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Legislative Branch

United States Congress

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Let's Legislate

leg • is • la • tion:

The act or process of
legislating; lawmaking.

A proposed or enacted law or
group of laws.

- The U.S. bicameral legislation was born in Philadelphia in 1787
- The divisions formed from a compromise of two different plans.



This was a design for the recto of the seal of the United States, 1782, before the legislative branch was born

When 55 delegates from 12 of the original 13 United States convened in Philadelphia in May of 1787, their original goal was to amend the Articles of Confederation, a loose plan of government devised by Richard Henry Lee in 1777 to form a “firm league of friendship” among independent states. They soon agreed that this should be done by making a new government.

Delegates from Virginia presented a very thorough plan for revision known as the Virginia Plan. The plan called for three separate branches of government: legislative, judicial and executive. The legislative wing would have a lower and an upper house, making it bicameral. Smaller states had issues with nuances of the plan which allowed national control where states were viewed as “incompetent,” and more weight was given to the states with a larger population and financial contribution. New Jersey delegate William Paterson responded with the New Jersey Plan, which retained a unicameral Congress where states were equally represented.

The argument was resolved by Connecticut delegates, who proposed the Connecticut Compromise. The bicameral legislation would be composed of the House of Representatives, the lower house, where each state was represented based on population, and the Senate, the upper house, where each State was represented equally.

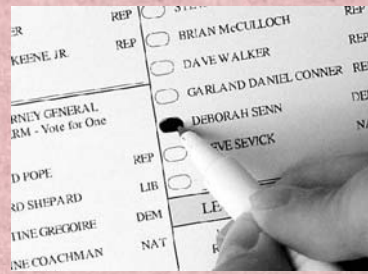
Elections

How often?

What month?

What day?

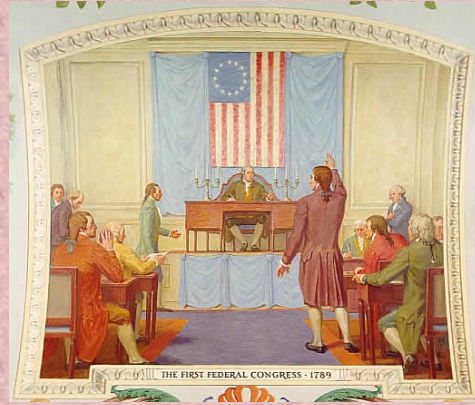
When do the winners take office?



Elections are held every numbered year in November on the first Tuesday after the first Monday. Winners take office January 3rd after the election.

“I call this meeting to order...”

The first Congress met in New York City in 1789 and moved to Washington, D.C. in 1790.



Meeting of the first Federal Congress

On March 4, 1789, Congress met for the first time in New York City in the Federal Hall on Wall Street. In December of 1790 they moved to Philadelphia, and on November 17, 1800 they made their final move to a permanent spot in Washington, D.C.

The House of Representatives

- The lower house of the legislative is based on population
- Number of representatives may be reassessed every ten years
- Gerrymandering sometimes puts at risk the votes of party minorities within each district



The district created by members of Governor Elbridge Gerry's party closely resembled a salamander

The lower house of the legislative, the House of Representatives, is based on population. States are divided into districts in order to balance the population for representation. To reflect changing populations, the number of representatives each state may have is reassessed every ten years. This is called reapportionment. The U.S. Census comes up with new population numbers and representation is changed accordingly. No matter how small the population, every state is guaranteed at least one representative. There are 435 members of the House of Representatives.

Districts may sometimes be redefined, which makes them at risk for Gerrymandering, or the act of drawing district lines to favor the political party in power. The term was first used in 1812, when painter Gilbert Stuart noticed that Massachusetts Governor Elbridge Gerry's district, drawn by members of his party, resembled a salamander. He then attached claws, wings and a head to the creature and gave birth to the new phrase.

Qualifications for House members

- **Must** be at least **25** years old
- **Must** live in the state you represent (some states have additional requirements that representatives also live within the district they represent)
- **Must** be a U.S. citizen for at least **seven** years
- Each term is two years and members can run for re-election as often as desired



The House of Representatives
circa 1860

House Divisions

House parties:

- Speaker of the House
- Majority Floor Leader
- Majority Whip
- Minority Floor Leader
- Minority Whip



The term “whip” comes from fox-hunting, which was popular among politicians in the 18th century

The House is divided by political parties by control. There are two “whips,” one for the house majority and one for the minority. The term comes from fox-hunting: a “whipper-in” is the member of the fox-hunting team that keeps the hunting dogs from straying from the team during a chase.

Speaker of the House—The most powerful leader of the majority party. Chosen by floor vote and presides over the House.

Majority Floor Leader—Works to keep his/her party in line and voting in step with party wishes.

Majority Whip—Assistant to the Majority Floor Leader

Minority Floor Leader—Works to keep his/her party in line and voting in step with party wishes

Minority Whip—Assistant to the Minority Floor Leader

Committees of the House

- Standing Committees are permanent committees that debate proposed bills
- The first permanent committee was the House of Ways and Means created in 1789
- Ways and Means was discharged right away but recommissioned at the 4th Congress in 1795

The house standing committees are:

Agriculture

Appropriations

Banking & Finance

Budget

Commerce

Education & the Workforce

Government Reform

House Oversight

International Relations

Judiciary

National Security

Resources

Rules

Science

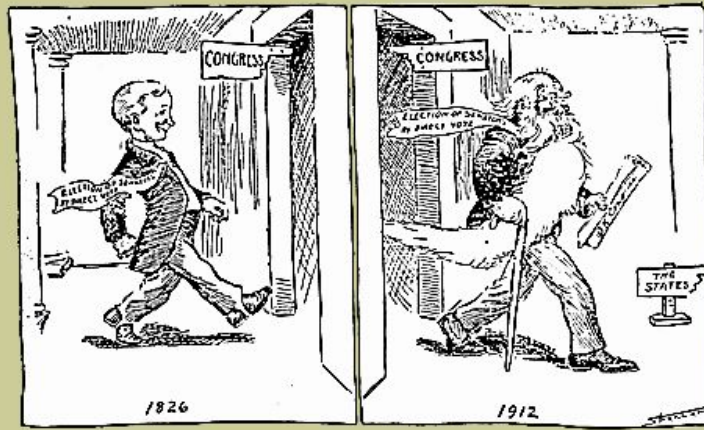
Small Business

Standards of Official

Conduct

Transportation & Infrastructure

The Senate



This cartoon, which ran in the Omaha World Herald in 1912, portrays how long it took to pass the 17th amendment

In the Senate, representation is equal for each state. Senators were originally elected by state legislatures until 1913, when the 17th Amendment was passed. This amendment gives voters the right to directly elect their senators, and also allows the governor to appoint a replacement Senator if there is a sudden vacancy. A replacement will then hold office until the next election. Oregon and Wisconsin do not allow their governor this privilege, while Oklahoma requires special elections to fill such vacancies.

Next Senator, please!



This depicts Andrew Clay's farewell speech to the Senate in 1852, which never really happened

- The Senate is a “continuous body.”
- Only one third of the Senate is up for reelection every two years.
- A senator's term is for six years.
- They can run for reelection as often as they desire.

Since the Senate is the upper house, with more responsibilities in the checks and balances system, the continuous body system ensures that there will not be a total turnover at one time.