

THE LEGISLATIVE BRANCH

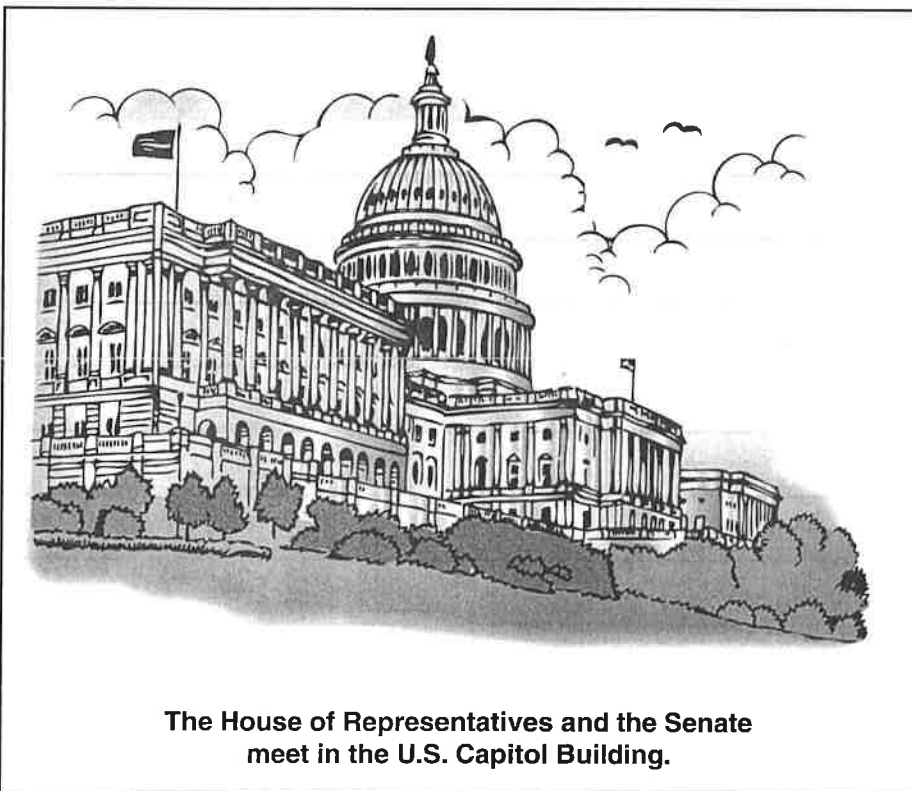
Introduction

(See Article I, Section 1)

The legislative branch of the United States government is described in Article I of the Constitution. Its major job is to make our country's laws. The American system of government is based on a representative form of government. Not all Americans can meet in the same place at the same time to make laws, so Americans choose representatives to make the laws for them. Representatives carry out the will of the people, or they are replaced during the next election.

Laws are passed by a *majority* vote. Majority means one over half. For example, among 10 people, six or more of them must agree in order to pass a law. The larger group of politicians is known as the majority, and the smaller group is known as the *minority*. If you are in the minority, you try to encourage members of the majority to change sides.

The legislative branch of our federal government is called Congress. Congress is made up of the House of Representatives and the Senate. Congress begins its meetings on the third day of January every odd-numbered year. The meetings are called terms, and they last two years with a recess, or break, during the summer. The first term of Congress met from 1789–91. The House of Representatives and the Senate meet in different chambers on opposite sides of the Capitol Building in Washington, D.C.



**The House of Representatives and the Senate
meet in the U.S. Capitol Building.**

The Congress makes its own rules governing its meetings. It can *expel*, or remove, a member by a two-thirds vote. That means that two-thirds of the members, not just a majority, have to agree to an action. A record is kept of all the meetings and is published in the *Congressional Record*.

Members of Congress also have certain *privileges*. They cannot be arrested when going to or coming from Congress, or while attending a session of Congress. A member cannot be sued or punished for anything he or she might say in Congress.

The Constitution goes on to define the individual

responsibilities and requirements of the two houses of Congress: the House of Representatives and the Senate, our lawmaking bodies.