

U.S. Congress: Structure and Organization



History

-1787: the delegates at the Constitutional Convention agreed to the Great Compromise; created a bicameral legislature (2 houses – the Senate and the House of Representatives)

-House of Representatives: delegates allocated based on state population; gave states with larger populations more weight when voting on federal laws

-Senate: each state has 2 delegates, regardless of population (smaller populated states still feel represented)

-Congressional powers are established in Article I of the U.S. Constitution



New Jersey Plan:

This plan included one house of legislature equal representation in congress, and this plan was supported by smaller states who feared they were losing their power since their populations was very small.

Virginia Plan:

This plan was the opposite of what the New Jersey plan offered. It wanted two houses of legislature. And they wanted representation to congress to be based on states population.

The Great Compromise:

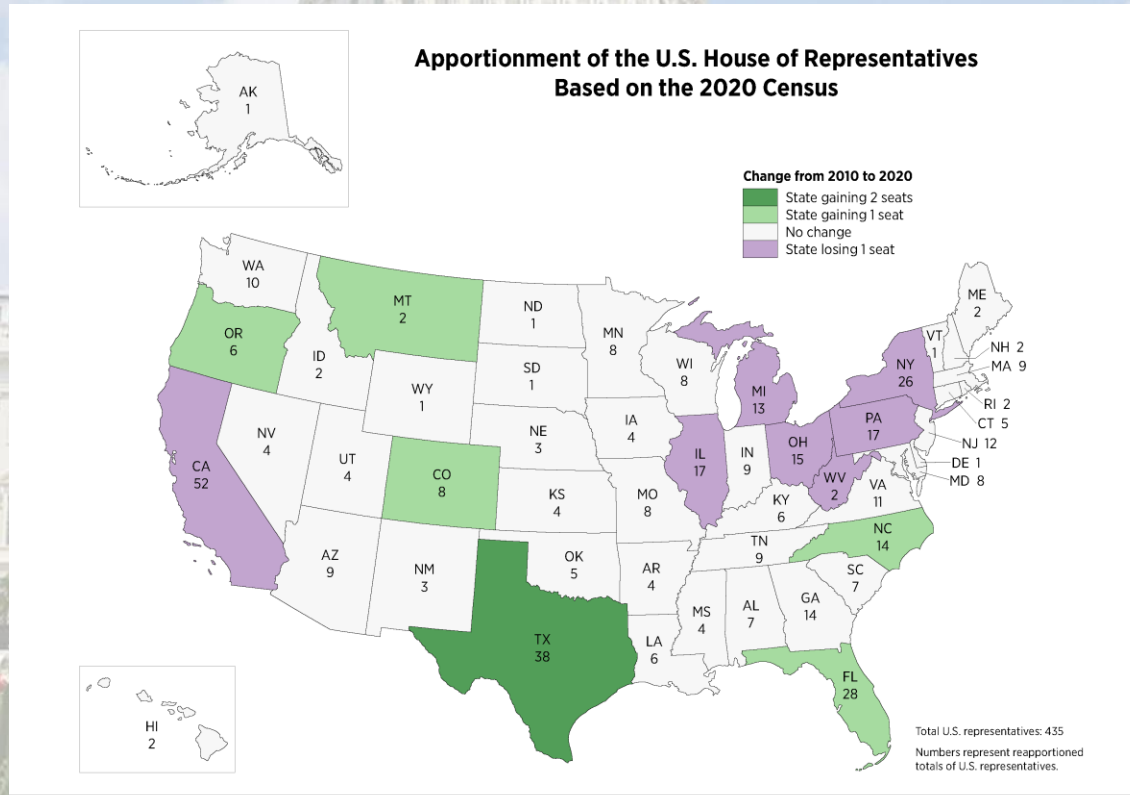
This plan decided to have two houses of legislature. It also stated equal representation in upper class and lower representation proportional to population. This compromise pleased followers of the New Jersey Plan and Virginia Plan.



