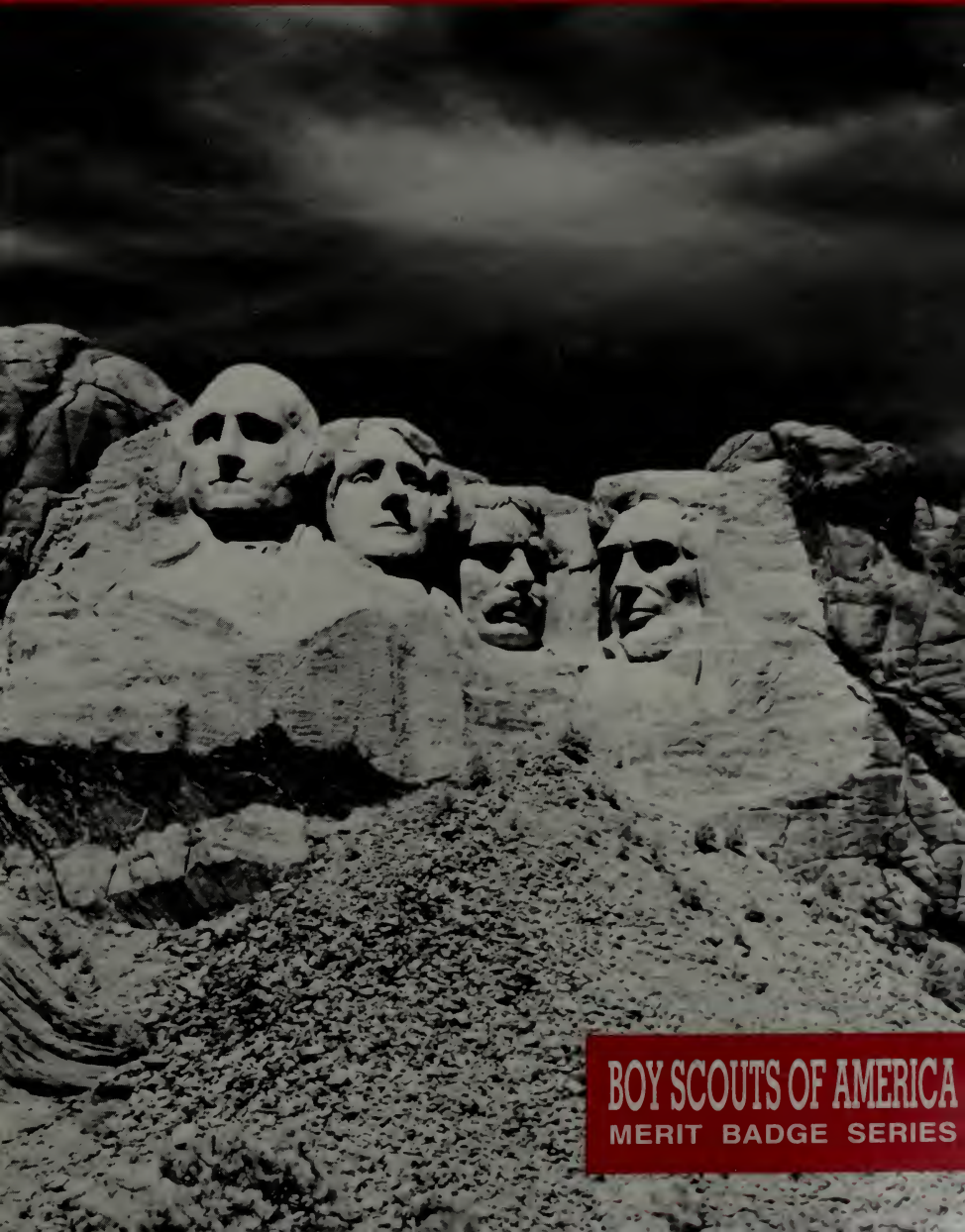




# CITIZENSHIP IN THE NATION



**BOY SCOUTS OF AMERICA**  
**MERIT BADGE SERIES**

## How to use this pamphlet.



The secret to successfully earning a merit badge is for you to use both the pamphlet and the suggestions of your counselor.

Your counselor can be as important to you as a coach is to an athlete. Use all of the resources your counselor can make available to you. This may be the best chance you will have to learn about this particular subject. Make it count.

If you or your counselor feels that any information in this pamphlet is incorrect, please let us know. Please state your source of information.

Merit badge pamphlets are reprinted annually and requirements updated regularly. Your suggestions for improvement are welcome.

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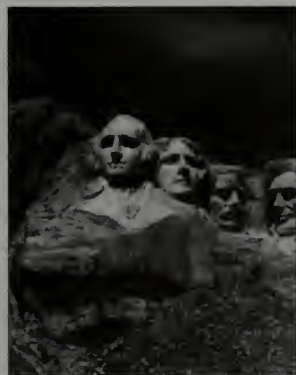
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Richard Wagner

886-2356

# CITIZENSHIP IN THE NATION



BOY SCOUTS OF AMERICA  
IRVING, TEXAS

# Requirements

1. After reading, discuss with your counselor the following documents:

- a. Declaration of Independence
- b. Preamble to the Constitution
- c. Constitution
- d. Bill of Rights
- e. Amendments to the Constitution

2. Name the three branches of government and explain their functions. Explain the checks and balances on each branch of government.

3. Outline the relationships between state and federal governments.

4. Do ONE of the following:

- a. Visit the national Capitol.
- b. Visit your state capitol.

✓ c. Tour a federal installation.

Explain your experiences to your counselor.

5. Name your two senators and the member of Congress from your congressional district. Write a letter to one of these elected officials on a national issue, sharing your view with him or her. Show your letter and any response to your counselor.

6. What are five important functions of your national government? Explain how these functions affect your family and local community.

7. Discuss the main ways by which the federal government is financed.

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ABRAHAM LINCOLN  
ENSHRINED FOREVER



The United States

— 1789 —

# Introduction

More than two hundred years ago a revolutionary experiment in self-government began. This experiment, based on the premise that government derives its power from its citizens, has been successful. The United States of America has evolved into the greatest democratic nation in the world. The principle of government “by the people, for the people” stands as a beacon for the other peoples of the world.

