

The Legislative Branch

How Congress is Organized



“The First Branch of this Government”



The U.S. Congress

- The “*Legislative Branch*” of the U.S. Government
- Consists of **535 members** in a **two house** (“*bicameral*”) system.
- “*House of Representatives*” and “*Senate*”



Capitol Hill

The Well in the House Chamber

House Office Buildings



Senate Wing

House Wing

Senate Office Buildings

Why TWO Houses?

Virtual Tour of the Senate Chamber



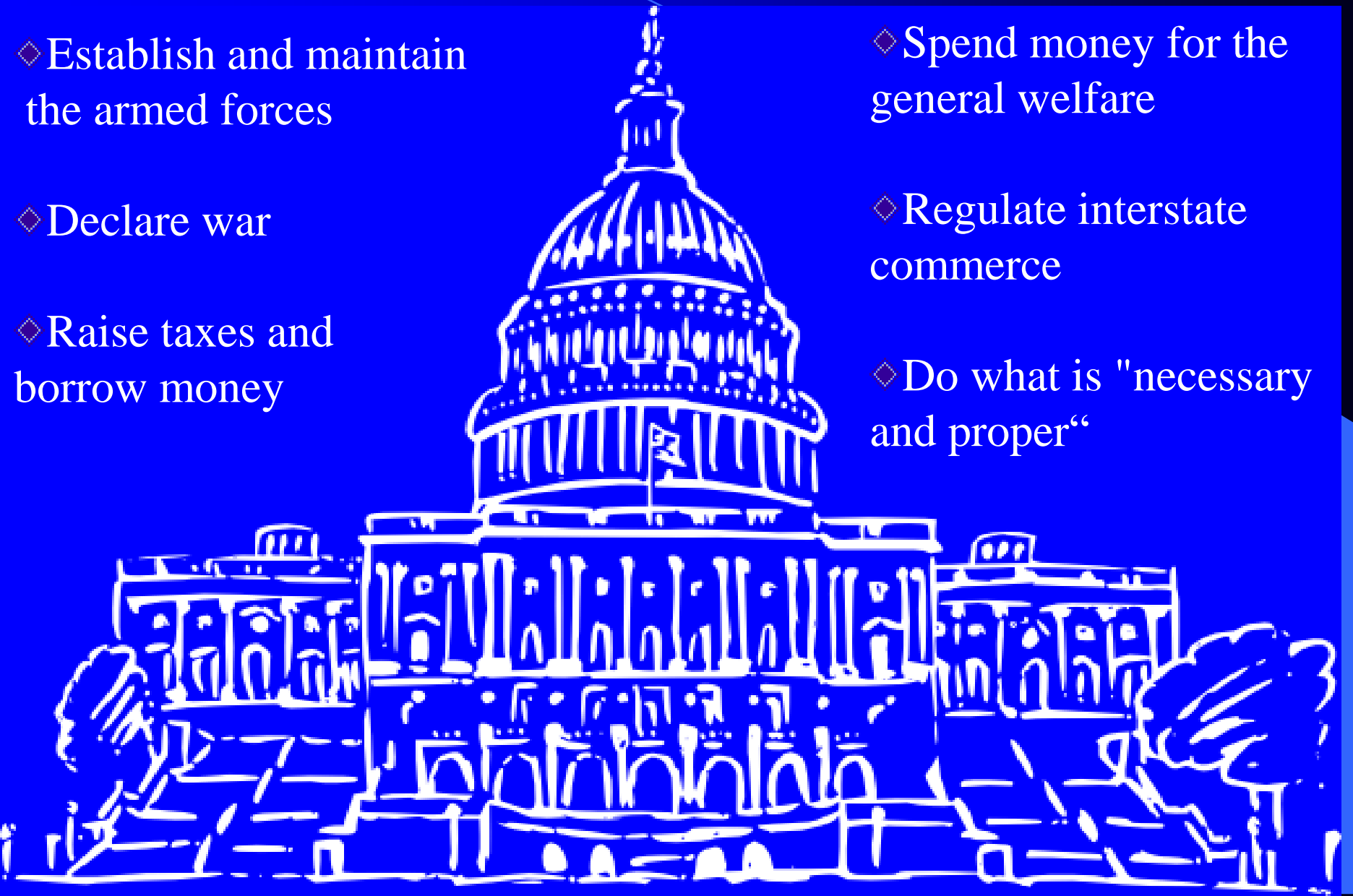
The U.S. Congress

- Every Congress has special meetings over the course of two years – this is called a Congressional Term.
- Each meeting is called a session.
- Each session begins on January 3rd (a new “Congress” begins every two years)
- We are in the “113th Congress, 1st Session”
- Main duty is to make laws for the nation.



