

### 9.3 The Legislative Branch Makes Laws

**F**or the framers of the Constitution, the first step in building a trusted government was to create a fair way to make laws. Article I of the Constitution gives the power to make laws to the **legislative branch** of government.

**The Structure of Congress** The Constitution creates a **bicameral** (two part) national legislature, called Congress. The two parts, or “houses,” of Congress are the House of Representatives and the Senate.

Members of the Senate serve six-year terms so that they can enjoy some independence from the day-to-day opinions of voters. In contrast, members of the House serve two-year terms. As a result, they have to face the voters much more often. In this way, the framers tried to balance the independence and thoughtfulness of the Senate with the House’s responsiveness to the changing wishes of the voters.

The framers also designed Congress to balance the rights of large and small states. Thus, while every state gets two senators, representation in the House is based on population. States with more people have more House representatives. To determine the number of representatives for each state, the Constitution calls for a census (a count of the population) every ten years. In time, the number of representatives in the House was set at 435.

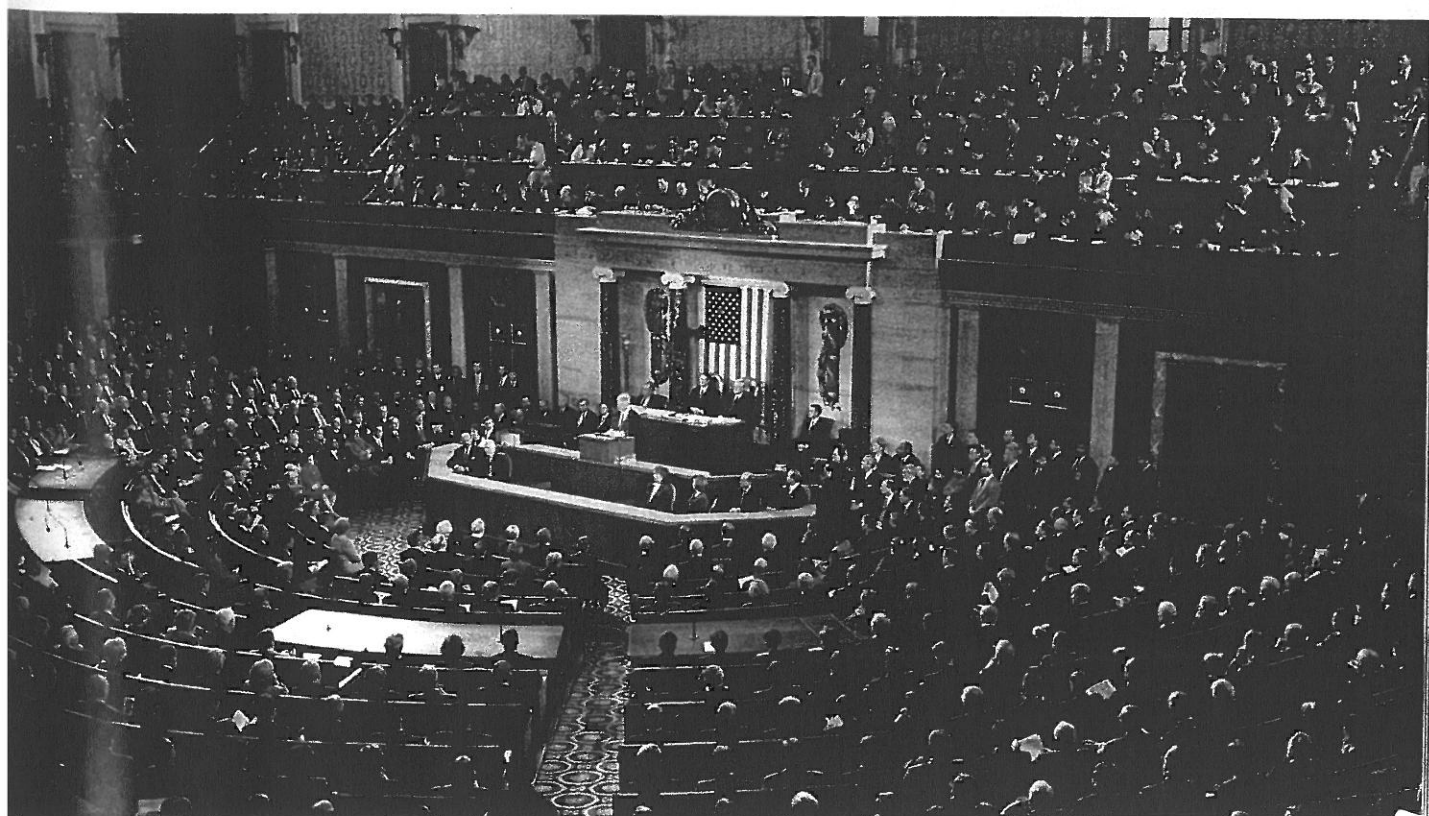
The framers considered the Senate to be the “upper house” of the legislature. Its members are supposed to be wiser and more experienced than members of the “lower house.” Senators must be at least 30 years old, while House members must be 25. Senators must have been citizens for nine years, House members for just seven years.

Originally, the Constitution allowed state legislatures to choose the two senators to represent their state. Today, however, senators are elected by popular vote (direct vote by the people).

**legislative branch** The law-making part of government, called the *legislature*. To *legislate* is to make a law.

**bicameral** Having two law-making parts. *Bicameral* comes from Latin words meaning “two rooms.”

Senators and members of Congress listen to a speech given by the president in the chambers of the House of Representatives. The president must get congressional approval for his ideas before they can become law.



**bill** a proposed law

**veto** To reject a proposed law or a bill. Only the president can veto bills.

**How Congress Passes Laws** The primary job of Congress is to make laws. Any member of the House or Senate can submit a proposal for a new law, called a **bill**. However, only the House can propose new taxes. If a majority in one house votes in favor of the bill, it is sent to the other house for debate. If both houses approve the bill, it goes to the president. The bill becomes a law if the president signs it.

The president can **veto** (reject) any proposed law. Congress can override the president's veto, which means passing the bill over the president's objections. But to do so requires a two-thirds majority in both houses.

**The Powers of Congress** Article I spells out other powers of Congress. For example, only Congress can decide how to spend the money raised through taxes. Other congressional powers include the power to raise an army and navy, to declare war, to pay government debts, and to grant citizenship.

In addition, Congress may "make all laws which shall be necessary and proper" to carry out its other powers. This power, known as the "elastic clause," gives Congress the flexibility needed to do its job. Over the years, the elastic clause has been stretched to allow Congress to do many things that were never listed among its powers in the Constitution.

