



American Government  
**CONGRESS**

John Perritano

A close-up, vertical view of the American flag, showing the blue field with white stars and the red and white stripes. The flag is draped and folded, creating a sense of movement and texture. It occupies the left side of the page, with the stars in the upper left and the stripes extending down to the bottom.

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## Chapter 1

# A TRIP TO WASHINGTON

It was 2015. Schools were on spring break. Ginger Netten did not go to Disney World. She did not stay home in Arizona. The 14-year-old was in Washington, D.C. It is our nation's capital.

Ginger took pictures in front of the White House. She saw the Washington Monument. Then she went to Capitol Hill. The U.S. Capitol is there. It's where Congress meets. There are offices and **hearing** rooms. Other office buildings are nearby for workers in Congress.





Ginger went there to talk to members of Congress. She was part of a group. They asked Congress to give scientists \$2.06 billion. The money would be used to study diabetes. It is a disease. The body can't make enough insulin. This causes too much sugar in the blood. About 30 million Americans have the disease. Ginger is one of them.

"I have to tell them how hard and difficult it is to live with this disease," Ginger said.

**Think About It:** *Does a big majority cause big trouble?*

## [ WHY CONGRESS? ]

Why didn't Ginger talk to the president? Or go to the Supreme Court? Each is a part of the U.S. government. Ginger knew how government works. She knew it has three branches. The president runs

the executive branch. Its job is to enforce laws. The Supreme Court is part of the judicial branch. Its job is to interpret laws.

Congress has a job too. It is the legislative branch. Congress makes laws. They are the rules people must follow. Congress gets money. It also spends money. Money to build. Money to fight wars. And it gives money to scientists.



“I have met with senators and congressmen before,” Ginger told a reporter. “I know if I put my heart into what I am saying, and make sure they understand where I’m coming from, I know I have done my best ...”

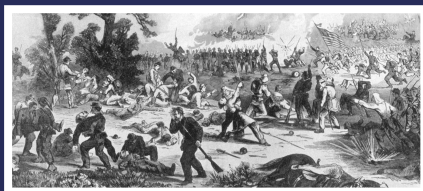
Congress did give money for diabetes research. But it was not as much as Ginger's group had asked for.

## → HISTORY HAPPENED HERE

**Event:** American Civil War

**Where:** Capitol Building

**When:** September 1862



The U.S. Civil War was bloody. Rebels from the South fought the Union. The Second Battle of Bull Run was fought near Washington, D.C. It was on August 28. Fighting lasted two days.

The Union lost. Soldiers needed a hospital. Beds were set up in the Capitol. Some were under the dome. Others were in hallways. About 1,200 hurt soldiers stayed there until October. The war dragged on. The army also used the Capitol as a bakery. Soldiers lived there too.

## [ POWER TO THE PEOPLE ]

The authors of the Constitution worked hard to create Congress. They wanted it to be the most important part of government. Why? England's King



George III used to rule America. He had too much power. Americans were forced to do things they did not want to do. A revolution began. The goal of the war was to break from the king. To be free. Our nation was born when England lost the war.

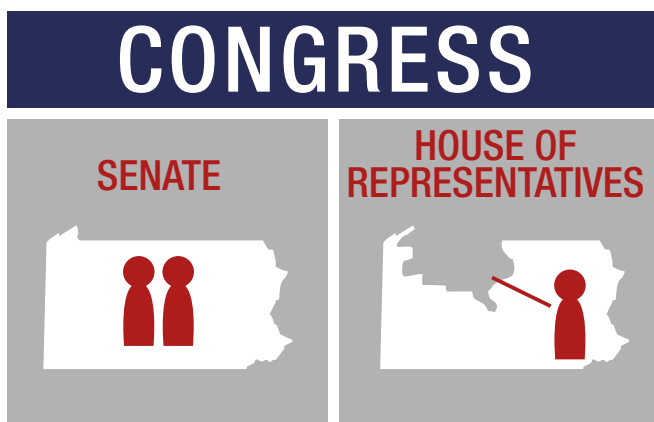


The authors, or framers, had to form a new government. They did not want one person to have as much power as a king.



The framers instead created Congress. They gave it powers. One of its jobs was to look out for people. To help them. It was up to Congress to “promote the general welfare” of the nation.

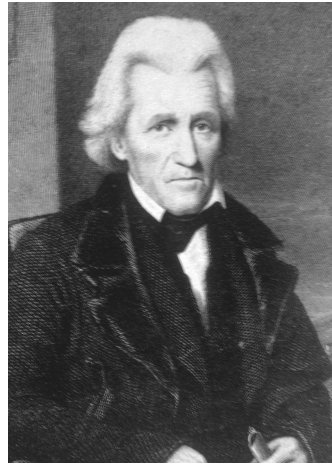
Congress became the “People’s Branch.” Citizens picked its members. Senators. Congressmen. Each senator represented a state. Each congressman represented a small part of a state. Called a district.



It was a new type of government. It was a republic run by laws. People elect their leaders. They make the decisions, not kings or queens.

## [ POWER UP ]

Congress had a lot of power when the nation was new. Most presidents did not. Some refused to let Congress bully them. Andrew Jackson stood up to Congress. He tried to do away with the national bank. Congress had set it up. Congress scolded Jackson. The president didn't care. He still changed the banking system.



*Andrew Jackson*



*Ulysses S. Grant*

Congress wanted Abraham Lincoln to fire a general. It was during the Civil War. The general was Ulysses S. Grant. Lincoln did not listen. Grant helped win the war.

The power of the president grew over time. By the 1940s, the president became the most important person in government. Congress had less power over time.

### [ FRUSTRATION NATION ]

Congress can be a rough place to work. It can be hard to get things done. It's annoying. Citizens get fed up. So does the president.





Sometimes there is **gridlock**. Nothing gets done. The executive branch may be from one party. The lawmaking branch is from another party. It is hard for them to agree. But the point of a democracy is to work things out. Cooperate. Lawmakers may agree for the common good.

Congress frustrated President John Adams. He did not get along with it. Adams made a joke. “I have come to the conclusion that one useless man is a disgrace, that two become a law firm, and that three or more become a Congress.”

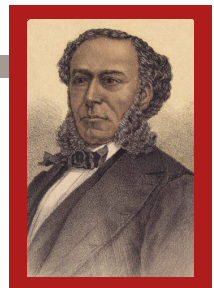
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## **FACES IN THE CROWD**

### **Joseph Rainey**

Born: June 21, 1832

Died: August 1, 1887



Joseph Rainey had been enslaved. He was also the first Black man to be in Congress. It was in 1869. That's four years after the U.S. Civil War. Rainey was from South Carolina.

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# American Government CONGRESS

**Being an informed citizen is not a choice. It is a responsibility.**

Congress has a specific role in U.S. government. But what is it? How does it work? This handbook illustrates all aspects of the lawmaking branch, with relevant facts and interesting sidebars. Open-ended “Think About It” questions frame each topic.

- Does a big majority cause big trouble?
- Does a two-year term keep House members closer to voters?
- The Constitution has an “elastic clause.” It says Congress can make any laws that are “necessary and proper.” Why is the phrase called “elastic”?
- Longest-serving Speaker Sam Rayburn said leaders must also “know how to follow.” Otherwise they cannot lead. Is this a true statement?
- Some bills are controversial. The health-care bill is one. So was Social Security. And Medicare. Do people change their minds about laws they disagree with?
- “All politics is local.” That’s what former Speaker Tip O’Neill said. Is this a true statement?

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