



The Executive and Legislative
Branches: SS.7.CG.3.7
**National Government:
Legislative Branch
READING #1**

Name: _____

Date: _____



SS.7.CG.3.7 Benchmark Clarification 1: Students will examine the processes of the legislative branch (e.g., how a bill becomes a law, appointment confirmation, committee selection).

The first branch of government created by Article I of the U.S. Constitution is the legislative branch. The legislative branch includes the **House of Representatives** and the **Senate**. Together they are the lawmaking body of the United States called **Congress**. Article I of the Constitution discusses the powers and organization of Congress. The main job of **U.S. Representatives** is to make laws.

At the federal level, the process of how a **bill** becomes law can be difficult. Each bill begins as an idea. An idea for a law can come from **U.S. Representatives, Senators**, the **president**, or even ordinary **citizens**.

An idea for a law is called a **bill**. Bills can be proposed in either chamber (house) of Congress (the House of Representatives or the Senate). Depending on which chamber of Congress proposes the bill, it will be sent to the appropriate **committee** that deals with the bill's topic. That committee will research the bill. There are many committees in Congress, and every member of Congress serves on one to two committees and up to four subcommittees. Each committee is led by a chair, usually chosen based on a seniority rule.

Congressional Committees		# in House	# in Senate
Standing Committee	a permanent committee that reviews and modifies bills and decides if they should be forwarded (sent) to the floor for a vote.	20	16
Subcommittee	a smaller committee within standing committees formed to tackle very specific tasks. This committee does much of the work of researching and reviewing a bill and is usually permanent but can change occasionally.	99	70
Select (Special) Committee	a temporary committee set up for a special purpose, usually to conduct special investigations or study a specific issue. The purpose of select committees is to investigate and report findings to the House of Representatives or Senate.	5	5
Joint Committee	a committee of members from both the House of Representatives and Senate. These committees normally have limited authority since they represent both the House of Representatives and the Senate. Joint committees coordinate the efforts of both houses on key issues and specific subjects and also help administer shared functions.	4	
Conference Committee	a temporary joint committee formed to create a compromise bill because the House of Representatives and Senate passed different versions of a bill.	created only when necessary.	

After the committee researches and discusses the bill, the committee decides if it should move to the next step of becoming a law. If the committee agrees to move the bill ahead, it moves to the full chamber of Congress where the bill was first introduced (either the House of Representatives or the Senate) to be debated and then voted on. If that chamber of Congress votes for the bill (for example, the U.S. House of Representatives), the bill moves to the other chamber of Congress (for example, the U.S. Senate) for more debate and discussion. Finally, the other chamber of Congress will vote on the bill. If members of that chamber vote for the bill, the president will then be asked to sign the bill to make it a law.

If there are more than 10 days left in the congressional session, the president may take one of three actions: 1) The president may choose to sign the bill into law, 2) the president may choose to **veto** (reject) the bill, or 3) the president may choose to take no action on the bill. A bill becomes law if the president takes no action on the bill and there are at least 10 days left in the congressional session. When the president takes no action with fewer than 10 days left in the congressional session, this is called a pocket veto.

The Congress is also the body that **confirms** any **nominees** appointed by the president. Specifically, only the Senate has the authority to hold **confirmation hearings** for presidential **appointments**. Within the Senate, committee members may question nominees on specific subjects. After questioning, the Senate standing committee will conduct a vote and pass their recommendation on to the full Senate. The full Senate will then take a vote and nominees must be **confirmed** by a simple majority of the Senate. For example, if all Senators vote on a nominee, 51 out of 100 senators must vote “yes” to confirm the nominee.

The president **nominates** all federal judges in the judicial branch and specified officers in cabinet-level departments, independent agencies, the military services, the Foreign Service, uniformed civilian services, U.S. attorneys and U.S. marshals.

appointment - job or duty that is given to a person

appointment confirmation - the process of the Senate approving the president's choices for certain positions within the government

bill - a proposal for a law

citizen - a legal member of a state and/or country

committee - a group of House or Senate (or both) members that discusses and debates proposed bills; they may also discuss issues of interest to the country

confirm – to ratify or approve

Congress - the national legislative body of the U.S., consisting of the Senate, or upper house, and the House of Representatives, or lower house

Congressman/Congresswoman - a member of the U.S. Congress, typically used to address members of the U.S. House of Representatives

legislative branch - the branch of government that creates laws

nominate - to suggest a person for a position or office

nominee – person suggested for a position or office

presidential appointment - the power of the U.S. President to choose members of his or her cabinet, ambassadors to other nations, and other officials in his or her administration

U.S. House of Representatives - the lower house of the U.S. Congress

U.S. Representative - a member of the U.S House of Representatives; representatives are elected in districts throughout each state

U.S. Senate - the upper house of the U.S. Congress

U.S. Senator - a member of the U.S. Senate elected to represent an entire state, there are two senators per state

veto - a decision by an executive authority such as a president or governor to reject a law passed by the legislative branch