

THE LEGISLATIVE BRANCH:

Two Chambers of Congress



The seal of the U.S. Congress

The United States Constitution divides the federal government into three equally important parts: the legislative, executive, and judicial branches.

The main role of the legislative branch is to make the laws. The legislative branch has other significant duties. It has the power to declare war. It also confirms or rejects presidential nominees for important jobs in the executive and judicial branches.

The legislative branch includes the United States Congress. There are two chambers, or groups, in Congress: the Senate and the House of Representatives.

Read about the two chambers of Congress. Then, answer the questions on page 2.

	The House of Representatives	The Senate
Number of seats	There are 435 members of the House. The number of representatives for each state is determined by its population.	There are 100 members of the Senate. Each state elects two senators.
Length of term	Representatives are elected for two-year terms. That means that the entire House is newly elected every two years.	Senators are elected for six-year terms. Elections of senators are staggered such that one-third of the Senate is newly elected every two years.
Voting population, or <i>constituency</i>	Each state is divided into districts. People in each district vote for one representative.	People in each state vote for two senators to represent their whole state.
Top leadership role	The top leader in the House is known as the Speaker of the House. The Speaker chooses representatives to serve on committees, communicates with the president, and decides what laws the House will consider passing.	The U.S. vice president is the formal leader of the Senate but does not participate in debates and only votes in the event of a tie. The Senate majority leader plays a more active leadership role.

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PART I

Use the information on page 1 to fill in the blanks.

1. States with large populations, like Texas, have more seats in the _____ than less populated states, like Vermont, do.
2. Since each state is equally represented in the _____, smaller states such as Rhode Island have the same number of representatives as larger states such as California.
3. The _____ has rules for debate that allow its 100 members to discuss a bill for hours. Sometimes members use this extended speaking time to try to delay a vote. This practice is called a filibuster.
4. The _____ has 435 members. So, to allow more people an opportunity to talk, this chamber has time restrictions limiting the length of arguments in debate.
5. If representatives in the _____ are evenly split for and against a bill, the U.S. vice president will vote to break the tie.
6. The leader of the _____ is called the Speaker and is chosen by the political party that has the majority of seats.
7. Members of the _____ represent an entire state, rather than a single district, so they must be knowledgeable about issues that impact anyone in the state.
8. The _____ has shorter terms. This means elected officials need to pay close attention to public opinion in their districts so that they can convince people to re-elect them every two years.

PART II

Research your representatives! Write their names below.

State senators: _____

District representative: _____

BONUS QUESTION:

Which chamber of Congress would you rather serve in and why? Do additional research to help you decide.