

*Apologies in advance if the following information is a bit basic. But just in case you need your memory jogged since your last civics class in the 7<sup>th</sup> grade, we thought we'd provide a quick primer on the fundamentals of how our governmental system works.*

## THE THREE BRANCHES



**EXECUTIVE BRANCH**  
(carries out laws)

The executive branch consists of the President, his or her advisors and various departments and agencies. The President is responsible for implementing and enforcing the laws written by Congress and, to that end, appoints the heads of the federal agencies, including the Cabinet.



**LEGISLATIVE BRANCH**  
(makes laws)

The legislative branch is made up of the House and Senate, known collectively as the Congress. Among other powers, the legislative branch makes all laws, declares war, regulates interstate and foreign commerce and controls taxing and spending policies.



**JUDICIAL BRANCH**  
(evaluates laws)

The judicial branch consists of the US Supreme Court and the Federal Judicial Center. The Federal Judicial Center is the education and research agency for the federal courts. The Supreme Court settles disputes over the law and its interpretations.

### The House of Representatives

The House currently has 435 members. The number of representatives elected from each state is determined by the state's population through the process of "apportionment." Members of the House represent the citizens of their local districts. Representatives serve two year terms, with elections held every two years. The House is reserved the powers of voting on charges of impeachment and initiating bills involving the raising of revenue, such as tax bills and the annual appropriations bills of the annual federal budget.

**Key Committees:** Foreign Affairs, Financial Services, Appropriations

### The Senate

The Senate is currently comprised of 100 senators. Each state is allowed to elect two senators. Senators represent all citizens of their states and so represent state interests on the whole. Senators serve 6-year terms, with one-third of the senators elected every two years. Powers reserved to the Senate include: trying officials impeached by the House; confirming presidential nominations, including Supreme Court justices, federal judges, ambassadors and cabinet secretaries; and ratification of treaties signed by the President.

**Key Committees:** Foreign Relations, Appropriations, Finance

# THE LEGISLATIVE PROCESS

