**SS.7.C.1.5 Benchmark Clarification**: Students will identify the weaknesses of the government under the Articles of Confederation.

After drafting the **Declaration of Independence**, the colonists needed to create a system of government for the new and independent nation. The first government of the United States was the **Articles of Confederation**. The colonists chose to create a **confederation** which is a state-centered, decentralized (no central power) government where the main powers of government were controlled by the states. The Articles of Confederation was a direct response to the long list of grievances (complaints) against King George III, the **monarch** who controlled the executive, legislative, and judicial powers for the colonies. When one person controls all aspects of government, this is called a unitary system.

To avoid a unitary system from forming in the new nation, the colonists decided to create a confederal government that was very different. This new confederation would have a system of government with no central power that would reflect the colonists’ fear of a powerful national government. Since the colonists were hoping to avoid a powerful national government and leader, they included some very strict limits on the government that have been identified as weaknesses of the Articles of Confederation. Below is a list of these weaknesses:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Weakness of the National Government</th>
<th>What does this mean?</th>
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<tr>
<td>Congress had no power to tax</td>
<td>Congress could not collect money from the states to create and pay for an army and navy to defend the nation.</td>
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<td>Congress had no power to <strong>regulate</strong> trade</td>
<td>Congress could not make laws about the types of goods coming into the country. As well, the states may have had different policies related to trade.</td>
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<td>Congress had no power to <strong>enforce</strong> its own laws</td>
<td>The laws that Congress passed had no real influence on the people because they were not being enforced, and therefore, did not have to be followed.</td>
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<td>The national government lacked a national court system</td>
<td>There was not a set of national rules or national organizations that would determine how the laws should be applied. This means there was no judicial branch.</td>
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<td>The national government lacked central leadership</td>
<td>There was no chief executive who could manage the national government. This means there was no executive branch.</td>
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<td>Amendments to the Articles of Confederation required <strong>unanimous</strong> consent of the 13 state legislatures</td>
<td>Changing the government was very difficult. If one state legislature did not like a proposed change, it could vote against the <strong>amendment</strong> which would prevent change from taking place even if the other 12 states agreed on the amendment.</td>
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Because the Articles of Confederation created a decentralized (no central power) system of government, each state operated as an independent country in many ways. Each state was able to make trade agreements with other nations, each state established its own military, and each state made laws that its residents were expected to follow. The result of these actions was that the states were not operating as one nation and were, therefore, weak and could be attacked by other countries.

Adding to these concerns was **Shays’s Rebellion**. Shays’s Rebellion is the name given to an event where 2000 western Massachusetts farmers protested in county courthouses to prevent the government from taking their farm lands. The government of Massachusetts was threatening to take the land from these farmers because they had not paid their **taxes** and other debts (something owed, such as money) during the Revolutionary War, even though the government told them they did not have to pay those taxes. Because the government of Massachusetts had not held up their end of the bargain, the farmers **revolted**.

Shays’s Rebellion made leaders within the national government examine the Articles of Confederation a little more closely. In February of 1787, five states sent representatives to meet in Annapolis, Maryland to determine what to do next. They decided to call for a meeting of all 13 states to meet in Philadelphia that summer with the main purpose of fixing the Articles of Confederation. This meeting in Philadelphia would later be known as the **Constitutional Convention**, because this is where the U. S. Constitution was written to replace the Articles of Confederation.

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**amendment** - a change to the U.S. Constitution  
**Articles of Confederation** - the first constitution of the United States  
**Constitutional Convention** - a meeting in Philadelphia in 1787 where delegates decided to throw out the Articles of Confederation and draft the Constitution  
**Declaration of Independence** - a document written in 1776 that listed the basis for democratic government and the grievances of the colonists  
**confederation** - a system of government where power is located with the independent states and there is little power in the central government  
**enforce** – to carry out effectively  
**monarch** - a form of government headed by a king or queen who inherits the position, rules for life, and holds power that can range anywhere between limited to absolute  
**regulate** - to control, govern, or direct according to rule  
**revolt** - to rise up against the authority of a ruler or government  
**Shays’s Rebellion** - an event when 2000 Massachusetts farmers rebelled against land foreclosures and debt from the Revolutionary War  
**tax** - money levied by a government for specific facilities or services  
**unanimous** - in complete agreement