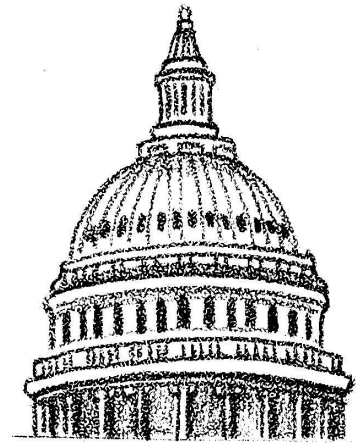


# CONGRESS

Directions: The notes on these pages provide information about the Congress of the United States. As you read through the statements, underline or highlight the key words, names, terms, and ideas.



## **How Congress Is Organized**

- The Congress of the United States, which makes the nation's laws, consists of the Senate and the House of Representatives.
- The 100-member Senate is made up of 2 senators from each of the 50 states.
- The House of Representatives, usually called simply the House, has 435 members. House members, or representatives, are elected from congressional districts of about equal population into which the states are divided. Every state must have at least one House seat.
- The Democratic and Republican parties have long been the only major political parties in the Congress. In the Senate and the House of Representatives, the party with more members is the majority party. The other one is the minority party.
- Before every new session of Congress, Democrats and Republicans in the Senate and House meet in what is called a caucus or conference to choose party leaders and to consider legislative issues and plans.
- Committees are an important part of each chamber's organization. They prepare the bills (proposed laws) to be voted on. The majority party elects the head of each committee and holds a majority of the seats on most committees.

## **When Congress Meets**

- A new Congress is organized every two years, after congressional elections in November of even-numbered years. Voters elect all the representatives, resulting in a new House. About a third of the senators come up for election every two years. The Senate is never completely new. Beginning with the First Congress (1789-1791), each Congress has been numbered in order. The lawmakers elected in 2000, for example, made up the 107th Congress.
- Congress holds one regular session a year. The session begins on January 3 unless Congress sets a different date. During the year, Congress recesses often so members can visit their home states or districts. Congress adjourns in early fall in election years and in late fall in other years. After Congress adjourns, the President may call a special session.
- The Senate and the House meet in separate chambers in the Capitol in Washington, D.C. The building stands on Capitol Hill, often called simply the Hill.
- Senators and representatives occasionally meet in a joint session in the larger House of Representatives chamber, mainly to hear an address by the President or a foreign official.
- The Constitution requires Congress to meet jointly to count the electoral votes after a presidential election.

## **Congress's Power to Make Laws**

- The Constitution gives Congress "all legislative powers" of the federal government. At the heart of Congress's lawmaking powers is its "power of the purse" — its control over government taxing and spending. Article 1 of the Constitution lists a wide range of powers granted to Congress. These delegated, or expressed, powers include the authority to coin money, regulate trade, declare war, and raise and equip military forces.

- Article 1 contains an elastic clause that gives Congress authority to “make all laws which shall be necessary and proper” to carry out the delegated powers. The elastic clause grants Congress implied powers to deal with many matters not specifically mentioned in the Constitution.
- The executive and judicial branches of government limit Congress’s powers. The President may veto any bill Congress passes. Congress can override a veto only by a two-thirds vote in each chamber, which is usually difficult to do. The President’s power to propose legislation acts as another check on Congress. By its power of judicial review, the Supreme Court may declare a law passed by Congress to be unconstitutional.
- The power of public opinion also limits what Congress can do. Lawmakers know that their actions must, in general, reflect the will of the people.

### **Other Duties of Congress**

- The Constitution requires the President to submit nominations of Cabinet members, federal judges, ambassadors, and other officials to the Senate for approval. Senators approve almost all nominations to the executive branch, but almost a fourth of Supreme Court nominees have failed to win Senate confirmation.
- The President has the power to make treaties, but a treaty requires the approval of two-thirds of the senators.
- Congress has the implied power to investigate executive actions and public and private wrongdoing by certain officials, including the President.
- Congress can propose amendments to the U.S. Constitution by a two-thirds vote in both houses.
- Congress counts and checks the votes cast by the Electoral College, the group of electors that chooses the President and Vice President. If no candidate has a majority of Electoral College votes, Congress selects the winners. The House chooses the President, and the Senate elects the Vice President.
- An impeachment is a charge of serious misconduct in office against a federal official. The House of Representatives brings the impeachment charges against these officials. If a majority of representatives vote for impeachment, the Senate hears the case. The official can then be removed from office by a two-thirds vote of the senators.
- The House voted to impeach President Andrew Johnson in 1868, but the Senate was one vote short of removing him from office. President Richard M. Nixon resigned in 1974 before representatives voted on impeachment charges recommended by the House Judiciary Committee.
- Congress can censure (officially condemn) or expel its own members for improper conduct. It can also apply a lesser form of discipline, such as a fine or reprimand.

