

The Legislative Branch

A Reading A-Z Level O Leveled Book
Word Count: 702

LEVELED BOOK • O

Connections

Writing

Imagine that you are running for Congress. Write a speech describing what you would do to help the people you represent. Present the speech to your class.

Social Studies

Use a Venn diagram to compare the House of Representatives and the Senate. Write a paragraph using the information in your Venn diagram.

The Legislative Branch

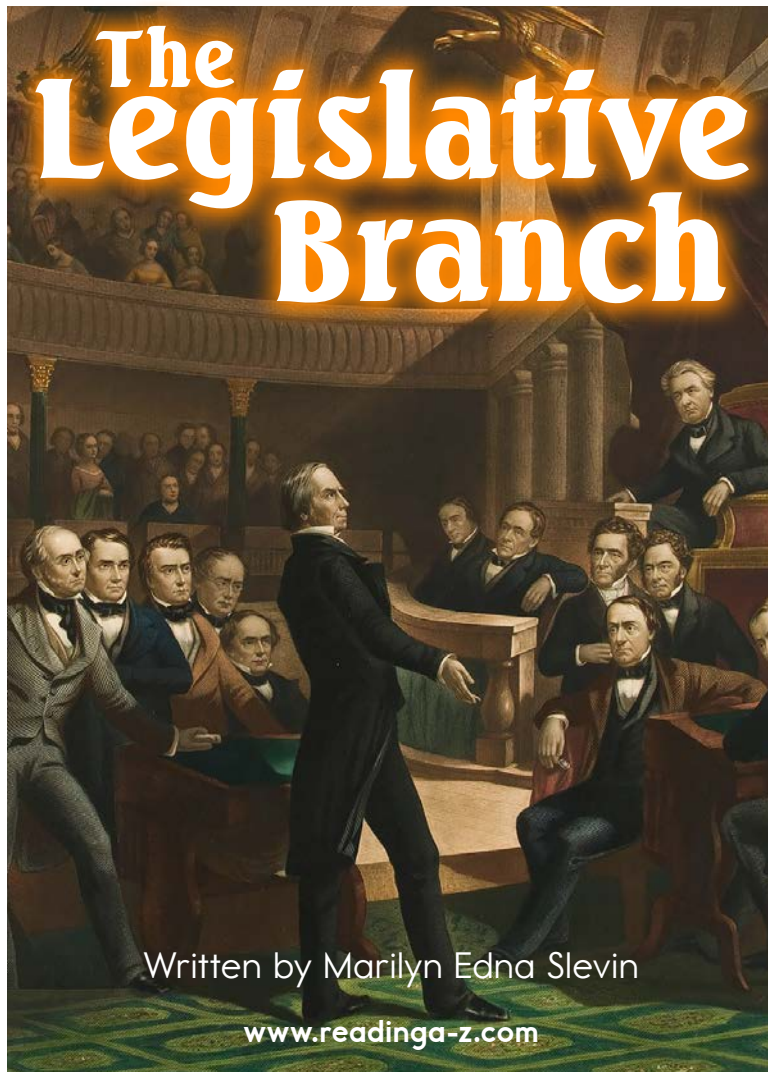
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Focus Question

What is the legislative branch of the United States government, and what are some things members of this branch do?

Words to Know

campaigns	legislative
elected	limit
fund-raising	reject
House of	research
Representatives	Senate

Front cover: The Capitol Building has more than six hundred rooms.

Title page: Senators talk about making new laws in this artwork from around 1855.

Page 3: Senator John Kennedy from Louisiana spent the day as a substitute teacher at a middle school in 2017.

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Correlation

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Members of Congress work in the Capitol Building in Washington, D.C.

