

# GOVERNMENT

TERM	DEFINITION
<b>Representative Government</b>	The system of government where the people elect their representatives directly and then hold them responsible for their activity while in office. This form of representation and the accountability of elected officials are the basis of the American government.
<b>Branches of Government</b>	<p>As detailed in the Constitution, American government is divided into three equal elements:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The Executive Branch includes the President, the officials appointed by the President, and the departments which administer the laws adopted by Congress.</li> <li>• The Legislative Branch includes the elected members of Congress to the House of Representatives and the Senate. Members of both the House and Senate propose, debate, and then vote on all new laws. Following approval, the new laws must be signed by the President before being adopted.</li> <li>• The Judicial Branch includes the Supreme Court and Federal District Courts in various parts of the country. The Supreme Court hears and decides on cases which involve issues directly related to the Constitution, while the Federal District Courts decide on issues related to federal laws.</li> </ul>
<b>Houses of Congress</b>	The Congress of the United States includes two equal branches, or houses: The House of Representatives, and the Senate. Members of both houses are elected directly by the people of the United States. The number of representatives for each state in the House is determined by its population; the larger the population, the greater the number of representatives. The Senate is made up of two members from each state, regardless of its population. In this fashion, the people of each state are represented fairly, regardless of the state's size.
<b>The Nation's Capital</b>	Washington DC, is the home of the three branches of government in the United States. First designated as the capital city by George Washington in 1790 and designed by Pierre L'Enfant, a French engineer who served during the Revolutionary War. Washington is actually the ninth location of the America's capital city. The first capital was Philadelphia during the First Continental Congress in 1774, followed by seven other locations including New York, Trenton, and Annapolis, until settling in Washington DC on November 17, 1800.
<b>The Capitol</b>	The building in Washington serving as the seat of the House of Representatives and the Senate. When in session, the House and Senate meet in separate chambers for discussion, debate, consideration, and voting on bills before Congress. The Capitol building was designed by William Thornton in 1793 and was largely completed by 1811. British troops attacked and damaged the building in 1814, but it was restored by 1819 and has been the seat of Congress since. Sitting on top of the Capitol dome is the Statue of Freedom, designed by Thomas Crawford in 1863. The statue features a tall bronze female figure wearing a helmet. Her right hand rests on a sword, while her left hand holds a laurel wreath of victory and the shield of the United States.
<b>Capitol Hill</b>	The area in Washington where the House and Senate office buildings, the Capitol, Supreme Court, and the Library of Congress are located. The phrase, Capitol Hill, is often used to refer to this seat of government power in Washington.

# GOVERNMENT

TERM	DEFINITION
<b>Checks and Balances</b>	The system of power sharing in government devised by the Founding Fathers during the Constitutional Convention in Philadelphia during 1787. Each branch of government, Executive, Legislative, and Judicial, has the authority to “check” or review the decisions of the other branch and oppose them if those decisions are seen to oppose the rights, privileges, and guarantees for all citizens provided by Constitution. Following such opposition, the branches of government work to “balance” their differences for the benefit of the country.
<b>The White House</b>	The official home of the President and his executive offices. Designed by James Hoban in 1792 and completed in 1800, every President since John Adams has lived here. In 1814, the White House was attacked and burned by British Troops during the War of 1812, but was completely rebuilt. Since then, every President has added personal touches, such as interior decorations and official state china for special occasions, to mark their family’s time in residence. The White House is the only private residence of the head of state open to the public, free of charge, in the world.
<b>Speaker of the House</b>	The leader of the House of Representatives who is elected by all members. The Speaker serves as the presiding officer during all sessions of the House and is also the leader of the majority party in Congress. Following the Vice President, the Speaker is the officer of government in line to succeed the President, following his or her death or inability to remain in office.
<b>President of the Senate</b>	The Vice-President of the United States serves as the Senate’s president when it is in session. His principal role is to cast the deciding vote in situations when Senators fail to reach a majority decision on pending legislation.
<b>Majority Leader</b>	The leader is elected by members of the majority party in the House and Senate to direct the activities of its members when Congress is in session. The majority leader in both the House and Senate plays a critical role in deciding which new proposals are brought up for discussion by all members.
<b>Minority Leader</b>	The leader of the minority party in the House and Senate elected by its members to represent the interests of the minority and to direct the activities of its members when Congress is in session.
<b>Party Whip</b>	The assistant leader of either the majority or minority party in the House and Senate. Known as “whips” since the early 1800s, the responsibility of the assistant leaders is to “whip up” and gather support or opposition by party members for legislation coming up for a vote in Congress.
<b>Bill</b>	A proposal for new legislation in Congress offered by one or more members of either the House or Senate. Once a bill has been proposed, it is debated by members and later voted upon for approval in both houses of Congress. Following its approval, the bill is forwarded to the President for review. At this state, the President has the option to either approve or reject the bill.

