

Chapter Summary

The Legislative Branch

Lesson 1 *Structure of Congress*

- Congress is made up of 535 lawmakers who are divided into two houses. The Senate has 100 hundred lawmakers and the House of Representatives has 435.
- Each state sends two representatives to the Senate. The number of representatives a state sends to the House is based on the state's population.
- The political party that has more than half the seats in each house is known as the majority party. The other party is the minority party.
- The majority party in the House of Representatives appoints a leader called the Speaker of the House. The Speaker guides legislation through the House and leads floor debates.
- If anything happens to the president and the vice president, the Speaker of the House is next in line to become president.
- The vice president is the presiding officer of the Senate and can vote to break ties in the Senate.
- Congress has three types of committees to deal with the thousands of proposed laws it considers each session.
- Standing committees are permanent and deal with specific types of government work.
- Select committees are temporary and deal with special issues.
- Joint committees include members from both the Senate and the House. They are formed occasionally for certain issues.

Lesson 2 *Powers of Congress*

- Article I, Section 8, of the Constitution gives Congress its powers. Powers that are specifically listed in the Constitution are called the *expressed powers* or *enumerated powers*. These include the power to raise and spend money, to regulate commerce, to make laws about defense, war, and the armed forces, and to create a postal system and a court system.

Chapter Summary

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The Legislative Branch

Lesson 2 *Powers of Congress, Cont.*

- The *elastic clause* gives Congress implied powers to do whatever is “necessary and proper” to carry out its expressed powers.
- In addition to lawmaking powers, Congress has the power to suggest amendments to the Constitution, approve or reject the president’s nominees for various offices, and accuse and try officials for misconduct.
- The Constitution limits Congressional power to prevent it from denying individuals their rights. For example, Congress may not punish a person without a trial or pass a law that makes an act a crime after the act has been committed. Nor can Congress interfere with the powers of the states.

Lesson 3 *How Congress Works*

- Members of Senate must be at least 30 years old, live in the state they represent, and have been a U.S. citizen for at least nine years.
- Members of the House of Representatives must be at least 25 years old, live in the state they represent, and have been a U.S. citizen for at least seven years.
- Members of Congress have offices in Washington, D.C., and in their home states. They have personal staffs that gather information on proposed laws and deal with news reporters, voters, and special interest groups.
- Congressional committees also have staffs to organize committee hearings, meet with lobbyists, and draft bills.
- Agencies that support Congress include the Library of Congress, the Government Accountability Office, and the Congressional Budget Office.
- In their lawmaking capacity, members of Congress write bills, promote their bills to fellow members, and evaluate the bills of fellow members.
- Members of Congress often help people from their districts in dealing with the federal government. They also try to bring federal projects to their states.

Chapter Summary



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The Legislative Branch

Lesson 4 *How a Bill Becomes a Law*

- Congress considers more than 10,000 bills or proposed laws each session. Bills might be private and concern individual people or places, or they may be public and apply to the entire nation.
- Bills come from private citizens, from special interest groups, and from the president.
- A bill first goes to a standing committee that may hold a hearing on it. After the hearing, the committee can approve, change, replace, ignore, or reject the bill.
- If a bill is approved, changed, or replaced, it is moved on to the full House or Senate for debate. The House may make relevant amendments to the bill. The Senate may add riders that are completely unrelated to the bill.
- If the House and Senate pass slightly different versions of a bill, a conference committee with members from each house works out the differences. The House and Senate then vote on the revised bill.
- The president has the power to veto or reject bills approved by both houses. Congress can override a presidential veto with a two-thirds vote of each house.