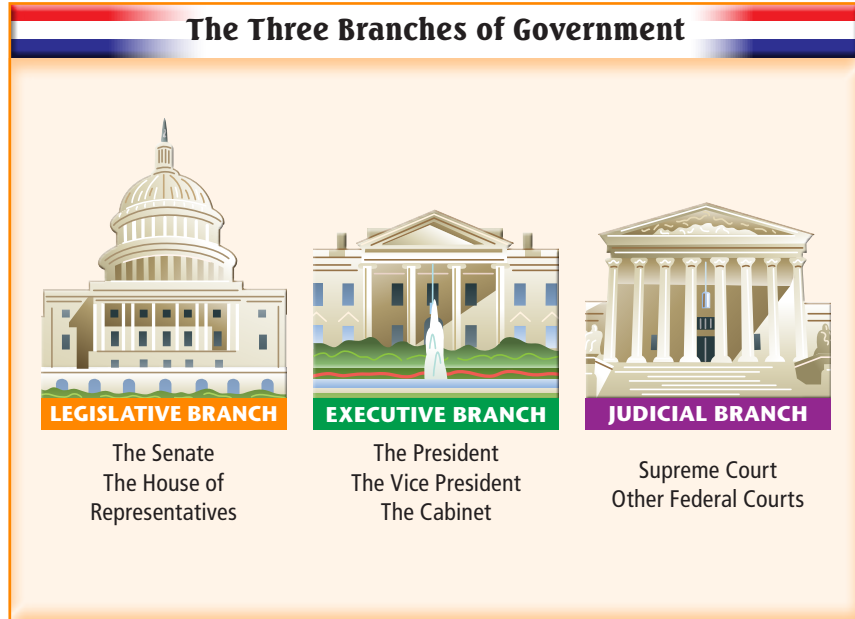
Introduction

The legislative branch of the United States government is called Congress. It is made up of the **Senate** and the **House of Representatives**. Senators and representatives speak for the American people in the U.S. government. They write and change the laws of the country. They also have other important jobs.

The U.S. Constitution

The Constitution, adopted in 1788, breaks up the U.S. government into three parts. The president is in charge of the executive branch. The Senate and the House of Representatives make up the **legislative** branch. The judicial branch runs the Supreme Court and the U.S. court system.

The different parts sometimes work together and sometimes disagree.



Delaware has only one representative in the House—Lisa Blunt Rochester.

How Congress Works

The Senate and the House of Representatives have different numbers of members. The House of Representatives has 435 members. Each member is **elected** to a two-year term. Members of the House are divided among the fifty states by how many people live in each state. California has more people than any other state. It has the most representatives in the House. Some states only have one.



Senators each earned \$174,000 in 2018.

One hundred senators make up the Senate. Senators are elected to a six-year term. Each state has two senators. It does not matter how many people live in the state.

How to Become a Senator or Representative

People who want to serve in Congress must meet certain rules. To serve in the Senate, people must be at least thirty years old and must have been U.S. citizens for the last nine years. They must live in the state they want to represent. To serve in the House, people must be at least twenty-five years old. They must have been U.S. citizens for the last seven years and live in the state they represent.

How a Bill Becomes a Law

It takes many steps to make a new law. The first step is to write a bill. Anyone can do this, even people who do not work in the government.



People talk to senators and representatives at town hall meetings. They even suggest bills.

Next, a member of Congress brings the bill to the Senate, the House, or both. Then a small group of senators or representatives meet to talk about the bill. Their job is to decide whether the bill should go to the full Senate or House. The group does **research** about the bill. They meet with people who know a lot about the topic of the bill. They make changes to the bill based on their research. Then the group votes.

If most of the group votes for the bill, it moves on. A date is chosen for the Senate or House to talk about it. Important bills are talked about right away. Many never get talked about at all.

A group of representatives talk about making changes to the U.S. health care system.



When a bill's date comes up, the full Senate or House talks about the bill. Its members make changes to it. Then they vote. If most of them vote for it, the bill moves to the other part of Congress. Then that part of Congress talks about the bill and makes changes to it.

Both parts of Congress must vote for the same bill. If it passes both votes, it goes to the president. Once the president signs the bill, it becomes a law. If the president does not sign it, it becomes a law after ten days. The president can also veto, or **reject**, the bill. Usually, the bill is no longer talked about after that. However, if two-thirds of both parts of Congress vote for it, the bill becomes a law anyway.

People march by the Capitol Building in 2018 to show their support for anti-gun laws.





Senator Jon Tester from Montana talks to people from his state during a parade in 2018.



Representative Will Hurd from Texas serves Thanksgiving dinner at an army base in 2017.