This heritage of individual liberties and responsive government was set forth in the documents and laws that established the republic. The United States system of government is firmly based on the concept of citizenship.

U.S. citizens are entitled to certain rights and privileges provided by law. In return, citizens owe certain obligations to their country. The United States is a republic—citizens elect individuals to represent them and to make laws on their behalf. These representatives are responsible to the people who placed them in office; they hold a public trust.

For this republican system to function, citizens must exercise their rights, especially their right to vote. To vote intelligently, citizens must be informed. To be informed, citizens must keep abreast of national, state, and local issues.

Even people too young to vote enjoy other rights of citizenship, and their opinions matter. What citizens think plays an important role in shaping government policy. Participation is the key element of democratic government.

To fully participate, U.S. citizens must understand their democratic heritage and how their government works. Only through the continuing concern and involvement of its citizens can the United States be assured of freedom and liberty in the future.

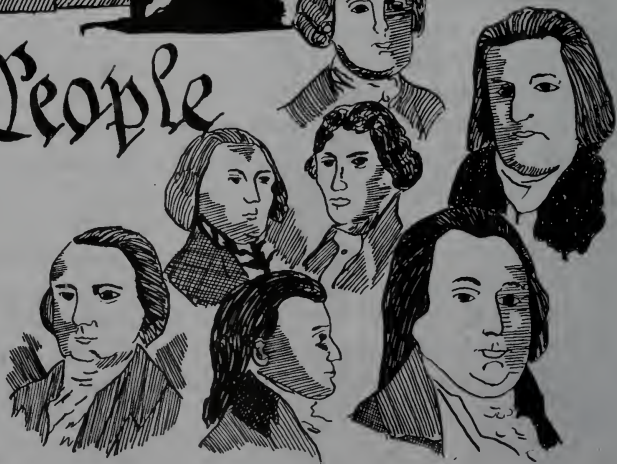
Earning this merit badge will acquaint you with the institutions of American government—how they were formed, how they work, and how they have changed. Earning the badge will help you understand the importance of your role as a citizen of the United States of America. This two-hundred-year-old experiment will continue to be successful only as long as its citizens vigilantly guard their hard-earned liberties and fulfill their civic obligations.

IN CONGRESS, JULY 4, 1776

# The unanimous Declaration of the thirteen united States of America



## We the People





# Basis of U.S. Government

The United States was born through war, but the basis for the new nation was established by two important documents—the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution.

Both documents were heavily influenced by the political and social theories of the eighteenth century, particularly the writings of the English philosopher John Locke. According to Locke, people have the right to life, liberty, and the ownership of property. The purpose of government is to protect the rights of its citizens. If a government fails in this responsibility, the citizens have the right to choose a new government.

At a time when many countries were colonies of European nations, these ideas were revolutionary. The thirteen North American colonies of Great Britain became the first country to establish a nation based on these ideas.

The Declaration of Independence asserted the right of a people to choose their own government. The Constitution established the liberties of American citizens and a strong but responsive form of government.

## Declaration of Independence

Fighting between the colonies and Great Britain had begun more than a year before the Second Continental Congress adopted the Declaration of Independence on July 4, 1776. Tension between the colonists and the British government had been growing for more than ten years before war broke out. Until the Declaration of Independence was adopted, the colonists had been demanding their rights as British citizens. After a year of bloody conflict, sentiment among American leaders began to favor complete independence.

At the meeting of the Second Continental Congress, made up of representatives of the thirteen colonies, a committee was appointed to draft a statement of independence. Members of the committee were Thomas Jefferson, John Adams, Benjamin Franklin, Robert R.

Livingston, and Roger Sherman. Jefferson wrote most of the declaration, and the draft of the document was presented to the Congress after two weeks of work. Members of the Congress discussed the document and struck compromises as to its contents before the final draft was adopted and signed.

The Declaration of Independence has four main parts:

- A preamble, which explains why the declaration was written
- A declaration of rights stating that all men are created free and equal, and have certain God-given rights of life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness
- A list of twenty-seven specific complaints against King George III of Great Britain
- A statement that asserts the thirteen colonies are free and independent

Patriot leaders wrote and adopted the Declaration of Independence to mobilize public support for their cause both in the colonies and in other countries. This widely imitated document is an announcement to all peoples explaining the reasons the colonies were dissolving the “political bands” that tied them to Great Britain and asserting that the colonies would “assume among the powers of the earth, the separate and equal station to which the Laws of Nature and of Nature’s god, entitle them. . . .”

The Declaration of Independence had a profound impact on the French Revolution and on the revolutions in South America when those countries fought to win their independence from Spain. One especially notable feature of the document is its eloquent language, which nobly expresses the ideals of individual liberties and the right of self-government.

## The Constitution

Thirteen years after the adoption of the Declaration of Independence, the United States adopted a second document—the Constitution—that molded the states into a nation.

Originally, the national government had been established by a document called the Articles of Confederation. The articles granted independence to each state and gave little authority to the national government.

Each state minted its own money and regulated its own trade. The resulting confusion caused an economic slump in the United States. The weaknesses of the Articles of Confederation became even more apparent when thousands of western Massachusetts farmers led by Captain Daniel Shays attempted to prevent the courts from foreclosing mortgages on their farms in 1786. This armed uprising against the state government, known as Shays' Rebellion, caused considerable alarm, and several states called for a convention to review the Articles of Confederation. National leaders such as George Washington and Alexander Hamilton also used their influence to demand a convention.

Congress approved the convention and asked that each state send representatives to work on revising the Articles of Confederation. Delegates to the Constitutional Convention met in Philadelphia at the State House, now called Independence Hall, on May 25, 1787. Twelve of the thirteen states (Rhode Island refused to send delegates) were represented at the convention. About half of the fifty-five delegates were college graduates, at a time when a large percentage of the population could not read.

The delegates were practical politicians. Thirty-nine delegates had been members of the Continental Congress, eight had served in state constitutional conventions, seven had been governors, eight had signed the Declaration of Independence, and two had signed the Articles of Confederation. Thirty-three of the delegates were lawyers, eight were business owners, six were planters, and three were doctors. Unlike most of the American people in 1787, however, none of the delegates was a craft worker, the owner of a small farm, or a laborer. Washington, hero of the Revolutionary War, presided over the convention.

