



The Constitution is organized into seven main parts, or articles. Article I describes the legislative branch, or Congress. Congress makes the laws.

Congress is made up of two houses, the Senate and the House of Representatives. Every state elects two members, called senators, to the Senate. In the House, the number of representatives depends on the number of people who live in a state. States with more people have more representatives in the House.

To make laws, members of Congress write bills. If a

majority in both houses of Congress votes to pass a bill, it is sent to the head of the executive branch, the president. If the president signs the bill, it becomes a law.

If the president refuses to sign a bill, Congress can overrule the president's decision. A two-thirds majority of both houses must vote to overrule the president. Otherwise, the bill does not become a law.

The legislative branch has many other powers. The Senate approves or rejects the people the president chooses to fill key jobs. The Senate must approve the president's choices for ambassadors. Ambassadors represent the United States in foreign countries. The Senate must approve the president's choice of federal judges. It also approves members of the president's **cabinet**.

Congress has some powers in foreign affairs, or the business that the United States conducts with other countries. Two-thirds of the Senate must vote to approve a treaty between the United States and another country. And both houses of Congress must give approval before the United States can declare war on another country.

The Constitution also gives Congress ways to remove people in the other branches who abuse their powers. The House can **impeach** the president, judges, and other officials. The Senate can put an impeached official on trial. If the Senate finds the person guilty, that official must

resign from his or her job.

Article I gives other powers to Congress. It can collect taxes. It can also create a national currency, or system of money.



Article II of the Constitution explains the powers of the executive branch. This branch carries out, or executes, the nation's laws.

The head of the executive branch is the president, or chief executive. Working for the president are the people and organizations that help to carry out the laws written and

passed by Congress.

The men who wrote the Constitution did not want the United States to have a leader with too much power, like a king. So, they limited the president's power. For example, the Constitution gives the president the power to either sign or **veto** the bills passed by Congress. But Congress can overrule the president's veto by a two-thirds vote of both houses.

Presidents cannot make laws, but they can lead the country by making proposals, or offering ideas, to Congress. One way that presidents do this is by giving a State of the Union speech every year to both houses in the House Chamber. In these speeches, they may suggest ideas for new laws.

The president can call Congress together for a special session, or meeting. This power is a useful tool when a president believes that there is a national emergency.

The president shares power over foreign affairs with Congress. The president can sign a treaty with another nation, but two-thirds of the Senate must approve it. As commander in chief, the president is in charge of the nation's armed forces, such as the army and navy. But only Congress can declare war.

As chief executive, the president nominates, or suggests,

people for key jobs in the government. For example, the president nominates cabinet members, ambassadors, and federal judges. However, the Senate has to accept or reject the president's choices.

The president has the power to grant pardons to people who have been found guilty of crimes against the nation. A pardon is a release from punishment. But the president cannot give pardons in cases of impeachment.

The president is only the head of the executive branch and not a king. But most people view the president as the leader of the country. In many ways, such as in discussions with other countries, the president represents the United States.



Article III of the Constitution describes the judicial branch. This branch interprets the nation's laws, settles disputes between states, and protects the Constitution.

The judicial branch is headed by the Supreme Court. Congress has used its power to create other federal courts under this Court. The Supreme Court has nine judges, or justices. The Court's leader is the chief justice. Justices are appointed by the president and approved by the Senate. They serve for life, or until they choose to retire.

The judicial branch has some important powers. It decides

whether a national or state law conflicts with the Constitution. Such a law is called unconstitutional. Because the Constitution is the basic law of our country, the judicial branch can overrule unconstitutional laws.

The judicial branch also has the power to review and comment on treaties. If it finds that a treaty violates the Constitution, then the treaty is not put into effect.

The judicial branch interprets the law. That is, the courts settle disagreements about what a law means or how it applies to a particular situation.

The judicial branch has power during impeachment trials. Most notably, the chief justice is the judge in such trials.

By using its powers, the judicial branch protects the Constitution and the rights of Americans. If the actions of the other branches conflict with the Constitution, the judicial branch acts to enforce the Constitution.