U.S. House of Representatives

-Representation based on each state's population → population is counted every 10 years by the U.S. Census → Census results may change how many delegates each state will lose or gain (this also changes Electoral College members)

The House will always have 435 delegates – this number never changes (this is a “fixed” total, so seats will shift, but the amount will always be 435 House members)



House Membership

- Each state is divided into one or more congressional district with one representative per district
- Boundaries are drawn so districts include roughly the same amount as constituents (citizens they represent)
- Apportionment or reapportionment: the number of representatives assigned to a state based upon its population
- Gerrymandering: drawing a district's boundaries in an oddly-shaped manner to benefit one political party over another and increase voting strength



U.S. House of Representatives

Your Possible Representatives

-Serve 2-year terms

3 requirements:

-25 years or older

-Live in state they represent at the time of election

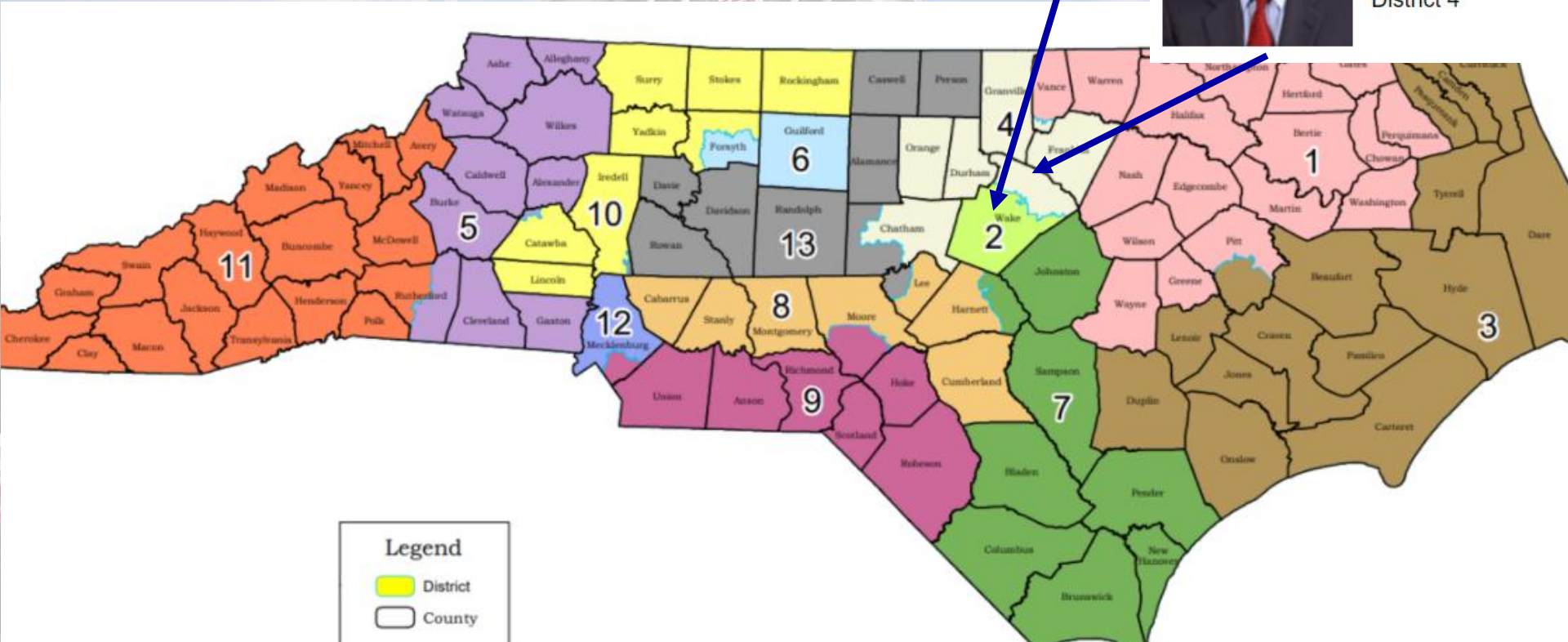
-U.S. citizen for at least 7 years before being elected