SIX Constitutional Powers of Congress

- ◆ Establish and maintain the armed forces
- ◆ Declare war
- ◆ Raise taxes and borrow money
- ◆ Spend money for the general welfare
- ◆ Regulate interstate commerce
- ◆ Do what is "necessary and proper"





Representation:
expresses the diverse views of the American people



Law Making:
creates bills to address issues and solve problems in American society



Consensus Building: reconciles competing interests

Key Functions of Congress



Approval:
confirms presidential appointees and treaties (Senate Only)



Investigation:
investigates government agencies, including the White House---
impeachment



Oversight:
ensures that laws passed by Congress are effectively carried out by the executive branch



Qualifications for the House

- 25 years old
- Citizen for at least 7 years
- Live in state which you represent
 - Should live in district you represent too – though this is not *required*



Qualifications for Senate

- 30 years old
- Live in state you represent
- Citizen for at least nine years



“U.S. House of Representatives”

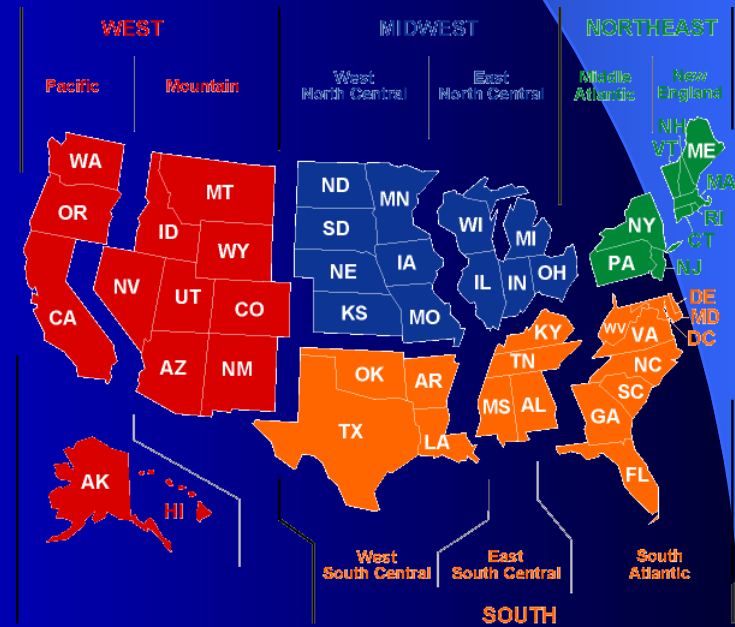
- The “*lower house*”
- Consists of 435 members
- Membership based on **population** (each state gets at least one)
- 2 Year Terms
- Focused on the concerns of their local “*constituents*” (people they represent)



“U.S. House of Representatives”

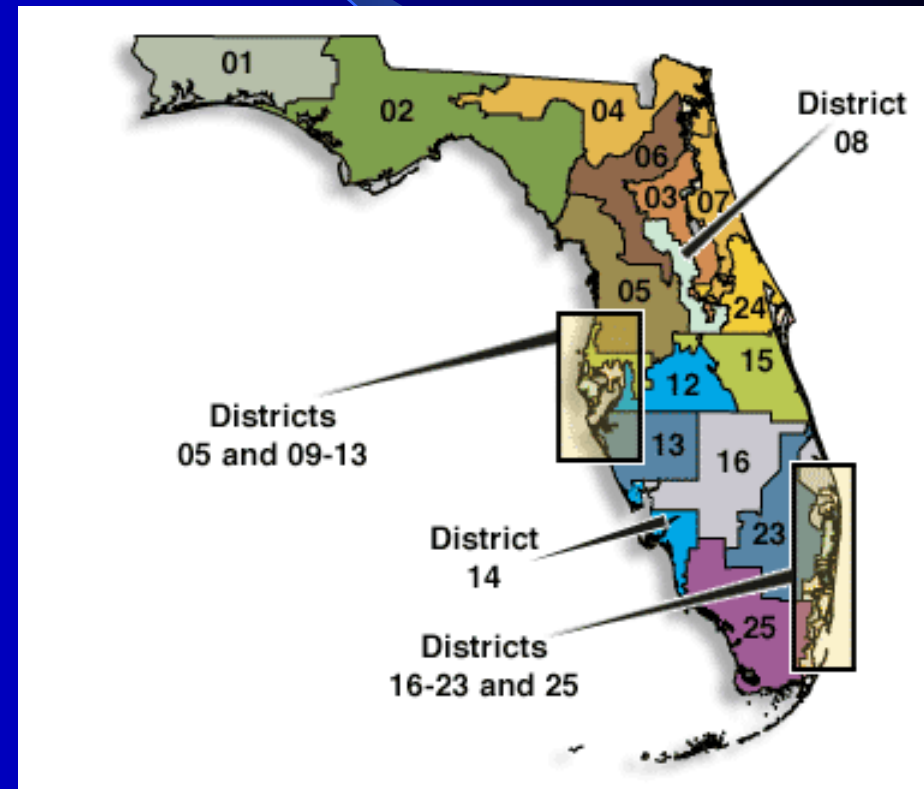
- State populations are based on a 10 year “census” (population count) given by the U.S. Census Bureau
- States may gain or lose representatives based on the “census”.

