

The Legislative Branch

Article I of the Constitution establishes the legislative (or lawmaking) branch of the federal government made up of the House of Representatives and the Senate. This is known as a bicameral legislature. Members of each are voted into office by the citizens in each state.

Members of Congress, senators and representatives, are chosen by direct election - although vacancies in the Senate may be filled by an appointment by that state's governor.



Congress has 535 voting members: 435 representatives and 100 senators. The House of Representatives also has six non-voting members representing US territories and the District of Columbia (Washington, D.C.).

Members of the House of Representatives serve two-year terms representing the people of a single congressional district. Congressional districts are allotted to states by population using census data.

Each state, regardless of population or size, has two senators which are elected for six-year terms. These terms are staggered so that every two years approximately one-third of the Senate is up for election.

The legislative branch of government is solely responsible for writing and passing federal laws, for declaring war and appropriating a budget - the money necessary to operate the federal government.

Congress confirms or rejects Presidential nominations for heads of federal agencies, federal judges, and the Supreme Court. This work serves to check the other two branches of government.

Activities of U.S. Congress men and women are frequently reported in the news. Read through several editions of the newspaper and other sources for reports about what our Senators or local representatives are doing. Do you agree with their actions? If so, why? If not, why not?

Next: The Executive Branch



This is one of seven Newspaper In Education features created to educate and celebrate Law Day 2018. Developed by the NYNPA NIE Program based on resources provided by the American Bar Association.