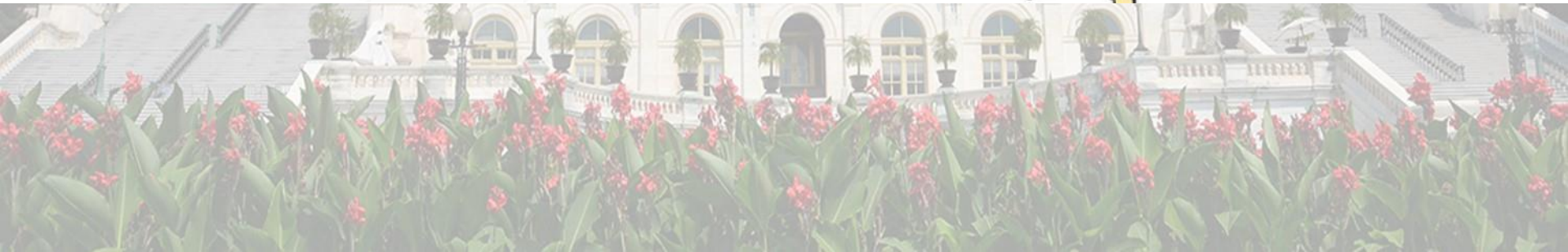
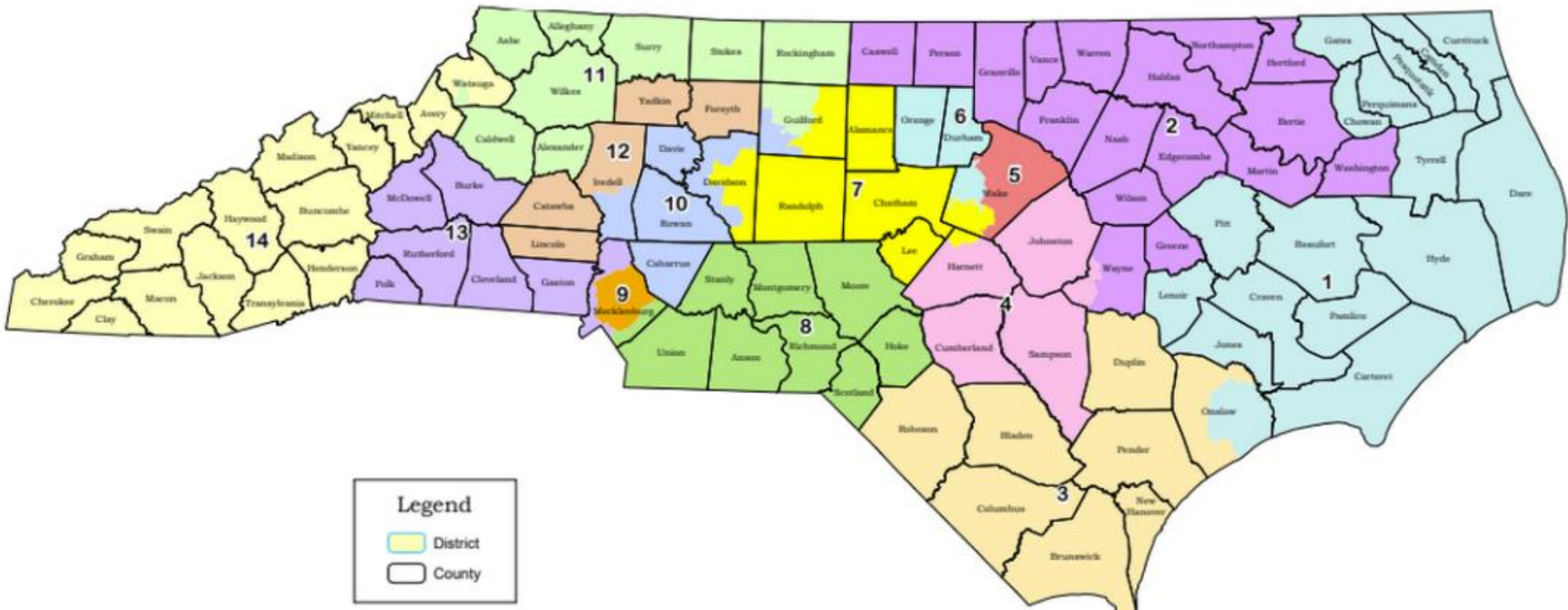
Deborah K. Ross ♀
Democrat
North Carolina
District 2