United States™
**Census
2010**



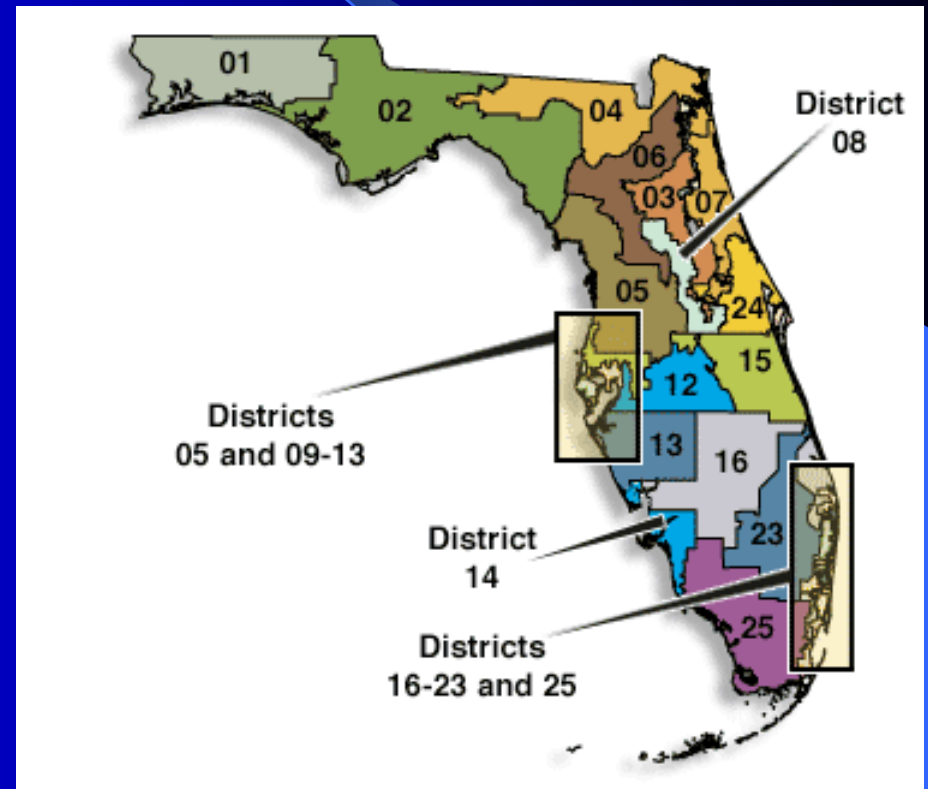
“U.S. House of Representatives”

- “*Congressional districts*” are created in each state to create boundaries to give roughly the same number of “*constituents*” (people represented) in each area.



“U.S. House of Representatives”

- “Gerrymandering” is the process of creating oddly shaped districts to *increase the voting strength* of a particular group.
- **Florida** (especially in the northeast) has been accused of this in the past.



