman to preside over everyday sessions. Often only a handful of congressmen are present at the daily sessions.

Most of the speaker's important work is done behind the scenes. The speaker decides which committees consider bills that representatives

introduce, and he or she has a major influence on which bills come to the floor for a vote. The speaker also works to convince members of his or her party to support legislation that the party leadership supports.

The speaker can vote on all matters that come before the House, but to participate in debate on the House floor he must appoint a temporary chairman to take his place.

Portraits of the speakers of the House in the Speaker's Lobby outside the House Chamber in the U.S. Capitol.

President of the Senate

Even though the vice president of the United States is the president of the Senate, he is not a member of the Senate. He cannot participate in debate or vote except to break a tie.

The Constitution calls for the Senate to choose a president *pro tempore*. The original idea was for the president pro tempore (also called the president pro tem) to preside in the absence of the vice president. Since 1890, the Senate has generally elected the most senior senator of the majority party to be president pro tem as a way to honor this long-serving member. The Senate has always done this since 1949.





Vice President John Garner brings down the gavel to convene a session of the 76th Congress, 1940.

In practical terms, today the vice president and the president pro tem hardly ever preside over meetings of the Senate. From the time of the first Vice President, John Adams, through the vice presidency of Richard Nixon in the 1950s, the vice president did preside over most meetings of the Senate. However, in the early 1960s Vice President Lyndon Johnson became more involved in political activities

and rarely presided over sessions of the Senate. This pattern continues today, and junior senators of the majority party preside over routine Senate sessions. The vice president presides if he anticipates a close vote or in other extraordinary circumstances.

The Committee System

Much of the work of the Senate and the House takes place in committees, which are each made up of a few members of the respective chambers. Committees study bills that members have introduced, conduct investigations that might lead to new legislation, and hear testimony from the president's staff and other experts regarding matters in which the committee has an interest. Each standing or permanent committee and its subcommittees has a subject area on which it works, such as trade, immigration, crime, or homeland security. Sometimes more than one committee might study a bill.

Members of Congress want to be appointed to committees that have special relevance to their home states and districts. Many congressmen from the Midwest, for instance, want to serve on agricultural committees. Representatives from Florida, Texas, and California might want to be named to committees that deal with immigration policy.

The Senate and House, as well as the media and many in the general public, consider certain

Left: Senate Banking Committee Hearing, 2005

Right: Clarence Thomas, Supreme Court nominee, testifies before the Senate Judiciary Committee, 1991.





Senate Banking and Currency Committee Hearing, 1933

Standing Committees of the Senate

Agriculture, Nutrition, and Forestry
 Appropriations
 Armed Services
 Banking, Housing, and Urban Affairs
 Budget
 Commerce, Science, and Transportation
 Energy and Natural Resources
 Environment and Public Works
 Finance
 Foreign Relations
 Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions
 Homeland Security and Government Affairs
 Judiciary
 Rules and Administration
 Small Business and Entrepreneurship
 Veterans Affairs

Special, Select, and Other Senate Committees

Indian Affairs
 Select Committee on Ethics
 Select Committee on Intelligence
 Select Committee on Aging

Standing Committees of the House of Representatives

Agriculture
 Appropriations
 Armed Services
 Budget
 Education and the Workforce
 Energy and Commerce
 Financial Services
 Government Reform
 Homeland Security
 House Administration
 International Relations
 Judiciary
 Resources (Natural Resources and
 Environment)
 Rules
 Science
 Small Business
 Standards of Official Conduct
 Transportation and Infrastructure
 Veterans Affairs
 Ways and Means
 Permanent Select Committee on Intelligence

Joint Committees

(with members from both the House and Senate)

Joint Committee on Printing
 Joint Committee on Taxation

Joint Committee on the Library of Congress
 Joint Economic Committee

committees to be the most prestigious. The Armed Services Committees in both houses work on military policy. The Senate Judiciary Committee, among other tasks, considers nominations for federal judgeships. The House Ways and Means Committee handles revenue and spending legislation and serves as a steering committee for much of the legislation that comes before the House. Party leaders usually name the member of the majority party who has served the longest on a committee to be chairman of that committee.

The committee system is one way in which the majority party exercises great power in the House and Senate. The majority party chooses all of the

committee chairmen and a majority of committee members. The committees usually actively consider only legislation that the majority party supports. Each committee also has a ranking member, who is the committee's longest-serving member from the minority party.

In the next unit we will see how bills that members of Congress introduce make their way through a set process in order to become law. We will also see the role that committees and political parties play in passing or defeating proposed legislation.

Party positions have been around for a long time, as evidenced in this incident in the life of the apostle Paul:

*And there occurred a great uproar;
and some of the scribes of the Pharisaic party stood up
and began to argue heatedly, saying,
“We find nothing wrong with this man;
suppose a spirit or an angel has spoken to him?”
Acts 23:9*

Assignments for Lesson 20

We Hold These Truths	Read the preface to <i>Congressional Government</i> by Woodrow Wilson, pages 83-85.
Project	Finish your project for Unit 4.
Student Review	If you are using this resource, answer the questions for Lesson 20 and take the quiz for Unit 4.
Literature	Finish reading <i>Mornings on Horseback</i> by David McCullough. Read the literary analysis of the book beginning on page 10 in the <i>Student Review</i> and answer the questions over the book.