

THE LEGISLATIVE BRANCH

The Senate

(See Article I, Section 3)

The other house that makes up the Congress is the Senate. The Senate is the smaller of the two groups, with only 100 members. These people are known as senators. Each state, regardless of how big or small, has two senators. Currently there are 50 states, so we have 100 senators in Washington, D.C.

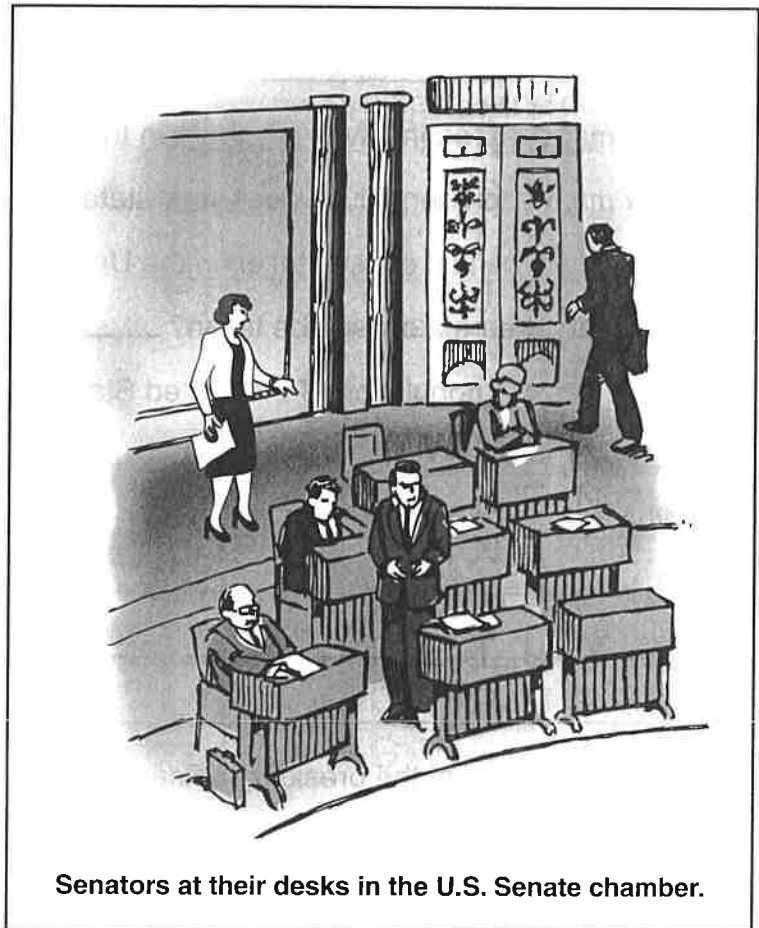
Each senator is elected for a six-year term, but every two years, one-third of the senate is up for reelection. For example, in 2004, 33 senators were elected for six-year terms. In 2006, 33 others were elected, and in 2008, 34 were elected. This way, there is never an entirely new group of senators; there will always be some experienced senators to guide the newcomers.

According to the original Constitution, the senators were chosen by their state legislatures, but in 1913, the Seventeenth Amendment changed this and allowed the people to elect their senators directly.

In order to be a senator there are certain requirements that must be met. A senator must be at least 30 years old, a citizen of the United States for at least nine years, and live in the state he or she represents.

The Senate also has certain leaders. The Vice President of the United States is in charge of all meetings of the Senate as the president of the Senate. He can only vote in the event of a tie among the senators. If the vice president is absent, the senators choose an alternate presiding officer known as the president pro tempore (temporary president). The president pro tempore is third in line to take over the presidency in the event of an emergency.

With regards to the impeachment process mentioned in the last lesson, the Senate acts as the jury and tries any impeachment cases. When the House of Representatives accuses an official of a crime, the Senate decides whether or not the official is guilty. The Chief Justice of the Supreme Court acts as the judge when the President of the United States is the one being accused. Two thirds of the senators present must find the official guilty in order to remove him or her from office.



Senators at their desks in the U.S. Senate chamber.