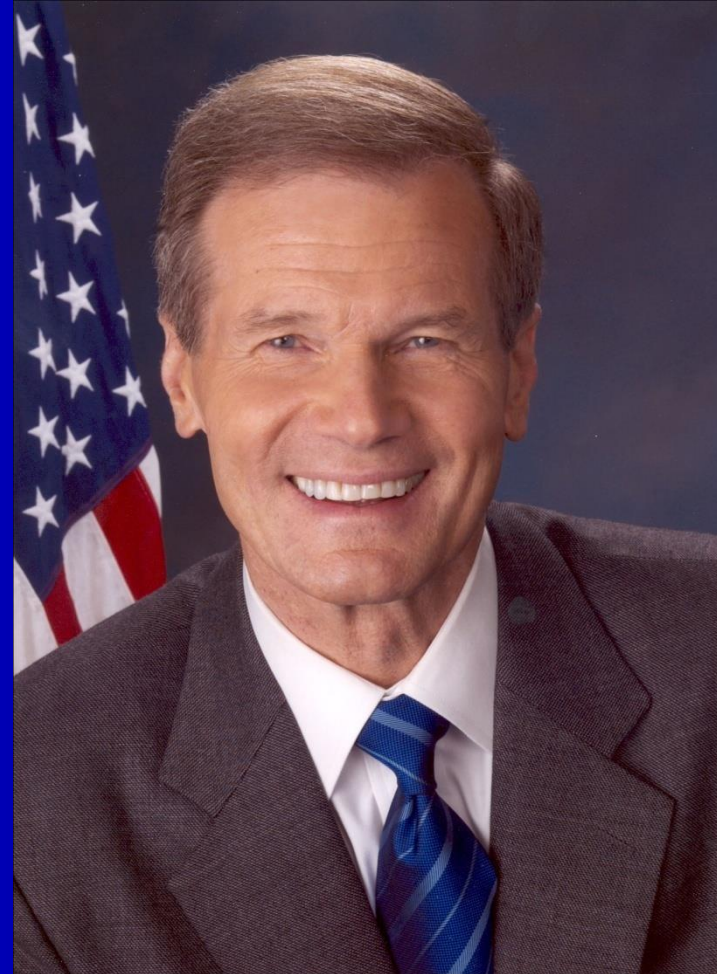
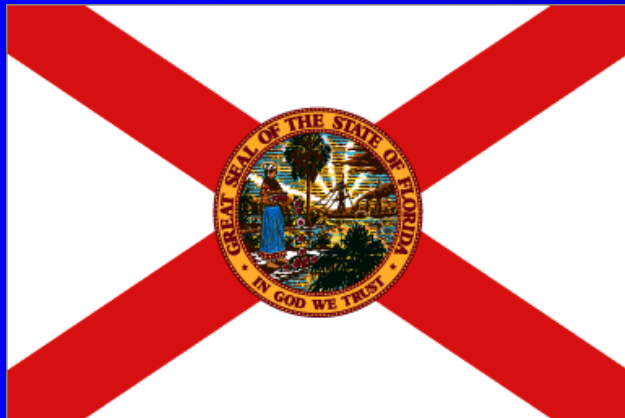
“U.S. Senate”

- The “*upper house*”
- Consists of **100 members**
- Membership based on **2 per state.**
- **6 Year Terms**
(*Constitution provides continuity because only 1/3 can be up for re-election at one time*)
- Focused on the concerns of their **state**
“*constituents*” (people they represent)



“U.S. Senate”

- **Florida** is currently represented in the U.S. Senate by **Sen. Bill Nelson (D)**