David E. Price ♂
Democrat
North Carolina
District 4



Redistricting Map After the 2020 Census (will impact the 2022 midterm elections)



Congressional Term Limit Debate

- Congress members be elected an unlimited number of times
- There are many Americans who support Congressional term limits

Congressional Term Limits

Pros

- Congressional term limits prevent politicians to stay in power for too long
- It is time for a change after a certain period of time
- Some politicians would do anything to stay in power
- Better ability for newcomers to climb the political ladder
- Politicians will become too old over time
- Power of lobbyists can be confined to a certain extent
- Younger politicians can have better knowledge in technology
- May give people more trust in politicians
- Can prevent politicians to artificially maintain their power
- Innovations may be encouraged
- People will get more aware of the importance of politics
- Can prevent decisions that are solely made out of re-election concerns
- "Family rulers" can be avoided

Cons

- Decisions may be biased in favor of short-term gains
- May contradict with the preferences of the general public
- Politicians do not have to deal with long-term issues
- Opponents claim that there is no need for term limits
- Congressional term limits can lead to a loss of experience
- Term limits may lead to a lack of motivation of politicians
- Can lead to inefficiencies in the political system
- Politicians may not be able to gain deep knowledge in their field
- Term limits are hard to introduce and implement
- Shorter terms also imply more administrative work
- Exploitation of loopholes regarding congressional term limits

3 requirements:

- 30 years or older
- At the time of the election, live in the state they represent (the one similarity to the House of Representatives)
- U.S. citizen for 9 years or more before being elected

U.S. Senate

SENATE

- SIX YEAR TERMS
- 100 MEMBERS
- MOVES SLOWLY
- EACH STATE IS EQUAL
- FEWER MEMBERS MEAN THEY MUST BE KNOWLEGIBLE ON MANY SUBJECTS

CONGRESS

BICAMERAL



HOUSE OF REPS

- TWO YEAR TERMS
- 435 MEMBERS
- POWERFUL LEADER
- STATES WITH BIG POPULATIONS RULE
- MORE MEMBERS MEAN THEY CAN BE SPECIALIST IN CERTAIN AREAS

Richard Burr (R)



Hometown: Winston-Salem

Thom Tillis (R)



