

CRASH COURSE GOVERNMENTS AND POLITICS

EPISODE #2: Bi-Cameral Congress

Teacher Notes:

US Congress- according to the US constitution is the most important branch of government.

Article I- section 1- All legislative power herein granted shall be vested in a congress of the US, which shall consist of a senate and a house of representatives.

Right away the constitution sets up a two-house legislature with a senate and a house of representatives. The Latin word for this is **bicameral**.

House of Representatives- in order to serve in the house you must be 25 years old and a resident of the state that you hope to represent. Representation is determined by population, no state has fewer than one, Vermont, North and South Dakota, Wyoming and Alaska. California has 52 and right now there is 435 members of the House of Representatives.

The Senate- has 2 senators from each state. To be a senator you must be at least 30 years old, and a citizen for nine years, and a resident of the state you hope to represent. Originally they were chosen by the state legislatures. They used to be apart of the elite class and now they are elected by the people.

How are they different: They both make laws

House of Representatives can **impeach** the president and other federal officials. The **FIRST** power the House has is that it can impeach a president. If they impeach that means the person has done something bad enough to bring them to trial. An impeachment is like a criminal indictment. The trial happens in the Senate and the chief justice of the supreme court presides otherwise it is the VP. You don't have the VP preside over the trial for the President because of motives that he or she may have. The **SECOND** power the House has is that they decide presidential elections if no candidate wins a majority of the electoral college. The **THIRD** power is "All bills for raising revenue shall originate in the House of Representatives." It means that any bill that raises taxes starts in the house. We care about taxes a lot, and this power is huge. It is called the **POWER OF THE PURSE**.

The Senate- has some important powers, too. The **FIRST** one I've already mentioned is that they hold impeachment trials. The **SECOND** power is that they ratify treaties. Most treaties you don't hear most about except for when the Senate didn't do with the Treaty of Versailles. (they need a 2/3rds majority) The **LAST** significant power is the confirmation power. The Senate votes to confirm the appointment of executive officers that require Senate confirmation. Some of these, like the cabinet secretaries, are obvious, but there are over 1000 offices requiring Senate confirmation, including federal judges, and this is probably too many.

Why do we have 2? Why did the framers make them different anyway?

Historical Reason: When the constitution was being written the framers could not agree on what type of legislature to have. Delegates from big states wanted them to be picked based on populations. States with small populations understandably didn't want proportional representation. They favored equal representation and supported the **Virginia Plan**, and small states wanted the **New Jersey Plan**. They argued over it until a compromise was reached. It was brokered by a Senator from Connecticut and was called the Connecticut compromise or the **Great Compromise**. Because historians are really bad at naming things. The compromise had an upper and lower house representing both small states and large states.

What about the practical Reasons: One of the reasons was to make it does not have too much power. How do we know that they wanted this? Because James Madison told us in the Federalist papers.

The idea that one house of the legislature can limit the other house is called an **intra-branch** check. The framers of the constitution were obsessed with the idea that the government has too much power.

The Clone Zone:

Senate had a 6-year term and is more insulated against public opinion.

House of Representatives-The main way the framer's representatives were responsive to their voters was to give them 2-year terms.

Give the power of the purse to the branch of government who are closest to the people.