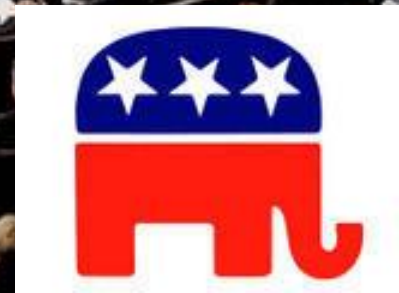
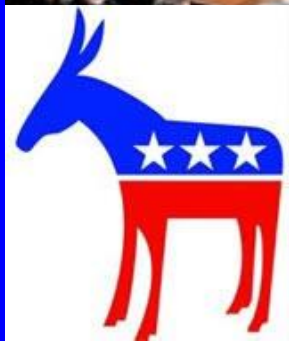
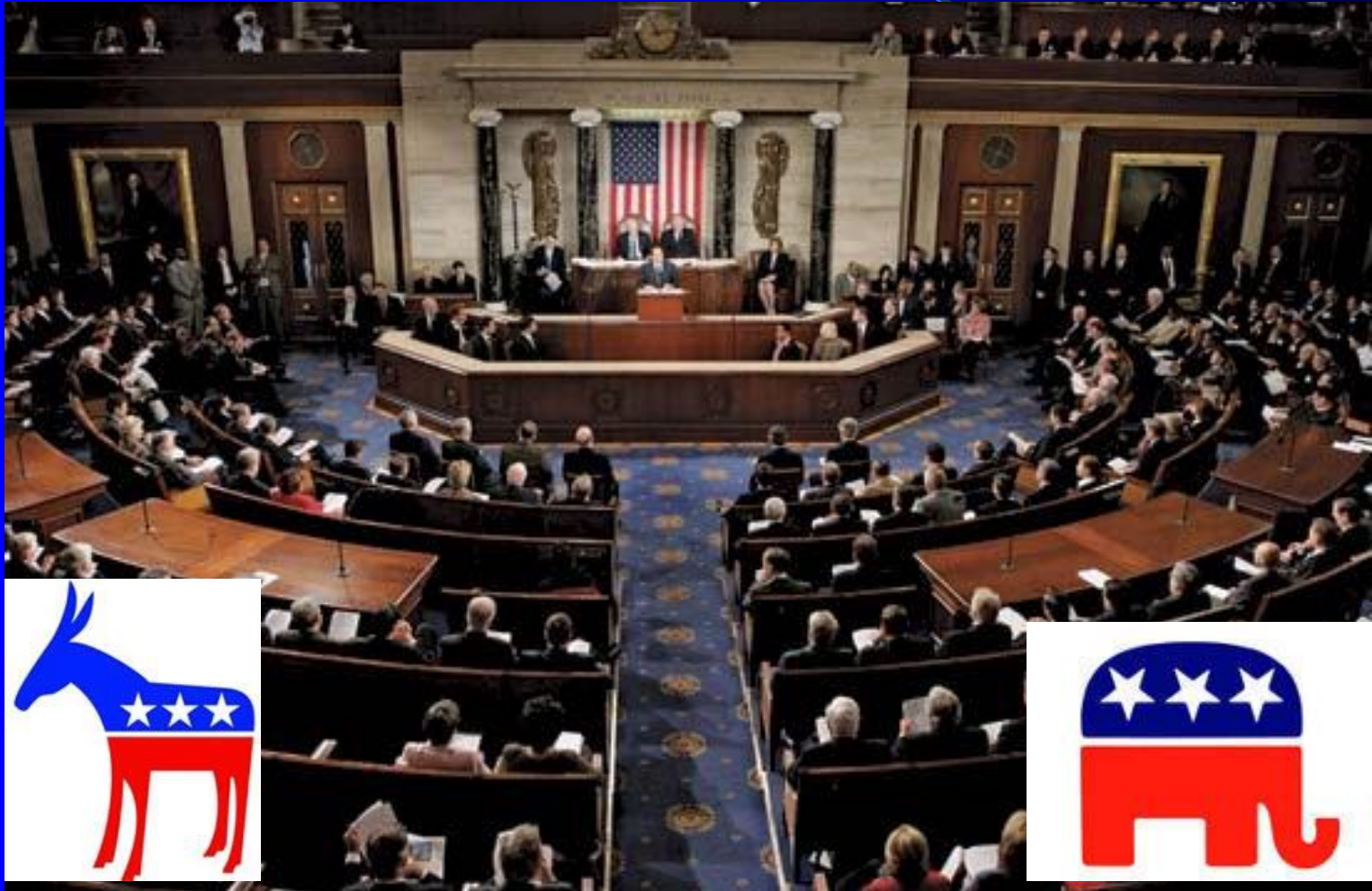


“U.S. Senate”

- **Florida** is currently represented in the U.S. Senate by **Sen. Marco Rubio (R)**



Congressional Leadership



Controlling Congress

- In the **Congress**, political parties control each house.
- The “**majority party**” is the party with *more than* $\frac{1}{2}$ of the membership within their party in that house (other is the “**minority party**”)
- Majority Party: to pass its legislation
- Minority Party: to oppose the Majority Party Legislation