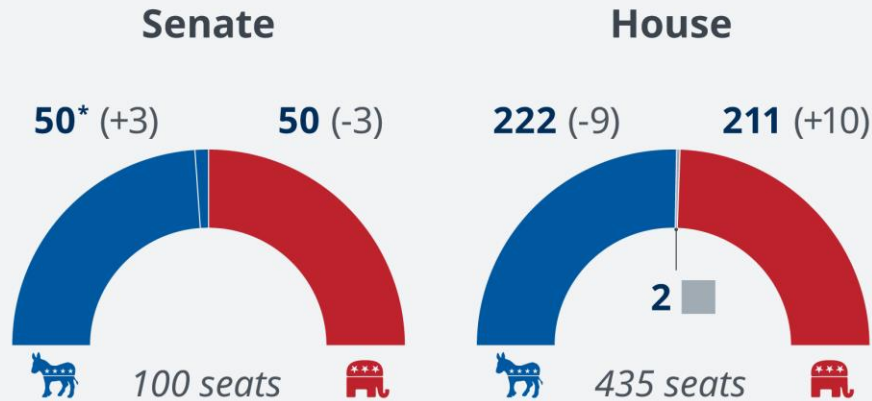
Hometown: Huntersville



Senate Terms

Democrats to hold majority in both Congressional chambers

Results of the 2020 congressional elections



■ Democrats ■ Republicans
■ Final results still in process

*Two independent senators currently support the Democrats.
The vice president is also Senate president and casts tie-breaking votes. From January 20, 2021, Kamala Harris (Democrat) will be vice president.

-6-year terms; unlimited terms

-Elections to the Senate are staggered over even years so that only about 1/3 of the Senate is up for reelection during any election

-Senators are elected “at large”, meaning they represent the whole state, not a district like the House of Representatives

Congressional Terms

117th Congress: *Fast Facts*

Every two years, Americans re-elect one third of the U.S. Senate and all members of the U.S. House of Representatives. Here's what you should know about the 117th Congress, which started its first session on January 3, 2021.

Gender Breakdown

SENATE
74 MALE | 26 FEMALES

HOUSE
315 MALE | 118 FEMALE

91 Veterans

85 MALES
6 FEMALE

63 REPUBLICANS
28 DEMOCRATS

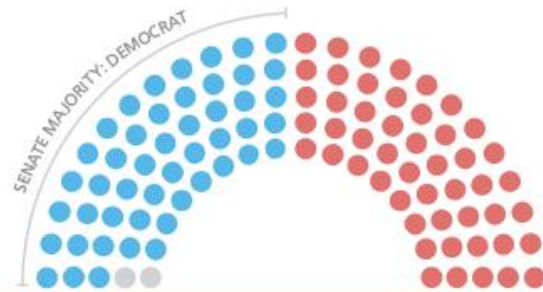
Freshmen (New) Members

Senate: 7 | House: 60
18 Democrats | 49 Republicans

27 WOMEN
15 VETERANS

Medical Professionals in Congress:

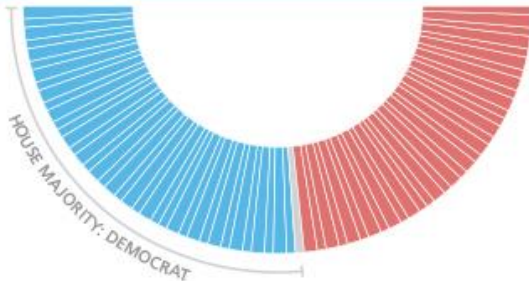
26



Senate
100 total seats



Seat Breakdown
Republican: 50
Democrat: 48
Independent: 2



House
435 total seats



Seat Breakdown
Republican: 211
Democrat: 222
Vacant: 2

-Each Congressional “term” lasts two years and is given a number (117th Congress is currently in session and began 3 January 2021 – 3 January 2023)

-Term in Congress – 2 years; 2 sessions per term starting in January to November or December