# GOVERNMENT

TERM	DEFINITION
<b>Veto</b>	Under the Constitution, the President has the power to reject, or “veto,” any bill previously approved by Congress and forwarded to him or her for review. The term veto comes from Latin and means “I forbid.” Following a veto, the bill is returned to Congress for further consideration.
<b>Override</b>	Following a presidential veto, each house of Congress has the right to reconsider the bill and vote for its approval, despite the President’s decision. In order to counter, or override, the President, the reconsideration requires a two-thirds majority in both the House and Senate. Since the founding of the United States, fewer than ten percent of all presidential vetoes have been overridden.
<b>Joint Resolution</b>	A proposal adopted by both the House and Senate which is sent to the President for the purpose of expressing the opinion of Congress on an issue. A joint resolution is not intended to become part of federal law following its approval.
<b>Law</b>	When a legislative proposal, or bill, has been approved by both houses of Congress and signed by the President, it becomes part of federal law.
<b>Standing Committees</b>	Permanent committees or legislative panels established by both the House and Senate to consider specific issues, such as foreign affairs, taxes, commerce, and the military. Members of the committees are selected by Majority and Minority Leaders of both parties. In turn, each committee appoints a chair from the majority party and a minority leader from the minority party. The primary responsibility of the standing committees is to review and debate proposed bills before they are returned to the House and Senate for a vote by all members.
<b>Joint Committees</b>	A special committee with members representing both the House and Senate to consider matters of joint interest. Normally, joint committees have limited jurisdiction over issues and are not responsible for deciding on new legislation.
<b>State of the Union Address</b>	As required by the Constitution, the President is required to address both the House and Senate in joint session “from time to time” in order to report on the status of the country and to outline an agenda of priorities and administrative goals during the coming year. Traditionally, the State of the Union Address is delivered by the President in January at the beginning of a new Congressional session.
<b>Quorum</b>	The minimum number of voting members in the House and Senate who must be present during a committee hearing or a session of Congress in order for any business of government to proceed.
<b>Joint Session of Congress</b>	A legislative session involving all members of the House and Senate meeting together. Typically, these sessions occur during the State of the Union Address or during an address by an invited foreign leader or a person of special interest to the members of Congress. Joint sessions are not convened in order to consider or vote upon legislative proposals.
<b>Filibuster</b>	A strategy used in the Senate by members of the minority party to delay the vote on specific bills. Senators are allowed to speak for as long as they choose in opposition to the measure in question. Stopping a filibuster can only be accomplished by a special vote in the Senate called “cloture,” which requires the approval of three-fifths of all Senators. In many ways, the Senate filibuster is the ultimate exercise of free speech in Congress. Members of the House of Representatives do not have the right to filibuster.

# GOVERNMENT

TERM	DEFINITION
<b>Party Caucus</b>	Meetings in both houses of Congress by members of the majority and minority parties to select legislative agendas, elect party officers, and select committee members. Caucuses represent specific areas of interest to members and the meetings are typically closed sessions.
<b>Advice and Consent</b>	As required by the Constitution, the Senate is called upon by the President to provide “advice and consent,” or approval, to treaties negotiated by the President and appointments to public positions such as ambassadors, cabinet officers, federal attorneys, judges, and appointments to the Supreme Court. International treaties require approval by two-thirds of Senators, while other Presidential appointments require a simple majority.
<b>Cabinet</b>	The cabinet consists of the secretaries, or chief officers, of the various departments of the executive branch of government, such as defense, commerce, agriculture, health and human services, and the treasury. Cabinet members are appointed by the President and serve as key advisors on matters of policy, executive decisions, and legislative issues.
<b>The White House (Politics)</b>	In American politics, “The White House” refers not to the official residence, but to the policies of the current administration. Generally, the term is used to represent policies and concerns shared by the President with the Congress.
<b>Roll Call Vote</b>	Voting in both the House and Senate is typically determined by members expressing their opinion by voice or using an electronic system. A specific accounting of each member’s vote is accomplished by a roll call vote, when the Speaker of the House or the President of the Senate calls upon members for his or her approval in favor or opposition. Roll call votes are reported by each member’s name, while voice and electronic votes are not.
<b>Lobbyist</b>	Representatives of specific business interests or causes who attempt to persuade members of Congress to support or oppose specific issues being considered by the House or Senate. Under federal law, all lobbyists working with members of Congress must be registered on the public record for both houses.
<b>Executive Order</b>	A decision by the President regarding a specific administrative action within the Executive Branch not requiring congressional approval.
<b>Federal Law</b>	Legal decisions made by both the House and the Senate which are later approved by the President which regulate issues and affect all branches of government and the citizens of the United States.
<b>State’s Rights</b>	A major topic in American government concerning those rights and responsibilities not retained by the federal government which are exercised by the states. From the beginning of the nation following the Revolutionary War, the balance between federal and states’ rights has been hotly debated. Most famously, the argument over states’ rights concerning slavery led to the Civil War.
<b>State Law</b>	Legal decisions made by both houses of a state legislature and approved by the governor. State laws only regulate issues within that state and do not apply outside its boundaries.