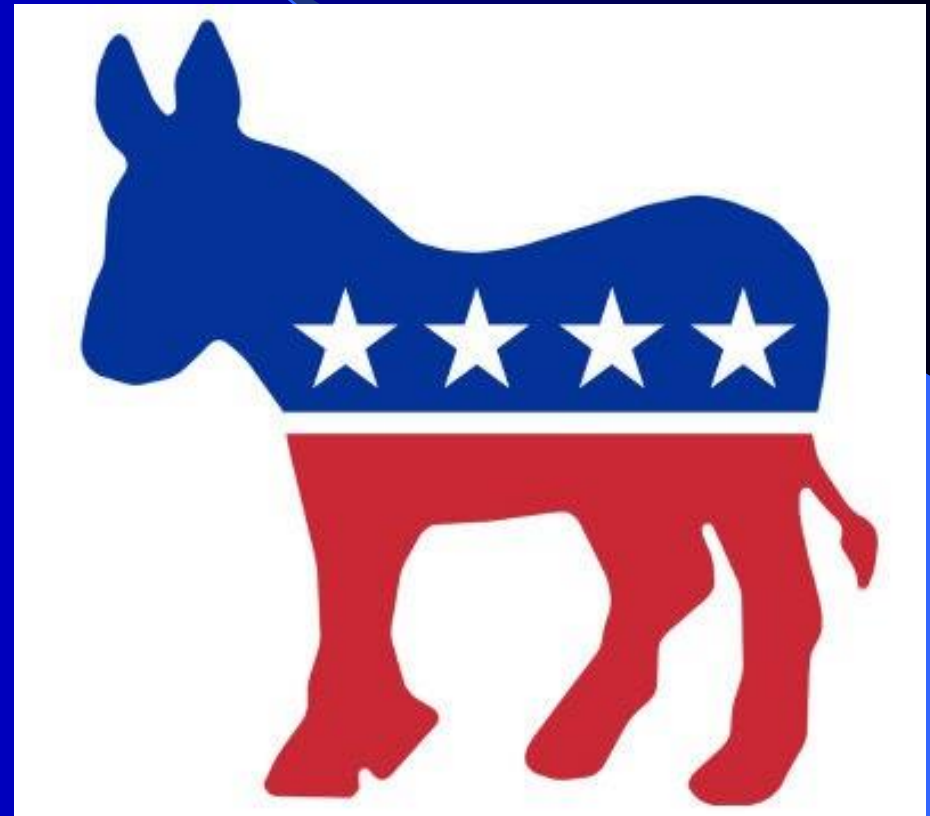
Controlling Congress

- Each “majority party” has a **majority leader**, who has the task of pushing party issues on the floor of each house.
- Assisted by the “**majority whip**” – these people help to enforce rules and procedures by “whipping” members into shape voting with the party.



Democrats Lose Complete Power

- In 2010, the **Democratic Party** lost the **House of Representatives**, but kept the **Senate**.
- The Democrats also still control the **White House**



House Leadership



“Speaker of the House”

- This is the **most powerful** position in the **House** (*3rd in line for presidency*)
- Main task is to *steer legislation* and *keep control of any debates* on the House floor.
- Also pushes the agenda of the **majority party**.
- Selected by the members of their party



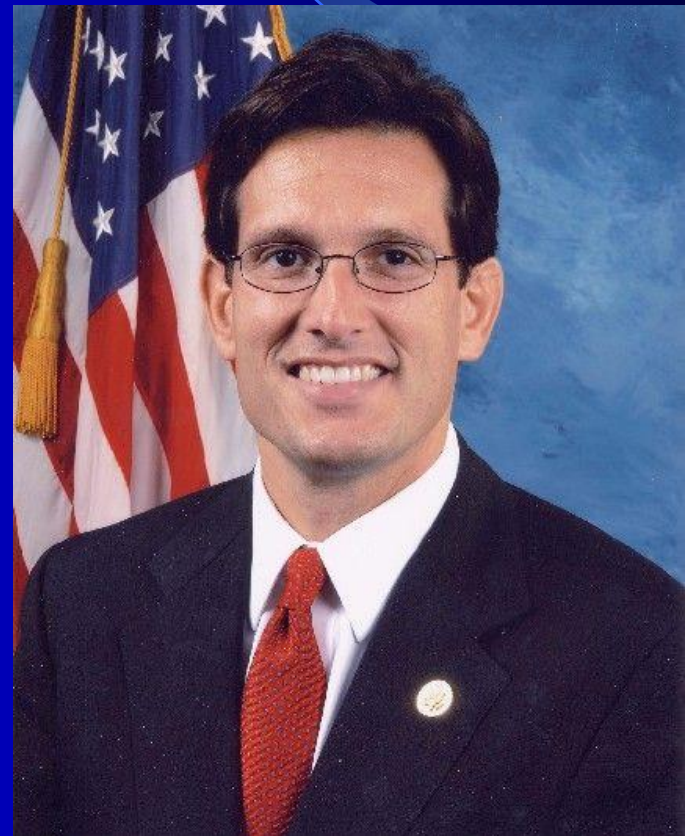
“Speaker of the House”

- The current speaker is **Rep. John Boehner (R)** from **Ohio**



House Majority Leader

- The current **majority leader** of the House of Representatives is **Rep. Eric Cantor (R)** of **Virginia**



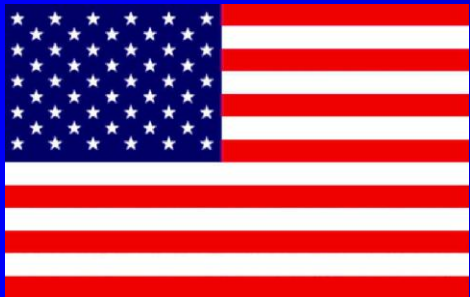
House Majority “Whip”

- The current **majority “whip”** of the House of Representatives is **Rep. Kevin McCarthy (R) of California**



House Minority Leader

- The current **minority leader** of the House of Representatives is **Rep. Nancy Pelosi (D) of California**



House Minority “Whip”

- The current **minority “whip”** of the House of Representatives is **Rep. Steny Hoyer (D)** of **Maryland**



Senate Leadership



Senate Leadership

- The “chairperson” of the Senate is the “**president pro tempore**” (or “Senate Pro Tem”)
- “*Pro Tempore*” means “for the time being”
- Only presides in the absence of the Vice President
- More ceremonial than influential (*but is 4th in line for presidency*)



Filibuster

A senator refuses to give up the floor in order to prevent a vote.