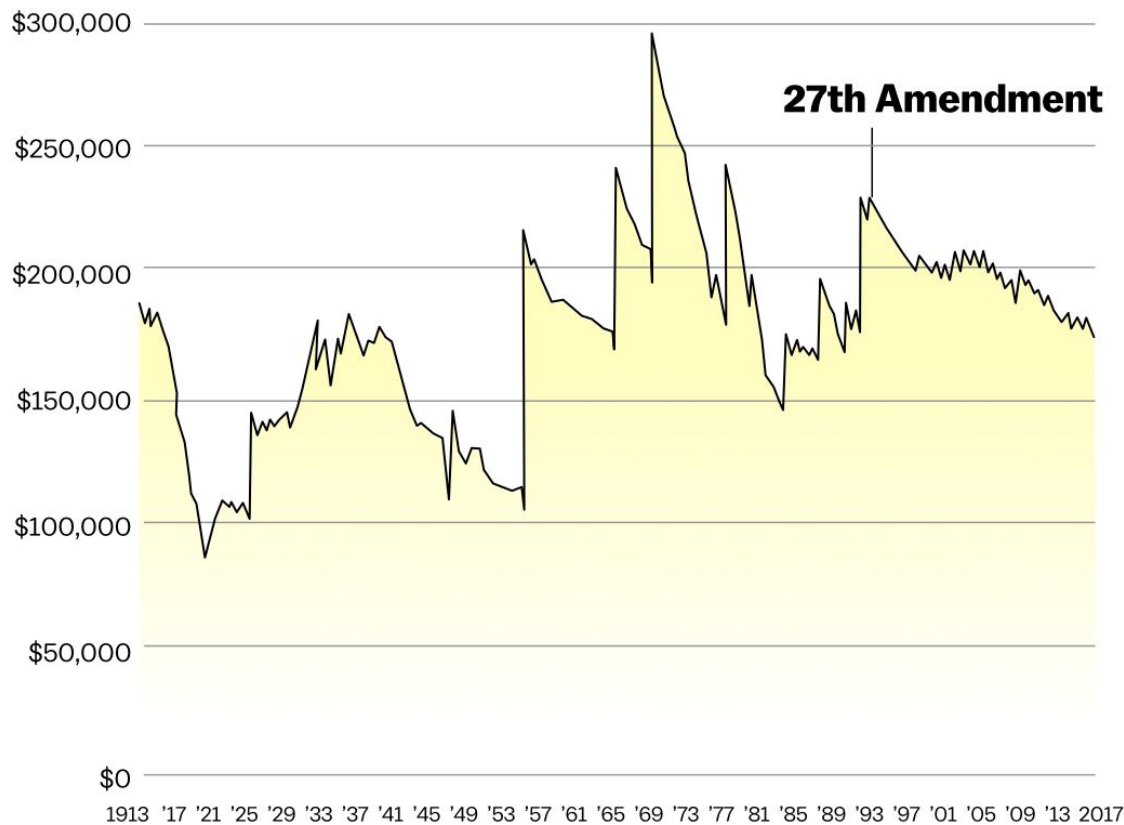
-Can be called into special sessions by the president in times of crisis

Members of Congress are eligible to receive the same annual cost-of-living increase given to other federal employees if any; raise takes effect automatically on 1 January of each year unless Congress, through the passage of a joint resolution, votes to decline it, as Congress has done since 2009

Salary:
\$174,000
(started as
\$6/day in
1789, which is
about \$193 in
2020)

