



Where our laws and

Members of Congress serve as the voice of the American people.

Most of the major laws that govern our lives are made in the halls of Congress. Find out more about this important branch of the US government.



The US Constitution

What is Congress?

The US Constitution (the nation's highest law) established Congress as the legislative branch of the federal government, in balance with two other branches—executive (President) and judicial (courts). Congress is made of two parts: the Senate and the House of Representatives. Each state sends two people to serve in the Senate, for a total of 100 senators. The number of representatives a state can send to the House depends on its population. Montana has one, while California has 53. In total, the House has 435 representatives (and six non-voting members). Besides making laws, Congress can approve treaties, oversee taxes, and declare war.



Signing the Constitution

Shaping the nation

The first session of Congress was scheduled to meet on March 4, 1789, at New York City's Federal Hall. But many members, traveling by ship or horse, were delayed by winter storms. The House finally convened on April 1, with the Senate following on April 6. The first Congress set up most of the policies for the new nation's government and certified the election of George Washington as President and John Adams as Vice President.



WOW!
A total of 12,599 people have served as members of Congress. Of those, 680 served in both the House and Senate.

Congress began meeting at the US Capitol in Washington, DC, in 1800.

Perks & quirks

Working in the US Congress comes with enormous responsibilities as well as some cool—and unusual—benefits. Here are a few.



The US Capitol subway

Capitol subway

In the early 1900s, a train system was built under the Capitol to help members of Congress move quickly between the chambers. There are two lines to the Senate (north) side and one on the House (south) side. Each ride takes less than a minute.





history are made



DUAL ROLE

The Vice President of the US is also the president of the Senate and can break a tie in a Senate vote.

DID YOU KNOW?

About 15,000 bills are introduced in each session of Congress.



Congress in session

How Congress works

Today, Congress meets at the US Capitol Building in Washington, DC. Lawmakers in either half of Congress can introduce a bill (draft of a law). The bill is discussed by a committee. If the committee approves it, all members can then debate it on the "floor" and propose amendments (changes). After that, a vote is held on whether to pass the bill. If a majority votes yes, it is sent to the other half of Congress and the process repeats. In order for a bill to become law, it must be passed by both bodies and signed by the President.



The midterm elections

Senators serve six-year terms, while House members are elected every two years. On November 8, all 435 House seats and 35 Senate seats (plus five non-voting seats) will be up for election. Because this vote takes place about halfway through the President's four-year term, it is known as a midterm election. The balance of Democrats, Republicans, and Independents in each part of Congress could also change as new members are voted in. The party that wins a greater number of seats will have more power to make laws that match its goals. When Americans go to the polls in November to vote, they will be shaping the country's future.



Candy desk

Desk 80 in the Senate is nicknamed the "candy desk." Senator George Murphy of California was assigned the desk in 1968, and he had a sweet tooth. Senators have been stocking the drawer with free candy ever since.



The winning trophy

Baseball game

Every summer, Republican and Democratic members of Congress put aside their differences to play a baseball game for charity, with the winning team receiving a trophy. Representative John Tener organized the first game in 1909.