What Members of Congress Do

Members of Congress are very busy.
Here is a look at some parts of their work.

Speeches

Unless a time **limit** has been set, senators can usually talk about a bill for as long as they like. Often only a few senators talk about a bill. Other senators are busy working in groups or in their offices. Lights and bells tell senators when it's time to vote.

Since there are so many representatives, rules limit how long they can talk about a bill. Rules also limit the number of changes that can be made to a bill in the House.



Representative Nancy Pelosi from California gave the longest speech ever in the House. It lasted for more than eight hours.



Representative Pramila Jayapal (pruh-MIH-luh JYE-uh-pawl) from Washington talks about why she wants to keep working in the House.

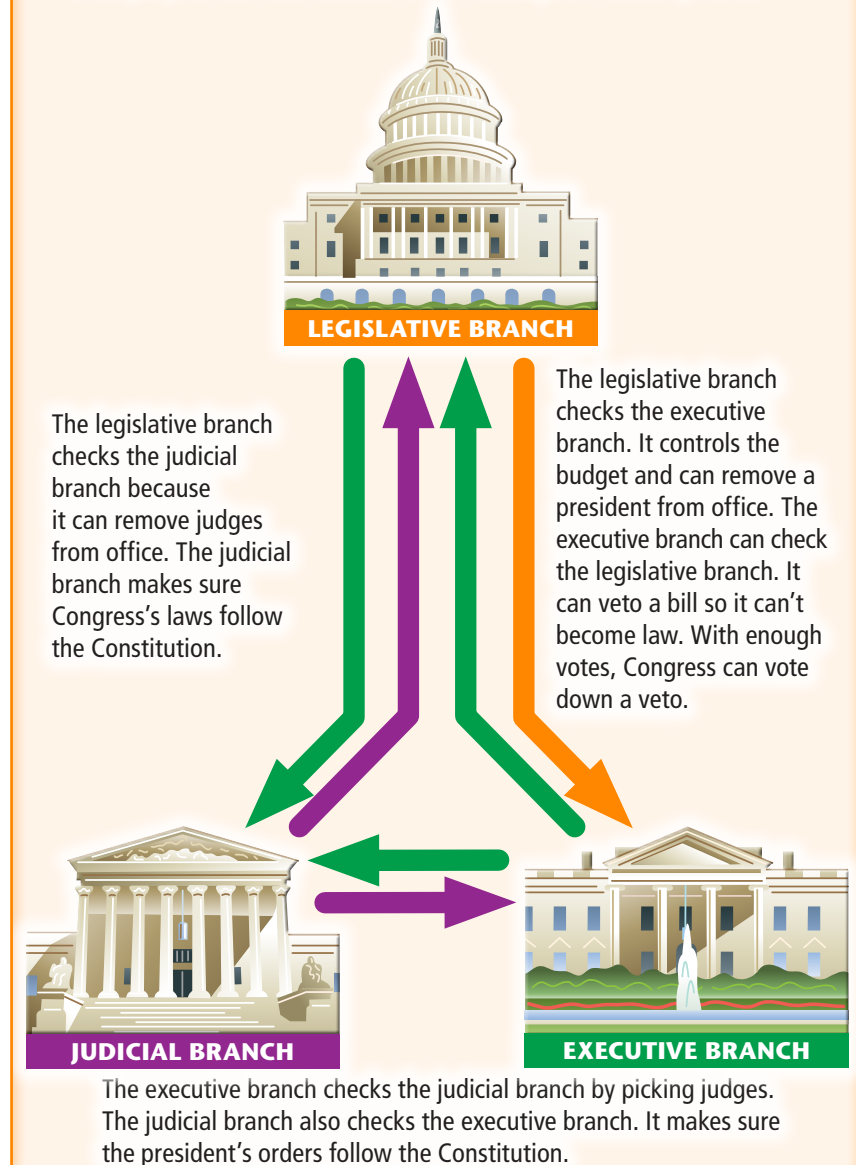
Getting Elected

Members of Congress spend a lot of their time raising money for election **campaigns**. They spend money on ads, travel, posters, stickers, and stamps to get elected and stay in their positions.