Congressional pay adjusted for inflation

in current dollars

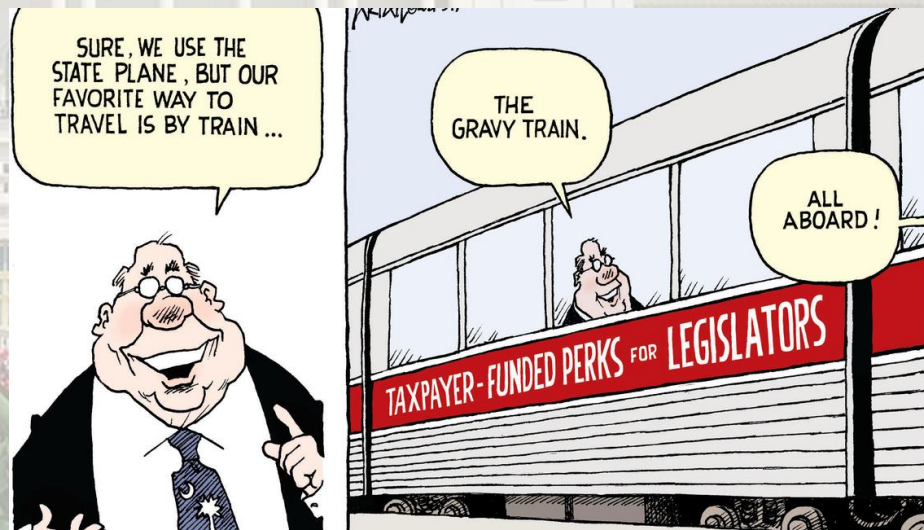


Source: govtrackinsider.com

Vox

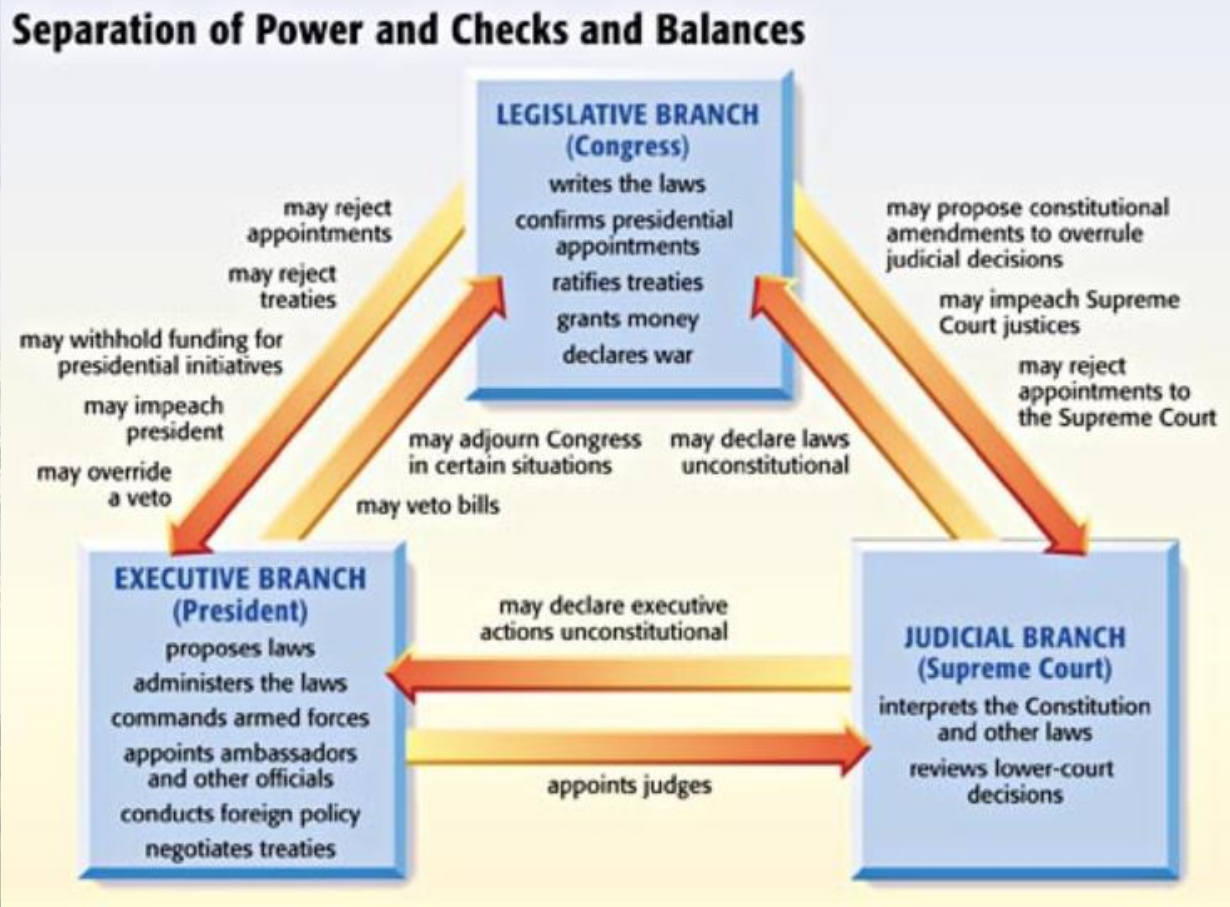
Congressional Benefits

- Prior to 1984, no members of Congress (or any other federal civil service employee) paid out to Social Security
- Congress members receive retirement and health benefits under the same plans available to other federal employees
- Receive a budget for home state and Capitol staff members who gather information on new bills and issues, handle requests for help from voters, respond to the media and lobbyists, work on re-election campaigns, etc.
- Office space at the Capitol building
- Paid trips to their home state
- Franking privileges: ability to send work-related mail without postage
- Congressional immunity: protection from suits of slander for speaking or debating on behalf of their constituents



Congressional Limitations

- Congress has always been limited by the enumerated (listed) powers given to them in the U.S. Constitution – there are powers that states hold that the federal government does not (reserved powers)