With the frustration of government under the Articles of Confederation, it became apparent that revision of the articles would not be practical. A majority of the convention delegates decided to write a new plan of government—the Constitution of the United States.

The Constitution consists of a preamble, seven articles, and twenty-seven amendments. This document establishes a federal system of government by dividing powers between the national government and the state governments, but gives strong central authority to the national government.

## Preamble

The preamble is the introduction to the Constitution and explains the main purposes of the law. The **preamble states**, in one sentence, the **six reasons for writing the Constitution**:

"We the people of the United States, in order to form a more perfect union, establish justice, insure domestic tranquility, provide for the common defense, promote the general welfare, and secure the blessings of liberty to ourselves and our posterity, do ordain and establish this Constitution for the United States of America."

This elegant language clearly affirms that the *people*, not the states or the national government, were ordaining the supreme law of the land to have a better form of government, to have laws that treat all citizens fairly, for life in the U.S. to be peaceful, for the nation to be able to defend itself from its enemies, to enjoy good living conditions, and for Americans to be free and to pass that freedom to future Americans.

## Articles

The seven Articles of the Constitution **provide the foundation for the system of government in the United States**:

*Article I* establishes the legislative, or lawmaking, branch of government—the Congress—consisting of the Senate and the House of Representatives. This article explains the powers and limits of the legislature, the qualifications for office, and the methods of electing representatives, and places some restrictions on state governments.

*Article II* establishes the executive branch of government and the office of the president and vice president. This article explains the powers, duties, and limits of the president and the qualifications and methods of electing the president and vice president.

*Article III* establishes the judicial branch of government and the Supreme Court. This article also gives Congress the power to establish "inferior" courts. The article explains the judicial power of federal courts.

*Article IV*, adopted almost exactly from the Articles of Confederation, describes the relations states must have with each other, the relations between the federal government and the state governments, and the procedure for the addition of states and territories.

*Article V* details the procedures for amending the Constitution.



*Article VI* states that the Constitution and all subsequent national laws are the supreme law of the land. This article requires all state judges to follow the Constitution, even if state laws or constitutions contradict it, and requires all state officials to swear to support the U.S. Constitution.

*Article VII* explains how the Constitution shall be ratified, or approved, by the states in order for it to be established.

According to Article VII, once nine states had approved the Constitution, it would go into effect among the ratifying states. On December 7, 1787, Delaware became the first state to ratify the Constitution. New Hampshire became the ninth state to ratify the Constitution in June 1788, officially putting the law into effect. However, only until the important states of Virginia and New York had ratified the Constitution later in the summer of 1788 did the other states begin to select presidential electors.

On February 5, 1789, the electors named George Washington as the first president of the United States. He was inaugurated on April 30. The first Congress under the Constitution met in New York City on March 4.

The last two states to ratify the Constitution—North Carolina and Rhode Island—did so only after Congress agreed to add the Bill of Rights to the Constitution.

## **Bill of Rights**

The first ten amendments to the Constitution are called the Bill of Rights. These amendments, which protect individual liberties, were proposed by James Madison in Congress and sent to the states for adoption. Some states would not have ratified the Constitution without the addition of these amendments. Twelve amendments originally were proposed, and by December 15, 1791, enough states had ratified ten of the amendments to add them to the Constitution.

*Amendment 1* protects freedom of religion, speech, and the press, and grants citizens the rights to peaceful assembly and to petition the government.

*Amendment 2* prohibits the national government from restricting the right to carry weapons.

*Amendment 3* prohibits citizens from being forced to take soldiers into their homes. Congress must pass a law in wartime to require citizens to house soldiers.

*Amendment 4* prohibits the unreasonable search and seizure of people, their houses, papers, and effects. Searches, seizures, and arrests must, in most cases, be carried out under the authority of a warrant issued by a judge after the judge has heard the reasons for the warrant to be issued.

*Amendment 5* describes the rights of citizens in criminal cases. A person may not stand trial for a crime unless he or she has been accused by a grand jury, a special group of people selected to determine if there is enough evidence against a person to turn him over for trial. A person may not be tried twice for the same offense, and a person may not be forced to testify against himself. The amendment also states that no person shall be deprived of life, liberty, or property without "due process of law." The amendment further says that the government must make fair payment when taking land for public use.

*Amendment 6* guarantees the right to a fair trial: A person must have a speedy and public trial heard by an impartial jury. The defendant must be told of the charges against him, be confronted by the witnesses against him, be allowed to introduce witnesses on his behalf, and have the benefit of legal counsel.

*Amendment 7* guarantees the right to a trial by jury in civil cases where the disputed amount exceeds \$20. Either party in the suit may ask for a jury trial.

*Amendment 8* prohibits courts from imposing excessive bails and fines. The amendment also prohibits "cruel and unusual punishments."

*Amendment 9* states that those rights not specifically listed in the Constitution are retained by the people.

*Amendment 10* states that the powers not delegated to the federal government by the Constitution are retained by the states or the people.

## **Other Amendments**

Since 1791, the Constitution has been amended sixteen times. These amendments reflect the changing needs of American society and the flexibility of the Constitution.

*Amendment 11* (1795) prohibits a citizen of one state or a citizen of another country from suing another state in federal court. However, a citizen may file suit in federal court against state authorities for depriving him of constitutional rights.

*Amendment 12* (1804) requires members of the electoral college to vote for one person as president and for one person as vice president. Before this amendment was added, electors voted for two people without specifying the office. The person with the most votes became president and the runner-up became vice president. In the election of 1800, the vote in the electoral college was a tie, and the election was decided by the House of Representatives.

*Amendment 13* (1865) abolished slavery. With the Emancipation Proclamation of 1863, President Abraham Lincoln had declared that slaves in the Confederate states were free. This amendment completed the abolition of slavery in the U.S. and in territories under its jurisdiction.

