



The Legislative Branch

The Legislative Branch of our government is called Congress. The main job of Congress is to make the laws for our country. Congress has two parts or houses called the Senate and the House of Representatives. Members of Congress are elected by the citizens of our country.

The Senate has a total of 100 members, as each state has two Senators. In order to be a Senator you must be at least 30 years old, you have to have been a U.S. citizen for the past nine years, and you must live in the state you represent. Members of the House of Representatives serve six year terms.

As of 2015, the House of Representatives has 435 members. The number of representatives each state can send to the House of Representatives is based on the population of the state. In order to be a representative you must be at least 25 years old, you have to have been a U.S. citizen for the past seven years, and you must live in the state you represent. Members of the House of Representatives serve two year terms.

The powers of Congress are listed in Article I of the Constitution. Some of the powers of Congress are:

- * to make laws
- * to tax the people
- * to raise an army and navy to defend the country
- * to declare war
- * to create a court system
- * to coin money
- * to regulate trade between states
- * to regulate trade between the U.S. and other countries

Each part of Congress also has certain special powers. For example, the House of Representatives must introduce laws that make people pay taxes, and they can decide if a government official should be put on trial before the Senate. Special powers of the Senate include approving treaties of the President, approving any people the President recommends for jobs including ambassadors and Supreme Court Justices, and holding trials for government officials who do something very wrong.

There are limits on the powers of Congress. For example, Congress cannot make unfair laws such as those that would limit a person's right to freedom of speech. If they do pass such a law, the Supreme Court can declare it unconstitutional. Also, the President can veto, or turn down, a law passed by Congress.



The Executive Branch

The main responsibility of the executive branch is to carry out and enforce the laws passed by Congress. The president is the head of the executive branch. Other members include the vice-president, the members of the president's cabinet such as the Secretary of the Treasury and the Secretary of Defense, and officials of independent agencies such as the Central Intelligence Agency.

In order to be president, one must be at least 35 years old and a natural-born citizen of the United States. You also must have lived in the United States for at least 14 years. The president serves a four year term and can be elected by voting citizens to serve twice.

The Framers of the Constitution gave the president many powers and responsibilities such as:

- * to serve as head of state in meeting with leaders of other countries
- * to act as commander in chief of the armed forces
- * to make treaties with other countries
- * to appoint ambassadors and judges to the Supreme Court

- * to conduct a war
- * to recommend laws to Congress
- * to call Congress together in special circumstances
- * to serve as the "boss" of federal government workers
- * to sign or veto bills from Congress

Though the president has many powers, the Framers placed limits on them to ensure a president could not become too powerful. For instance, the president can conduct a war, but only Congress can declare war. The president is the commander-in-chief of the armed forces, but Congress controls the money needed to support them. The Senate must approve all treaties and appointments that the president makes. The House of Representatives has the power to impeach the president for wrong-doing, and the Senate then has the power to hold the trial after he or she has been impeached.



The Judicial Branch

The main responsibility of the judicial branch is to decide what the laws mean. The judicial branch is made up of lower courts and the Supreme Court of the United States. The Supreme Court is the highest court in our country. There are nine Justices in the Supreme Court.

There are no requirements to be a Supreme Court Justice, but so far all of them have had training in the law. Many of them have been members of Congress, governors, or members of a president's cabinet. Supreme Court Justices are appointed by the president and serve for life or until they resign, retire, or are impeached by the House of Representatives for wrong-doing and then convicted by the Senate.

Other members of the judicial branch include the judges of lower federal courts. Like Supreme Court Justices, they are appointed by the president and approved by the Senate. They also serve for life or until they resign, retire, or are found guilty of serious crimes.

The Supreme Court has the power to declare a law passed by Congress unconstitutional. They can also declare an action by the president as unconstitutional. State laws can be declared

unconstitutional if they conflict with the laws made by Congress or with the Constitution.

There are limits on the powers of the judicial branch. Congress has the power to impeach, try, and remove Supreme Court Justices and federal judges from office. Also, the courts do not have the power to enforce their decisions. The president is responsible for doing that.