



American Government
CONGRESS

John Perritano

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 **SADDLEBACK**
EDUCATIONAL PUBLISHING

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 deep shadows and bright highlights in the fabric.

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Introduction

Article I of the United States Constitution created Congress. It gave Congress its powers. Set its limits. It is the longest article. There are 10 sections. Each says how Congress works.



Article I, Sections 1–10


- 1.** Gives Congress the power to make laws. Only Congress has this power. Congress has two houses. The House of Representatives is one. The Senate is the other.
- 2.** Creates the rules for the House.
- 3.** Creates the rules for the Senate.
- 4.** Says that states can decide how and when to hold elections and meetings. It says that Congress must meet once a year.
- 5.** Creates the rules for Congress. Each house must have most of its members present to meet. Each house must keep a record of what happens in meetings. It is a journal. Now it is called the *Congressional Record*.
- 6.** Says that members of Congress get paid. They cannot have another job in the government. Not when they are in Congress.
- 7.** Explains how a **bill** becomes law.
- 8.** Names the powers that Congress has. It says Congress can pass laws that it needs to carry out its powers.

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9. Names the powers that Congress does not have.
 10. Limits the power of the states. They cannot take certain actions. States cannot build an army in times of war. They cannot make their own money.
-

Congress met for the first time in 1789. It was in New York City. There was a to-do list of jobs. The first job was to elect the president. George Washington won the vote. John Adams won vice president.

Their next job was to raise money. The government needed cash to work. Congress decided to collect taxes. It decided what to tax. Congress passed its first tax law.

Next Congress set up the executive branch. It had three departments. The State Department. It was run by Thomas Jefferson. The War Department. It was run by Henry Knox. And the Treasury Department. It was run by Alexander Hamilton.

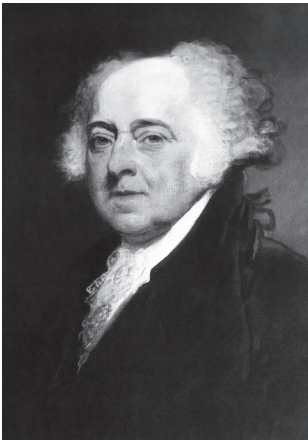


Then Congress set up the judicial branch. Congress passed the Judiciary Act of 1789. This created the Supreme Court. It set the size of the court and how it worked. Congress could create lower courts too. Congress named someone to be the head of the Justice Department. This was the attorney general. He gave legal advice to the president.

Finally Congress had to decide on a bill of rights. The Constitution gave people some rights. But the states wanted their rights protected. They wanted the government to have less control. They told James Madison their ideas. He agreed with some of them. He wanted people to have personal freedoms. Their rights should be protected. But he did not want to limit the power of the government. Madison asked to change the Constitution. He wrote the Bill of Rights. It gives people basic freedoms.

The first Congress had 91 members. There were 65 representatives and 26 senators. Of that group, 34 were lawyers. There were also soldiers, farmers, businessmen, teachers, and doctors.

Today Congress has 435 representatives and 100 senators. Of that group, 104 are women. There are 46 African Americans. In fact, the 114th Congress is the most diverse in our nation's history. There are 184 lawyers. Many former governors, state legislators, and mayors also serve.



*Power must never be
trusted without a check.*

—John Adams




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 ...”

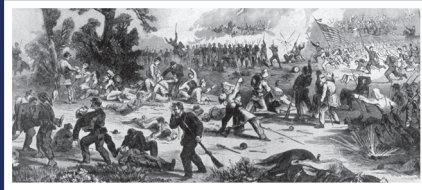
Congress did give money for diabetes research. But it was not as much as Ginger's group had asked for.

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

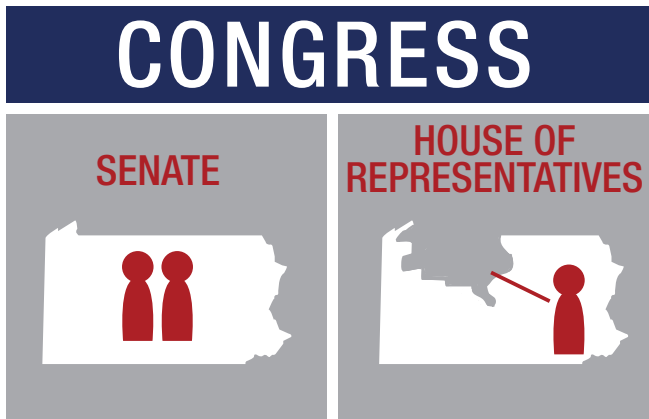
George III used to rule America. He had too much power. Americans were forced to do things they did not want to do. A revolution began. The goal of the war was to break from the king. To be free. Our nation was born when England lost the war.



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.

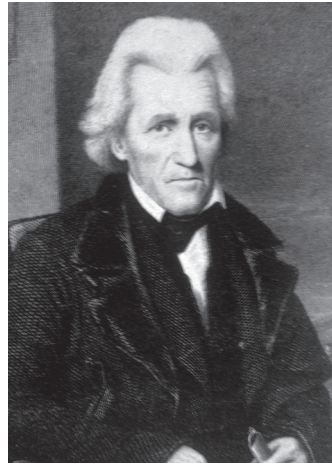
Congress became the “People’s Branch.” Citizens picked its members. Senators. Congressmen. Each senator represented a state. Each congressman represented a small part of a state. Called a district.



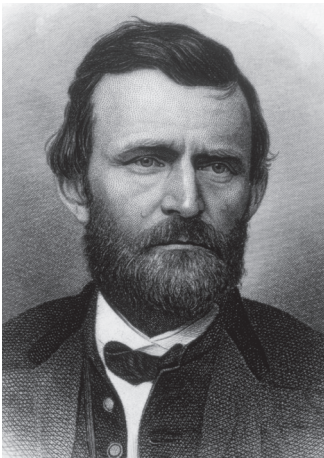
It was a new type of government. It was a republic run by laws. People elect their leaders. They make the decisions, not kings or queens.

[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.”

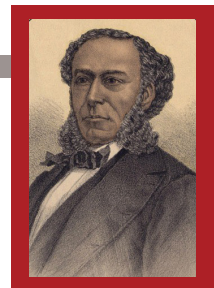
FACES IN THE CROWD

Joseph Rainey

Born: June 21, 1832

Died: August 1, 1887

Joseph Rainey had been a slave. He was also the first African American 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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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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