*Amendment 14* (1868) gave to former slaves citizenship both in the United States and the state in which they lived. The amendment also forbids states to pass and enforce laws depriving people of their privileges as citizens. This amendment, known as the *civil rights amendment*, forbids states to deny people equal protection of their laws or to deprive a person of life, liberty, or property without "due process of law."

*Amendment 15* (1870) prohibited the U.S. government and the states from denying former slaves the right to vote.

*Amendment 16* (1913) grants Congress the right to levy an income tax.

*Amendment 17* (1913) gives the people of the states the power to elect their senators. Previously, the state legislatures had elected senators.

*Amendment 18* (1919) prohibited the manufacture, sale, and transportation of alcoholic beverages in the U.S. This amendment is known as the *prohibition amendment*.

*Amendment 19* (1920) gives women the right to vote.

*Amendment 20* (1933) changes the date that newly elected presidents and members of Congress take office, moving the inaugurations closer to the date of the elections. This amendment is known as the *lame duck amendment*. Before it was added, members of Congress not reelected ("lame ducks") held office for four months.

*Amendment 21* (1933) repealed the prohibition amendment.

*Amendment 22* (1951) limits a president's term of office to two terms, and limits the term of office of a president who has served

more than two years of another's term to one elected term. President Franklin D. Roosevelt was the only president to run for election for more than two consecutive terms. He died in office at the beginning of his fourth term (1945).

*Amendment 23* (1961) grants residents of the District of Columbia the right to vote in presidential elections.

*Amendment 24* (1964) prohibits making voters pay a *poll tax* before they can vote in a national election. The poll tax, or head tax collected from every voter, was used to keep poor people and minorities from voting.

*Amendment 25* (1967) provides for the succession to the presidency. The amendment states that the vice president succeeds the president if the president is removed from office, dies in office, or resigns from office. The amendment also provides for the vice president to succeed to the presidency if the president becomes disabled, and details how presidential disability is determined. The second section of the amendment provides for the president to nominate another vice president if the office becomes vacant. The new vice president will take office if confirmed by a majority of both houses of Congress. Previously, a vacancy in the vice presidency was left unfilled until the next presidential election.

*Amendment 26* (1971) grants the right to vote to citizens 18 years of age or older.

*Amendment 27* (1992) bans midterm congressional pay raises.

The framers of the Constitution intentionally made it difficult to amend the Constitution. More than seven thousand amendments have been introduced in Congress, thirty-three have been passed, but only twenty-seven have been ratified.

An amendment must be proposed by two-thirds of each house of Congress, or by a national convention called by Congress at the request of two-thirds of the states. The second method has never been used. To become part of the Constitution, an amendment must be ratified, or approved, by the legislatures of three-fourths of the states or by conventions in three-fourths of the states. Only one amendment, the Twenty-first, has been ratified by state conventions. Congress determines which method of ratification will be used.

Amendments also must be ratified in a timely manner. Congress has determined that in most cases amendments must be ratified within seven years after they are proposed.



## Other Changes

Since its adoption, the Constitution has gradually expanded to meet the changing needs of society. But not all change has come through amendments to the Constitution. Laws enacted by Congress, court decisions, presidential actions, and the development of political parties all have influenced the supreme law of the land.

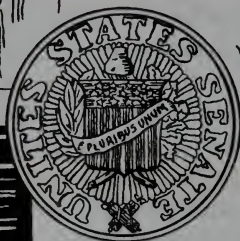
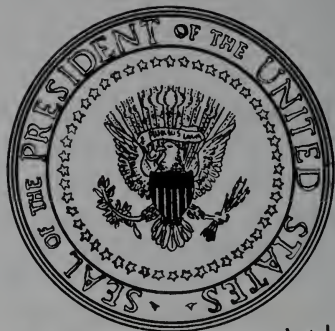
Congress has the constitutional right to pass laws that are "necessary and proper." With this power, Congress has established lower federal courts and such agencies as the Internal Revenue Service and the U.S. Postal Service. Since the national government has the power to regulate interstate and foreign commerce, many laws passed by Congress greatly influence the economy.

The Supreme Court has the right of *judicial review*, or the right to decide if a law is constitutional. As the final authority in interpreting the meaning of the Constitution, the Supreme Court has exercised this right to nullify federal and state laws hundreds of times. Other courts also apply the Constitution in deciding many cases.

Strong presidents have used Article II of the Constitution to increase presidential authority in various ways. For example, both Woodrow Wilson and Franklin D. Roosevelt used the power of their office to initiate sweeping domestic reform legislation, and George Washington established the president as the leader in foreign affairs.

Political parties are not mentioned in the Constitution. However, they began to develop immediately after the Constitution was adopted. The organization of political parties at the state and local levels has greatly affected the American election process.

All these changes reflect the spirit of the framers of the Constitution, who wanted the document to be useful and vital for ages. The Constitution of the United States is the oldest written constitution still in effect.



# Branches of Government

The founders of the United States were concerned with the potential abuse of power by the government. They had experienced such abuse when the colonies were under British rule. The Constitution was written to provide a system of checks and balances among the branches of government. By dividing the duties of the government among three branches—legislative, executive, and judicial—no one branch can become too powerful. This division of government is known as separation of powers.

## Legislative

The two houses of Congress—the Senate and the House of Representatives—make up the legislative branch. The Senate has 100 members, with two senators being elected from each state. The House of Representatives has 435 members, with the number of representatives from each state based on the population of the state. This arrangement, with the states having equal representation in one house of Congress and representation based on population in the other house, was a compromise worked out during the Constitutional Convention of 1787.

Senators are elected to six-year terms. Members of the House are elected to two-year terms. When the newly elected members of the House convene every second year, it marks the beginning of a new term of Congress. Senators are elected in statewide elections; members of the House are elected from congressional districts.

The boundaries of congressional districts are determined by population and may be redrawn after every U.S. census. A *census*, or count of the people, is taken every ten years. States that decrease in

population lose representatives. States that increase in population gain representatives. Every state is guaranteed at least one representative. Each congressional district contains approximately the same number of people.

In 1929, Congress passed the Reapportionment Act, which limits the size of the House of Representatives to 435 members. Until that time the number of representatives had been increasing as the population of the U.S. increased.

