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The Legislative Branch

Today we're going to talk about the legislative branch...in just a minute.

The legislative branch is the branch of the federal government that includes Congress—the elected officials who make the laws. Congressional power is divided across two chambers: the Senate and the House of Representatives.

There are 100 Senators—two from each state. To be a Senator, a person must be at least 30 years old and have been a US citizen for at least nine years. Senators serve six-year terms.

There are 435 US representatives. The number of seats for each state is based on that state's population. To be a representative, a person must be at least 25 years old and have been a US citizen for at least seven years. Representatives serve two-year terms.

Article I of the Constitution grants Congress several powers:

Financial: Congress establishes the budget, imposes taxes, and regulates commerce.

Military: Congress has the power to declare war.

Investigative: Congress oversees government agencies and can investigate for misconduct.

And finally, legislative power: Congress is responsible for the creation of all federal laws.

Each chamber has some powers that are exclusively theirs. For example, the Senate confirms presidential appointments, while the House elects the President in case of a tie. Lawmaking, however, is collaborative; any bill sent to the president must first be approved by both chambers—a process that depends heavily on compromise.

Why might the framers of the Constitution have wanted Congress to have more than one chamber?