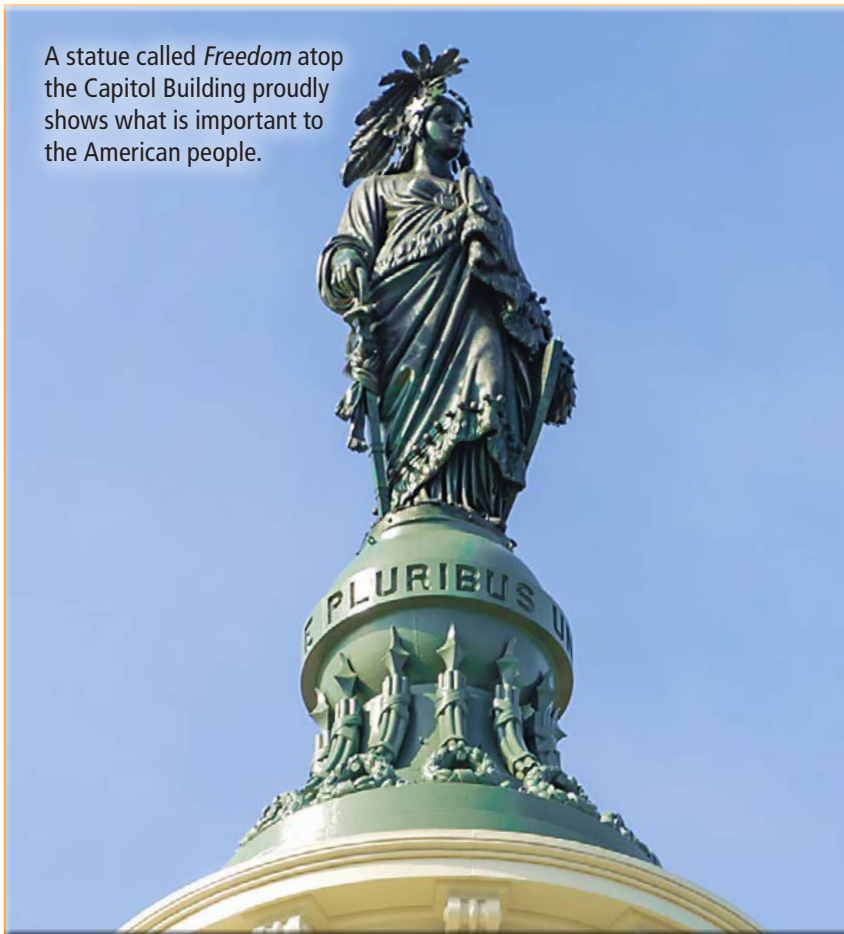
Since representatives only serve a two-year term, **fund-raising** is really important for them. Representatives might spend half their day trying to get people's support. They make phone calls and give speeches and interviews. They talk about what they have done and what they plan to do to help the people they represent.

Checks and Balances

Under the Constitution, each of the three branches of government can stop, or "check," the other two. This system of checks and balances is an important part of the Constitution. It helps prevent one branch from having too much power.



A statue called *Freedom* atop the Capitol Building proudly shows what is important to the American people.



Conclusion

The legislative branch is an important part of the U.S. government. Senators and representatives write and change laws. They make sure the voices of the American people are heard in their government.

Glossary

campaigns (<i>n.</i>)	planned actions taken to reach a certain goal (p. 13)
elected (<i>v.</i>)	chosen by vote to be a member of government (p. 6)
fund-raising (<i>n.</i>)	the process of collecting money to support a certain cause or goal (p. 13)
House of Representatives (<i>n.</i>)	one of the two parts of the U.S. Congress that makes laws, having a number of representatives from each state that is based on how many people live there (p. 4)
legislative (<i>adj.</i>)	of or relating to the branch of government that makes laws (p. 5)
limit (<i>n.</i>)	the greatest or smallest number or amount that is allowed (p. 12)
reject (<i>v.</i>)	to refuse (p. 10)
research (<i>n.</i>)	a detailed study of a subject, especially to discover new information or to find facts (p. 9)
Senate (<i>n.</i>)	one of the two parts of the U.S. Congress that can make laws, having two senators for each state (p. 4)