In addition to the power to pass laws, the Constitution grants Congress the power to raise the money needed to run the government, to regulate foreign and interstate commerce, to declare war, to coin money, to make laws governing bankruptcy, to establish post offices, to regulate weights and measures, and to grant copyrights and patents.

## How a Bill Becomes Law

To pass a law, Congress must go through a complex process that can take months or even years.

A draft of a proposed law—a *bill*—is presented to a lawmaking body. Ideas for these new laws come from various sources. The president and other elected officials may propose a bill, as may individual citizens and special-interest groups, or the bill can result from a newspaper editorial or from a large protest.

Specialists on congressional staffs usually write a bill. A senator or representative then introduces the bill in the Senate or the House of Representatives, where it is given to the proper committee.

The committee then collects evidence, conducts hearings, suggests amendments, and then votes on the bill. If the committee approves the bill, it is “reported out” to the floor (the full House or Senate) and listed on the calendar for debate.

During the debate, amendments may be added from the floor. The Senate or House then votes on the bill. If it passes, it is sent to the other house of Congress, where it follows the same procedure.

Unless the bill is passed in identical form in both houses, it is assigned to a conference committee made up of members of both houses of Congress, where differences between the House and the Senate versions of the bill are worked out. Both houses of Congress then vote on the conference version of the bill. If it passes in both



houses, the Speaker of the House and the president of the Senate (the U.S. vice president) sign the bill. The bill is then sent to the president for signature.

If the president signs the bill, it becomes law. If the president objects to the bill, he may *veto* it. To veto a bill, the president must send the bill back to Congress within ten days after receiving it, along with a statement of his objections to the bill. Congress can override the veto by passing the identical bill again with a two-thirds majority of both houses.

If the president does not wish to veto the bill but wants to show his displeasure with parts of it, he may refuse to sign it. After ten days (not including Sundays) the bill becomes law without the president's signature if Congress is still in session. If Congress sends a bill to the president for signature less than ten days (not including Sundays) before Congress adjourns, the president may keep the bill without signing it, and the bill dies. This is called a *pocket veto*.

Once a bill becomes law, it becomes the responsibility of the executive branch to enforce and administer the law.

## Executive

The chief responsibility of the president is to enforce and administer the laws, but the office carries other duties as well. The president serves as commander-in-chief of the armed forces; appoints the heads of executive departments; grants pardons and reprieves; makes treaties with the advice and consent of the Senate; appoints ambassadors, Supreme Court justices, and other officials with the consent of the Senate; appoints high-ranking officials to fill vacancies while Congress is not in session; informs Congress from time to time of the state of the Union and recommends needed laws; may call either or both houses of Congress into session; acts as host to ambassadors and representatives of other nations; and commissions all military officers.

Though not directly provided for in the Constitution, through interpretation of the Constitution the president may appoint officials to help fulfill the duties of the office. Through this custom, the president's cabinet and the federal bureaucracy have developed. Each of

the fourteen cabinet departments is headed by a secretary who reports directly to the president. The cabinet departments are State, Treasury, Defense, Justice, Interior, Agriculture, Commerce, Labor, Health and Human Services, Housing and Urban Development, Transportation, Energy, Education, and Veterans Affairs.

The federal bureaucracy is composed of independent agencies, regulatory commissions, and other offices such as the Securities and Exchange Commission, the Environmental Protection Agency, the National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA), the Federal Communications Commission, and the Small Business Administration.

In addition, the executive office of the president is made up of advisers and staff specialists who assist the president in making decisions and staying informed.

## Judicial

While only the Supreme Court is named specifically in the Constitution, Article III gives Congress the authority to establish and abolish lower federal courts. Congress has established district courts, courts of appeals, and specialized courts that hear certain types of cases.

### District Courts

The lowest level of the federal court system is the district court. There are ninety-four courts at this level, and each state has at least one district court. Some of the more populous states, such as California, New York, and Texas, have as many as four district courts.

Judges appointed by the president preside over these courts. These judges, who serve for life, also have been approved by the Senate. These courts hear only cases involving federal laws. They operate as trial courts—a panel of twelve people, known as a *petit jury* or *trial jury*, decides the guilt or innocence of the accused. District courts hear both civil and criminal cases and often review the decisions of federal administrative agencies.

### Courts of Appeals

Created by Congress in 1891 to relieve the Supreme Court of the number of cases it heard, U.S. courts of appeals hear cases that have

been appealed from the district courts. An *appeal* is a request for the review or rehearing of a case. The courts also review the decisions of federal administrative agencies.

There are thirteen of these courts distributed geographically throughout the U.S. Each court has from three to fifteen judges, appointed by the president, with the approval of the Senate, to serve for life.

## **Supreme Court**

The highest level of the federal court system is the Supreme Court. It is composed of the chief justice of the United States and eight associate justices. These justices also are appointed by the president, with the approval of the Senate, to serve for life.

The Supreme Court hears three types of cases: those in which the court has original jurisdiction, those appealed from lower federal courts, and those appealed from the highest appeals court in a state. Cases of original jurisdiction, or those going immediately to the court, involve the representative of another nation or a state as one of the parties.

## **Special Courts**

Several other federal courts have been created by Congress to hear certain types of cases. The court of claims was created in 1855 to hear cases in which individuals have a claim against the federal government. The court of customs and patent appeals was created in 1909 to review disputes over tariffs, patents, and trademarks.

Congress has created legislative courts to help it carry out its legislative power. The United States Tax Court was created in 1969 to act as a court of appeals in all federal tax cases. Territorial district courts govern the territories of the United States. These courts act as the federal court system in Puerto Rico, the Virgin Islands, and Guam.

Congress created the Courts of the District of Columbia to serve as the court system for the nation's capital. The U.S. Court of Military Appeals was created to serve as the final appellate court in court-martial cases.

## **Growing Bureaucracy**

As the United States has grown, the government has grown. At the federal, state, and local levels more than eighteen million people

work for the government. For every thousand citizens there are approximately sixty state and local government employees and twelve federal government employees.

Government employs more people than the largest industrial corporations. The federal departments that employ the most civilians are the Department of Defense, more than 1 million; the Postal Service, more than 800,000; the Department of Veterans Affairs, more than 248,000; and the Department of the Treasury, more than 158,000.