### **Members of Congress at Work**

- Most members work at least 11 hours a day, often with two or three meetings scheduled at the same time. Members choose which meeting to attend. They make brief appearances at other meetings or send aides to take notes.
- During the afternoon, and many mornings and evenings, the Senate and House are in session. Most legislators are so busy with other work that they do not stay in their chamber for debates. Instead, they follow them on closed-circuit TV. Members must be ready to go to their chamber for a vote.
- Telephone calls, letters, and visits from constituents take up much of a legislator’s time. Many people contact members of Congress to give their views on bills. Other people seek help with jobs, immigration problems, social security payments, or appointments to military academies.

- Senators and representatives have paid assistants in their Washington, D.C., offices and in their state or district offices. Most legislators also accept students who work without pay to gain political experience.
- Members of Congress travel often to their home states or districts to appear at public events, study area problems, and talk with voters or local officials. About a third of all representatives return to their districts nearly every weekend.

### Game Rules for JEOPARDY

A large drawing of the gameboard on the right will be put on the board. The five categories are TERMS, SENATE, THE HOUSE, PEOPLE, and ODDS AND ENDS.

The class will be divided into two teams. Someone from Team 1 will be asked to pick a category and point value. For example, they might choose “TERMS for 20.” A question will then be asked about a term mentioned in the notes on Congress. The first person on either team to raise their hand will be called on. A correct answer earns the team 20 points. If an incorrect answer is given, or the person called on does not respond immediately, the other team can answer.

The person who gives the correct answer will choose the next category and point value. When a space is chosen, it will be crossed out and cannot be picked again. The same person cannot answer twice in a row for their team.

TERMS	SENATE	THE HOUSE	PEOPLE	ODDS AND ENDS
10	10	10	10	10
20	20	20	20	20
30	30	30	30	30
40	40	40	40	40
50	50	50	50	50

## Congress

### **TERMS**

- (1) \_\_\_\_\_ The elastic clause gives Congress these powers to deal with matters not specifically mentioned in the Constitution.
- (2) \_\_\_\_\_ Sometimes called a conference, it is the meeting of each party before every new session of Congress.
- (3) \_\_\_\_\_ An official condemnation by Congress of its own members.
- (4) \_\_\_\_\_ In the Senate and in the House, this is the term for the party — Democrats or Republicans — with the most members.
- (5) \_\_\_\_\_ Specific powers of Congress, also called expressed powers.

### **SENATE**

- (1) \_\_\_\_\_ Each state sends this many senators to Washington, D.C.
- (2) \_\_\_\_\_ This fraction of the Senate is elected every two years.
- (3) \_\_\_\_\_ Fraction of senators needed to approve treaties.
- (4) \_\_\_\_\_ The Senate, like the House, meets in a separate chamber in this building.
- (5) \_\_\_\_\_ Almost a fourth of them fail to win Senate confirmation.

### **THE HOUSE**

- (1) \_\_\_\_\_ No state can have fewer than this number of House members.
- (2) \_\_\_\_\_ Official chosen by the House when there is no Electoral College majority.
- (3) \_\_\_\_\_ Charge of misconduct by the House against a federal official.
- (4) \_\_\_\_\_ A meeting in the House chamber attended by senators.
- (5) \_\_\_\_\_ Two words for the part of a state a House member represents.

### **PEOPLE**

- (1) \_\_\_\_\_ After Congress adjourns, this person can call its members back to Washington for a special session.
- (2) \_\_\_\_\_ President impeached by the House in 1868.
- (3) \_\_\_\_\_ Recommended impeachment charges against President Richard M. Nixon.
- (4) \_\_\_\_\_ These groups of people prepare bills to be voted on.
- (5) \_\_\_\_\_ People who call, write, or visit their legislator.

### **ODDS AND ENDS**

- (1) \_\_\_\_\_ Members of Congress help young people get appointed to these schools.
- (2) \_\_\_\_\_ The Congress of the United States consists of these elected bodies.
- (3) \_\_\_\_\_ Four words referring to Congress's control over taxing and spending.
- (4) \_\_\_\_\_ It gives Congress "all legislative powers" of the federal government.
- (5) \_\_\_\_\_ This number is the sum total of the members of Congress.