- Checks and balances (the power of the veto, federal court rulings, etc.)
- However, Congress can expand their power through the interpretation of the “Necessary and Proper Clause” found in Article I, Section 8 of the Constitution

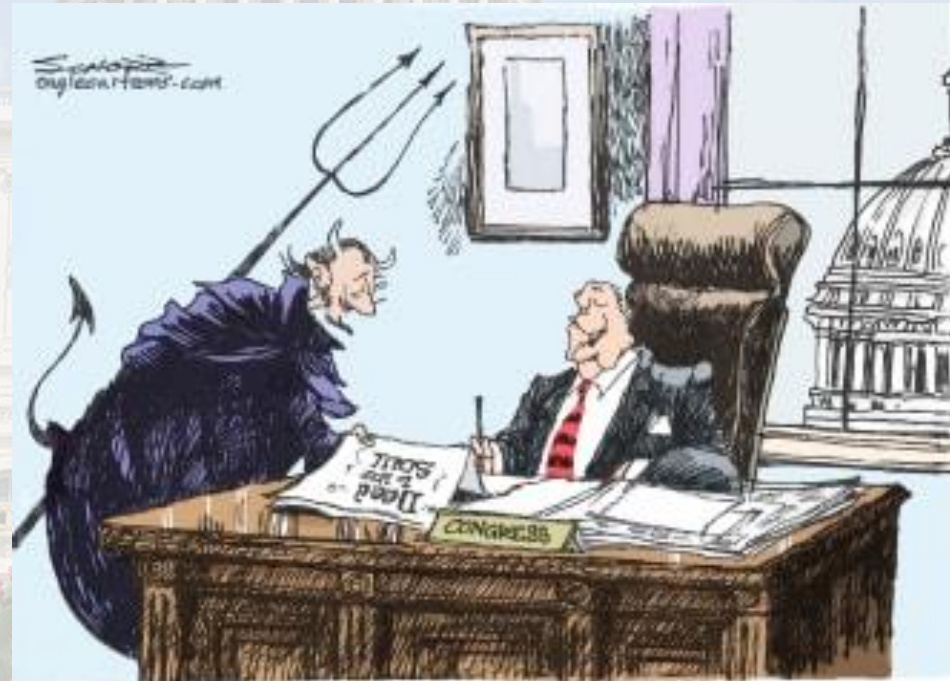


-Expulsion: Article I, Section 5 of the Constitution allows a 2/3rds vote to remove a member from Congress; it's the most severe punishment and usually given for corruption

-Since 1789, the Senate has expelled only 15 (14 were expelled during the Civil War for supporting the Confederacy) and the House only 5 (3 during the Civil War)

-Censure: documents deep disapproval of member misconduct that only requires a majority vote (we've only censured 9 Senators and 24 House members); result can be that they lose seniority and committee assignments, which diminishes their power

-Reprimand: documents disapproval and was used interchangeably with censure before the late 1960s once an ethics committee was established and it was minimized as less than a censure



"WHOA. I SWEAR...THE COST OF CAMPAIGNING GETS MORE EXPENSIVE EVERY YEAR!"