Scientists who test dangerous drugs for the Food and Drug Administration, clerks who authorize checks for welfare recipients, and park rangers who supervise the care of America's national parks are among the people who work for you as government employees. They help share the responsibilities of governing the country.

### **Total Federal Civilian Employment\***

These figures illustrate the growth of employment in all branches of the federal government:

	<b>Executive</b>	<b>Legislative</b>	<b>Judicial</b>	<b>Total</b>
1970	2,829,495	29,939	6,879	2,866,313
1980	2,820,978	39,710	15,178	2,875,866
1990	3,067,167	37,495	23,605	3,128,267

## **Checks and Balances**

The Constitution provides for all three branches of government to be equally important, and each branch has powers it can use to check the powers of the other two branches.

The executive branch (the president) can check the judicial branch by appointing judges and granting pardons. The president can check the legislative branch by suggesting legislation, appointing officials, making treaties, operating federal departments, administering programs, and setting budgets. The most important check the president has is the power to veto legislation. In modern times, President Franklin D. Roosevelt used this power more than other presidents, with 635 vetoes; President John F. Kennedy used this power the least, with 21 vetoes.

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\*Source: U.S. Bureau of the Census, *Statistical Abstract of the United States*



The judicial branch can check the legislative branch by deciding the constitutionality of congressional actions. The judicial branch can check the executive branch by deciding the constitutionality of presidential actions and by presiding over presidential impeachments in Congress.

The legislative branch can check the judicial branch by determining the jurisdiction of federal courts, by establishing and abolishing lower courts, and by impeaching judges. Congress can check the executive branch by passing legislation over the presidential veto, by auditing and investigating executive agencies and programs, and by having the power to impeach the president, to ratify treaties, and to approve executive appointments.



# Federal and State Relations

Under the federal system of government in the United States, the national government and the state governments **share the power to govern**. Neither level of government gets its power from the other; the power to govern comes from the people.

The Constitution specifically gives certain **powers to the national government**. These are known as **delegated powers**, and include the right to conduct foreign relations, regulate commerce, coin money, levy taxes, and grant patents and copyrights. In addition, the **federal government has implied powers**, those reasonably suggested by the Constitution. The president's cabinet and the Supreme Court's right of judicial review developed from these implied powers.

Powers not specifically given to the national government are reserved by the states or the people. Examples of **reserved powers exercised by the states** are the regulation of marriage and divorce, the establishment of public schools, and legislation concerning business.

Powers shared by the national and state governments are called **concurrent powers**. Both levels of government may pass legislation in these areas. Concurrent powers include the areas of taxation, borrowing money, establishing courts, making and enforcing laws, and protecting the health and welfare of the people. If a conflict arises, the national law takes precedence over the state law.

The federal system of government allows for some independence of the states, yet satisfies the need for a strong central government.

Determining states' rights is difficult. The clause in the Constitution that gives the federal government the right to make laws that are "necessary and proper" invests the government with broad powers. Federal courts decide cases in which state laws and federal laws are in conflict.

For example, the Supreme Court has ruled that most of the Bill of Rights also applies to state governments. This ruling was based on the Fourteenth Amendment, which declares that no person may be deprived of life, liberty, or property without "due process of law." The Supreme Court decision that the segregation of public schools was unconstitutional also was based on this amendment.







# Government Facilities

Part of becoming a better citizen is learning about the places where government is in action. A visit to Washington, D.C., or to your state capital can be a fascinating experience.

When in the national capital or your state capital, visit not only historic sites and other interesting places, but the seat of government. Both the national government and state governments have three branches. Tour the chambers of each branch, keeping in mind the importance of each.

In Washington, D.C., visit the Capitol Building (where Congress holds its sessions), the White House and Executive Office Building (home of the president and some executive departments and agencies), and the Supreme Court Building.

Also in Washington is the National Archives Building. The Declaration of Independence, the Constitution, the Bill of Rights, and other important national documents are on display there.

To obtain passes to certain places around Washington, visit the office of the representative from your congressional district. The offices for U.S. representatives are in the Cannon, Longworth, and Rayburn buildings. If your representative is not in the office, members of his or her staff can provide you with the necessary passes.

Senators' offices are located in the Dirksen, Russell, and Hart buildings. A visit with a member of one of your senators' staffs also can be interesting.

Washington is a beautiful city and well laid-out, because it was designed before it was built. The site for the capital—the District of Columbia—was selected by George Washington on land in Virginia and Maryland. Washington, D.C., replaced Philadelphia as the national capital in 1800.

If you are unable to travel to Washington, D.C., or to your state capital, visit a federal installation. Federally administered facilities are operated by the executive branch of the government, and such facilities are found in every state. Examples include a lock and dam, a regional post office, a fish hatchery, a wildlife preserve, a national park, or a federal courthouse. Be sure to talk with officials at the facility to understand its operation and importance.

# CAMPAIGN

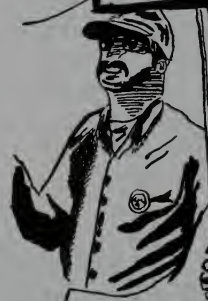


**STOP  
NUCLEAR**

**END THE  
ARMS  
RACE**

**STOP  
NUKES  
NOW**

**AMERICA  
UNITE &  
DISARM**



# National Issues

Problems and issues of national importance are constantly in the news. Keep informed about national issues by regularly reading the newspaper and listening to television and radio news broadcasts. A good citizen is an informed citizen.

A valuable way to participate in government is to write to your elected representatives expressing your view on an issue. Before writing, determine an issue or a bill of interest to you that is being considered by Congress. Learn about all sides of an issue before making up your mind about how you feel. Listen to and read news accounts of the issue, talk with family and friends, then decide. When you write your letter, follow these hints to help get your letter noticed.

- Address the letter correctly:

The Honorable John Smith  
United States Senate  
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Senator Smith:

The Honorable Mary Smith  
United States House of Representatives  
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Representative Smith:

- Clearly state your view on the issue or bill being considered.
- Ask for the elected official's opinion on the issue.
- Identify the bill by its number, if possible.
- Be brief and explain why you are concerned with this issue.
- Present your view rationally and politely.
- Send your letter before the bill is brought to the floor.
- Request a response and include your return address.

