

# **Branches of Government**

When the Constitution was drafted, the framers divided the federal government's power between the legislative, judicial, and federal branches.

## **Legislative Branch**

The Capitol Building is home to the legislative branch of government—that's congress. The United States Congress has the job of making laws. It is made up of the U.S House of Representatives and the U.S Senate. Both are made up from people of every state. There are four hundred thirty-five seats in the House of Representatives, but the amount of people from each state varies. Each state sends a certain number of representatives, depending on that state's population. The Senate always has two representatives per state, right now, that is one hundred. Voters elect two senators from each state, regardless of population size. The Senate and the House work together, but they each have different powers. Both the Senate and the House can introduce bills, which can become laws, but only the House can introduce bills that have to do with government spending, and only the Senate can approve or reject treaties with other countries and presidential nominations for government offices. The legislative branch and its many representatives helps build our laws in a way that serves every corner of our nation. Senators serve terms of six years each. The length of terms of state representatives is either two years or four years.

## **Executive Branch**

The executive branch includes the president, vice president, and the heads of various department heads of our government. The executive branch carries out laws and approves and recommends new ones, and directs nation and foreign policy. In addition, the president is commander-in-chief of the armed forces. The president operates with the help of special advisers called cabinet members. They advise the president on matters of foreign affairs, defense, agriculture, labor, education, and many others. The office of the president has grown very powerful since George Washington first held it. Today, the president is one of the most influential people in the nation and maybe the world. Still the president only gets two four-year terms and then they have to give someone else a shot.

## **Judicial Branch**

The Supreme Court and its nine justices head the judicial branch. The Supreme Court's chief responsibility is to review and rule on court cases that may conflict with the U.S Constitution. They look at these cases and decide whether or not the laws in question are unconstitutional. The Supreme Court is the highest court in the country and their decisions overrule those of all other courts. The lower courts then use the Supreme Courts ruling as guidelines. By putting forth their rulings, the Supreme Court is interpreting the Constitution and helping shape the law of the land.

## **Checks and Balances**

Each of these branches of the U.S government is held together by a complex system of checks and balances. The founders of the United States did not want any one branch to have too much power, so each branch is limited by the other two in different ways. For example, Congress sends bills to the president, but the president can choose to sign them, making them a law, or say no and veto it, but Congress can override that veto if two-thirds of the representatives in both houses agree. However, if the Supreme Court decides that that law is unconstitutional, then that law is out of here. In addition to the checks and balances associated with laws, there are some other. The president's cabinet members have to be approved by the majority of Congress. Supreme court justices can serve for life, but they first have to be appointed by the president and approved by the Senate. Congress can also remove Supreme Court justices from their post through a process called impeachment. The office of the president may be a powerful one, but the Supreme Court can declare the president's actions unconstitutional and Congress can remove the president from office by impeachment. The checks and balances and separation of powers help keep our federal government in balance. Change happens slowly and deliberately and only when a lot of people agree on it.