If 60 senators vote to end a filibuster, a vote on the bill must be held within 30 hours. (cloture)



**Strom
Thurmond
(1957)**

24 hours
against civil
rights
legislation



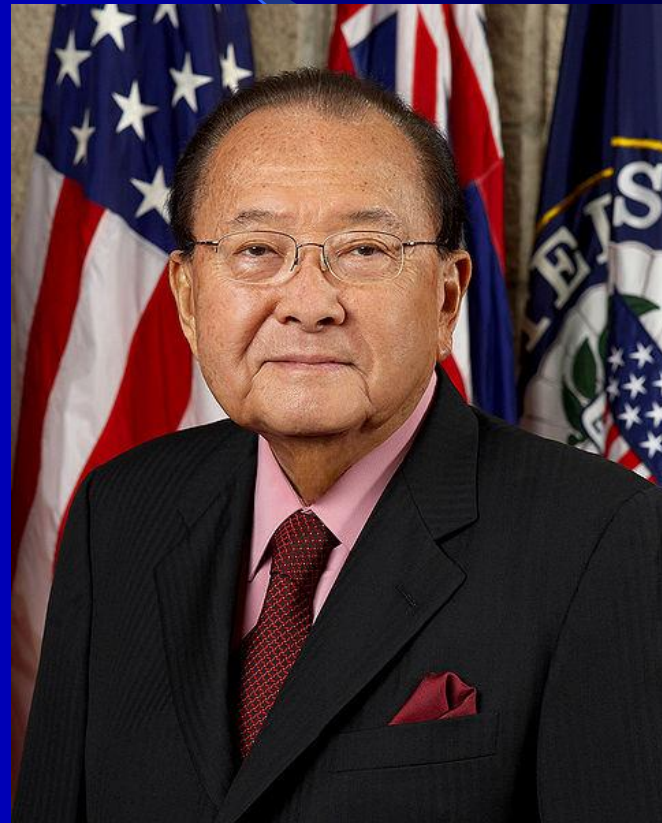
Huey Long
filibustered on
behalf of the
poor



Is the filibuster democratic?

“Senate Pro Tempore”

- The current “pro tem” of the Senate is **Sen. Daniel Inouye (D) of Hawaii**



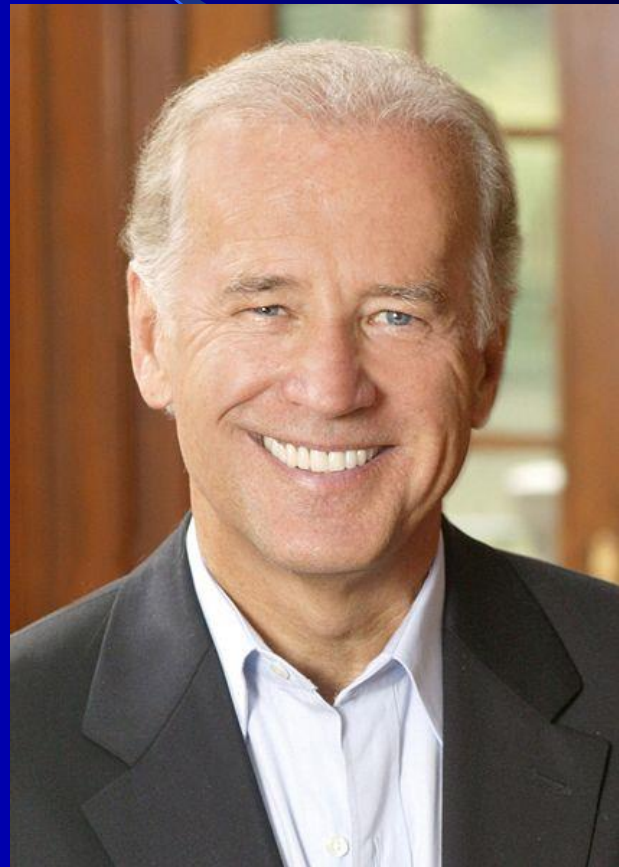
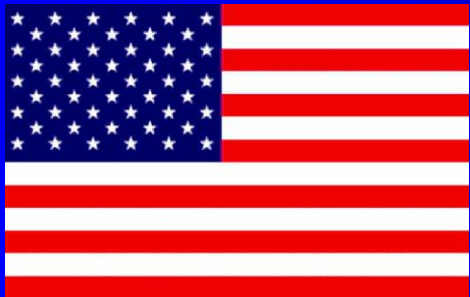
Role of the Vice President

- The **Vice President** is technically the *presiding officer* of the **Senate**.
- They rarely attend debates and only vote in the event of a tie.