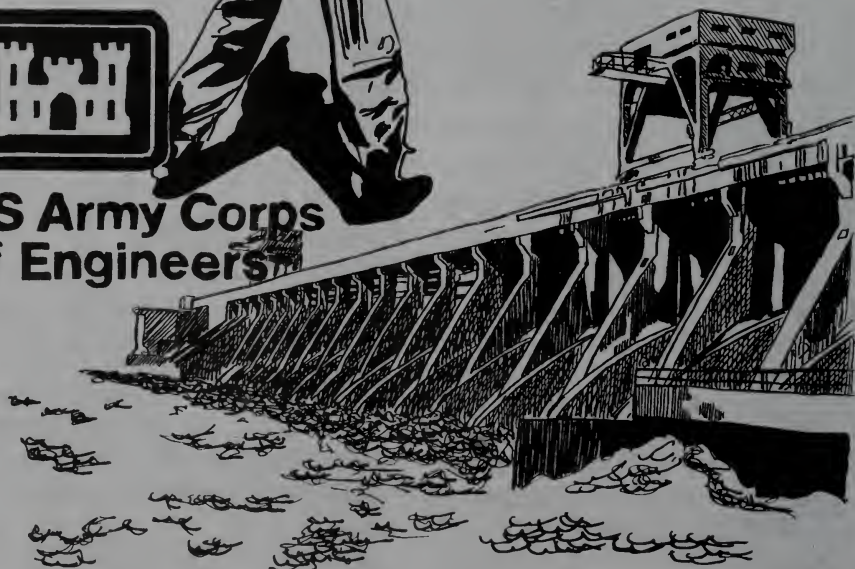
Your letter probably will be answered by an aide. Senators and representatives receive thousands of such letters each month, but they are interested in what you think and will share their views with you.

U.S. senators and representatives have field offices in their states and their congressional districts. One of these offices might be in your hometown or nearby, and you might be able to visit with a staff member or with the member of Congress personally if he or she is home from Washington.





**US Army Corps  
of Engineers**





# Government Functions

The Constitution of the United States charges the government to fulfill many responsibilities to its citizens. Many of these government functions affect the way Americans live.



## Defense

Maintaining capable U.S. military forces is the responsibility of the Department of Defense. This cabinet department is in charge of the Army, Navy, Air Force, and Marine Corps. The men and women in military service protect the nation and defend its interests around the world.



## Law Enforcement

The basic mission of law enforcement agencies is to preserve public order and protect citizens' rights and freedoms by enforcing the laws. These agencies operate at all government levels—local, state, and national. One of the best-known federal agencies is the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI), which is part of the U.S. Department of Justice. These agencies ensure that a citizen's rights are not infringed upon by others or by the government.

## Postal System

Providing a service for the flow of written communications is the responsibility of the U.S. Postal Service. The Postal Service employs more than 800,000 people who handle more than 165 billion pieces of mail each year. Mail is delivered through the nearly 29,000 post offices in the country.

## Highways

The Federal Highway Administration is responsible for more than 3.8 million miles of interstate highways and federal roads, and helps finance the construction and maintenance of these roadways with

funds from the Highway Trust Fund, which derives its income from taxes on gasoline, tires, and engine parts. This type of tax is known as an *excise tax*.

## Veterans' Benefits

Americans have felt an obligation to veterans of the armed forces even as far back as colonial days and the Revolutionary War. Fulfilling this obligation is the responsibility of the Department of Veterans Affairs, which provides benefits to more than 25 million veterans and their families. These benefits include medical and dental care; nursing home care; disability compensation; vocational training for disabled veterans; and loans for education, housing, and business.

## Welfare

The federal government spends billions of dollars each year on programs for needy citizens. Some of the relief programs financed wholly or in part by the federal government and administered by state governments are Food Stamps, Aid to Families with Dependent Children, and Supplemental Security Income.

## Social Security

The Social Security Administration usually is associated with providing pensions for retired persons, but it provides other services as well, such as disability pay and medical insurance for the elderly. This agency is funded through fixed contributions from workers and their employers.

## Foreign Relations

All dealings with the governments of other nations are the responsibility of the federal government. The relationship between the government of the United States and the government of another country is established by foreign policy. These policy decisions are made by the president with the assistance of the Department of State. Members of this department help the U.S. government maintain diplomatic relations with other countries and help encourage international trade for U.S. products and services.



## Natural Resources

Conservation of natural resources is the responsibility of the Department of the Interior. More than 550 million acres of land are under the jurisdiction of this cabinet department. The agencies of this department are charged with protecting and preserving the country's land, water, minerals, fish, and wildlife. The department oversees the National Park Service, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, the Bureau of Land Management, and the Bureau of Reclamation.

An independent agency of the federal government, the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), also strives to protect and enhance the environment today and for future generations. The EPA is responsible for controlling and abating pollution of air, soil, and water from solid wastes, noise, radiation, and toxic substances.

