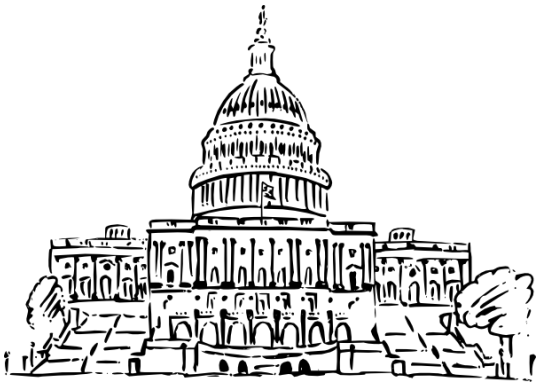


# The Three Branches of Government

There are three branches of government: the **legislative branch**, the **executive branch**, and the **judicial branch**. Each branch has different duties and powers that serve the American people and prevent one branch from overpowering another (also known as **checks and balances**). Read on to learn more.

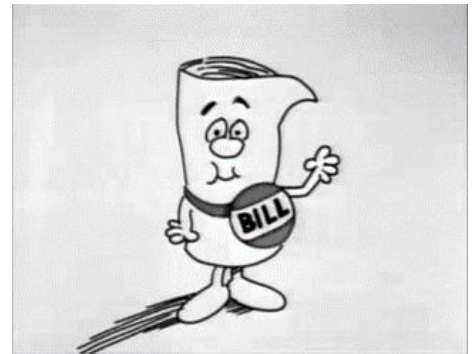


# The Legislative Branch

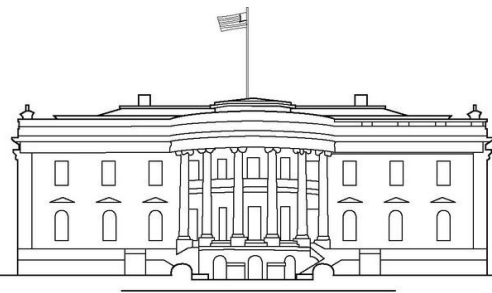
**Article I** of the Constitution gives the power to make laws to the **legislative branch** of government.

The legislative branch is **bicameral**, or made up of two parts, that are together called Congress. The two parts of Congress are the **House of Representatives** and the **Senate**. There are 100 seats in the Senate (two per state) and 435 seats in the House of Representatives (divided based on state population).

The primary job of Congress is to make laws. Any member of the House or Senate can submit a proposal for a new law, called a bill. If both houses approve the bill, it goes to the president. The bill becomes a law if the president signs it. The president can **veto** (or not approve) any bill. However, congress can override the president's veto, which means passing the bill over the president's objections. But to do so requires a two-thirds majority in both houses.



**The Powers of Congress.** Besides making laws, Congress can decide how to spend tax money and declare war.

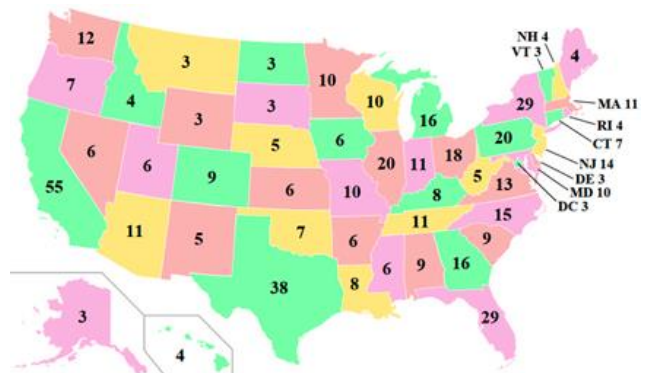


## The Executive Branch

Article II of the Constitution describes the **Executive Branch**. It's called this because it **executes**, or carries out, the laws passed by the legislature. For example, Congress says "we should spend some tax money to build some cheap houses for the poor", *someone* needs to actually build and manage those cheap houses. The someone that does these things is the **Executive Branch**.

The head of the executive branch is the **president**. Even though people do vote, ultimately it is the **electoral college** that chooses the president. Each state has a certain number of electoral votes based off of population. To win the presidency, a candidate needs **270** electoral votes.

A president must be a natural-born American citizen. The president serves a four-year term and can be reelected only



once. The Constitution gives Congress the power to remove a president from office if they break the law or don't do their job.

In addition to making sure that laws are carried out, the President is **commander in chief** of the nation's military forces. He or she can also veto laws and appoint Supreme Court justices, among other powers.



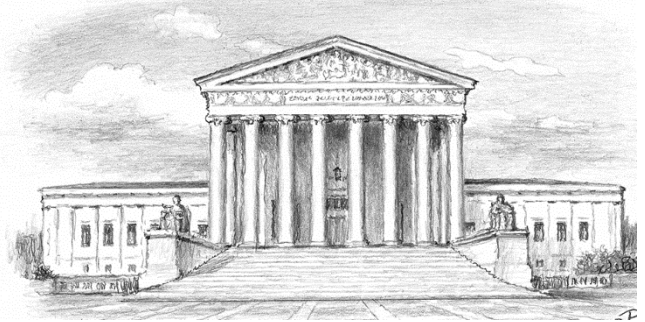
PRESIDENT BARACK OBAMA'S CABINET

To help out the President, the executive branch has different **departments** to carry out its duties (after all, the President can't carry out all the laws all by himself). For example, the **State Department** helps build relationships with other nations and the **Justice Department** handles law enforcement.

## The Judicial Branch

The Constitution is the "supreme Law of the Land." That means no other laws or actions can conflict with the Constitution. Therefore, the judicial branch of the government has the job of **protecting** the Constitution and making sure it is being followed by the other branches.

**Article III** of the Constitution says how the judicial branch is set up. At the top is the the country's *highest court*, the Supreme Court.



Perhaps the most important power of the Supreme Court is **judicial review**. This means that the Supreme Court gets to decide whether laws and acts made by the *other* branches are **constitutional** – that is, whether or not they go against the Constitution. The Supreme Court's decisions are final and can't be reversed *unless* the Supreme Court itself changes its mind later on. For example, it the case *Plessy v. Ferguson* said segregation was okay according to the constitution while the later case *Brown vs. Board of Education* said it absolutely wasn't.

There are nine justices on the Supreme Court. Once they are appointed, justices usually serve for life. After hearing statements from both side of a case, the justices debate among themselves and vote.