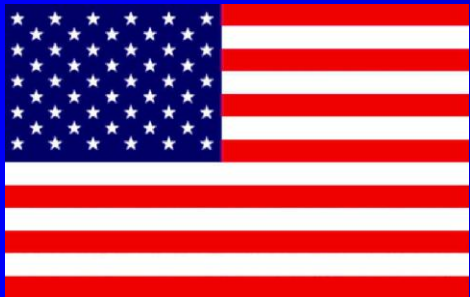
Role of the Vice President

- The **Senate** will be presided over by **Vice-President Joseph Biden (D)**



Senate Majority Leader

- The current *majority leader* of the Senate is **Sen. Harry Reid (D)** of **Nevada**.



Senate Majority “Whip”

- The current *majority* “*whip*” of the Senate is **Sen. Richard Durbin (D) of Illinois.**



Senate Minority Leader

- The current *minority leader* of the Senate is **Sen. Mitch McConnell (R) of Kentucky**



Senate Minority “Whip”

- The current *minority* “*whip*” of the Senate is **Sen. Jon Kyl (R) of Arizona**



Congressional Committees

HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES Standing Committees

- ★ Agriculture
- ★ Appropriations
- ★ Armed Services
- ★ Budget
- ★ Education and the Workforce
- ★ Energy and Commerce
- ★ Financial Services
- ★ Government Reform
- ★ House Administration
- ★ International Relations
- ★ Judiciary
- ★ Resources
- ★ Rules
- ★ Science
- ★ Small Business
- ★ Standards of Official Conduct
- ★ Transportation and Infrastructure
- ★ Veterans Affairs
- ★ Ways and Means

SENATE Standing Committees

- ★ Agriculture, Nutrition, and Forestry
- ★ Appropriations
- ★ Armed Services
- ★ Banking, Housing, and Urban Affairs
- ★ Budget
- ★ Commerce, Science, and Transportation
- ★ Energy and Natural Resources
- ★ Environment and Public Works
- ★ Finance
- ★ Foreign Relations
- ★ Governmental Affairs
- ★ Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions
- ★ Judiciary
- ★ Rules and Administration
- ★ Small Business and Entrepreneurship
- ★ Veterans Affairs

Select and Special Committees

- ★ Intelligence
- ★ Homeland Security
- ★ Aging
- ★ Ethics
- ★ Indian Affairs
- ★ Intelligence

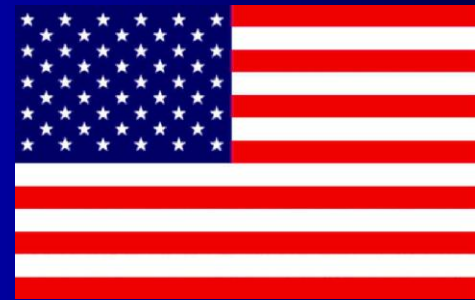
Joint Committees

- ★ Economic
- ★ Printing
- ★ Taxation
- ★ Library

- ★ House Committee
- ★ Senate Committee
- ★ Joint Committee

Congressional Committees

- “Congressional committees” are like mini-legislatures to divide up the work.
- There are **four main types** of Congressional committees.



Congressional Committees

- Placement on a committee is determined by the **majority leadership**.
- “Seniority” (years of service) often dictates who gets on these committees, as well as the leadership positions themselves.
- Leaders can influence the decisions of others on the committee.



SENIORITY RULE

- This is an **unwritten custom**, which provides that the most important posts will be held by those party members with the longest records of service in Congress.

SENIORITY
RULES 

DEFENDERS OF SENIORITY

- Defenders of the seniority rule argue that the practice ensures that a powerful and experienced member will head each committee.

GOOD

“Standing Committees”

- *“Standing committees”* are permanent committees that continue to work from session to session.
- The Senate has **16** and the House has **19** “standing committees”



“Select Committees”

- *“Select committees”* are committees created to do a *special job* for a *limited period* of time.
- Homeland security, ethics, Indian affairs, etc.



“Joint Committees”

- “Joint committees” are beneficial because they include members from both houses who work together on issues to get the bills passed and approved.
- The four “joint committees” are **Economic, Printing, Taxation, and Library.**



“Conference Committees”

- *“Conference committees”* helps the House and Senate agree on the details of a proposed law.
- These committees are temporary.