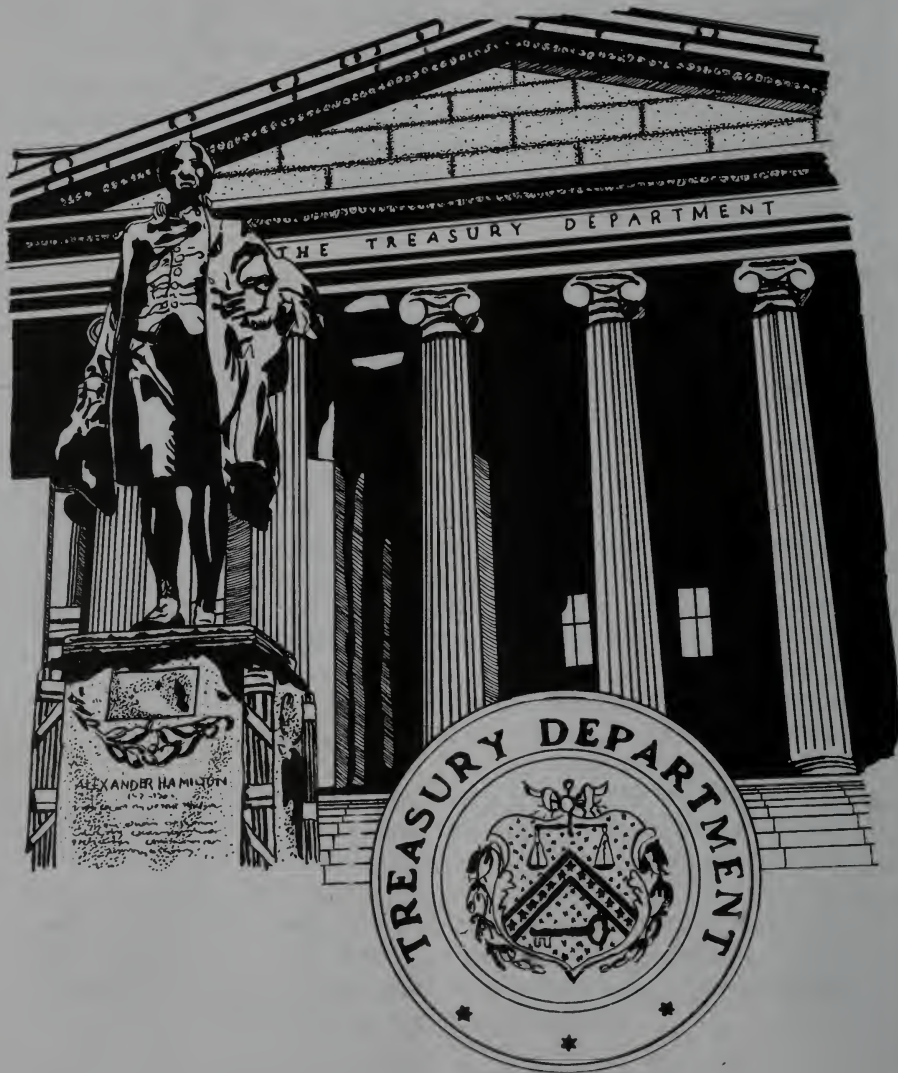
## Agriculture

Programs administered by the Department of Agriculture seek to improve farm income; expand markets abroad for agricultural products; enhance the environment and agricultural production by helping farmers and ranchers protect soil, water, forests, and other natural resources; and reduce hunger and malnutrition in the United States. This department also is responsible for rural development and credit programs and for food inspection and grading services that safeguard the quality of the nation's food supply.

Production of food and fiber has been encouraged through subsidies and extension offices. *Subsidies* are monies paid to farmers and ranchers by the government to regulate or stimulate the production of various agricultural products. *Extension* offices are a joint educational effort of the federal, state, and county governments. Extension agents demonstrate new and innovative methods and technologies to farmers and ranchers.

Form **1040A** Department of the Treasury—Internal Revenue Service  
**U.S. Individual Income Tax Return** (B) **1992** IRS Use Only—Do not

Form **1040EZ** Department of the Treasury—Internal Revenue Service  
**Income Tax Return for**  
**Single Filers With No Dependents** (B) **1992**





# Government Finances

The government of the United States **is run like a business**. The federal government is the nation's largest employer, borrower, spender, and consumer. This gigantic enterprise is financed mainly by taxes and by borrowing money.

## Taxes

Most government revenues are received through taxes. **Individual income taxes are the largest source of money for the government**. Other taxes that fund the government are corporate income taxes, excise taxes on goods and services, customs duties, and Social Security taxes. Miscellaneous income is derived from the sale of government assets, such as offshore drilling rights and land, and from the collection of various licenses and fees.

## Borrowing

The federal government borrows money by selling securities in the form of bonds and treasury notes to individuals, corporations, and financial institutions. The government pays interest on these securities after a specified time. The money the government owes is called the *national debt*. By 1991, the national debt amounted to more than \$3.6 trillion, or more than \$14,000 for every man, woman, and child in the United States.

## Management

Operating a government with such large budget receipts and outlays requires many people to **manage the finances**. Several agencies have been established to regulate the **collection and expenditure of government funds**.

The Internal Revenue Service (IRS), an agency of the Department of the Treasury, is responsible for collecting all taxes imposed by the

federal government. Each year, the IRS receives more than 100 million tax returns from taxpayers.

The United States Customs Service collects taxes, called *duties*, on many imported goods. This agency also is responsible for preventing illegal goods from being smuggled into the U.S.

The treasurer of the United States serves as the manager of government funds and pays all the bills. The treasurer (not to be confused with the secretary of the Treasury) is not involved with decisions concerning public revenue. The treasurer may release funds only when authorized by the secretary of the Treasury.

The Office of Management and Budget (OMB) reviews and alters budget requests from the various departments of the executive branch to comply with the preferences of the president. This budget is then proposed to Congress for approval and enactment before money can be spent.

The Federal Reserve Board, an independent agency of the government, regulates credit and borrowing in the American banking system. Banks are regulated under the supervision of this agency.

# Conclusion

Understanding the great heritage of democratic values and individual freedoms of the United States is the first step in becoming a good citizen. But the concept of citizenship extends beyond the mere understanding of our political system. Citizenship means involvement.

American society has a proud tradition of the participation and support of its citizens. This tradition must be learned and carried on by each succeeding generation of Americans.

Effective citizenship requires practice. As with every other endeavor, a good citizen must develop skills. These skills include knowledge of basic laws, of law enforcement, and of the justice system, and understanding the rights and responsibilities of citizens and exercising them. By developing these skills, a good citizen develops the ability to solve problems within the American political system.

This political system has adapted to our changing society for more than two hundred years. The realities of American life often fall short of the noble ideals set forth in our great national documents, but a good citizen aspires to these goals. A good citizen practices citizenship in all aspects of life—at work, at school, at worship, at home, and with friends.

Citizens, in the full sense of the word, are necessary to keep the United States of America strong and free, as a beacon of liberty and democracy. True citizenship is the responsibility of every American.

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The standard summary of statistics on the social, political, and economic organization of the United States.

U.S. Government Printing Office. *The United States Government Manual*. U.S. Government Printing Office, annual.

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