

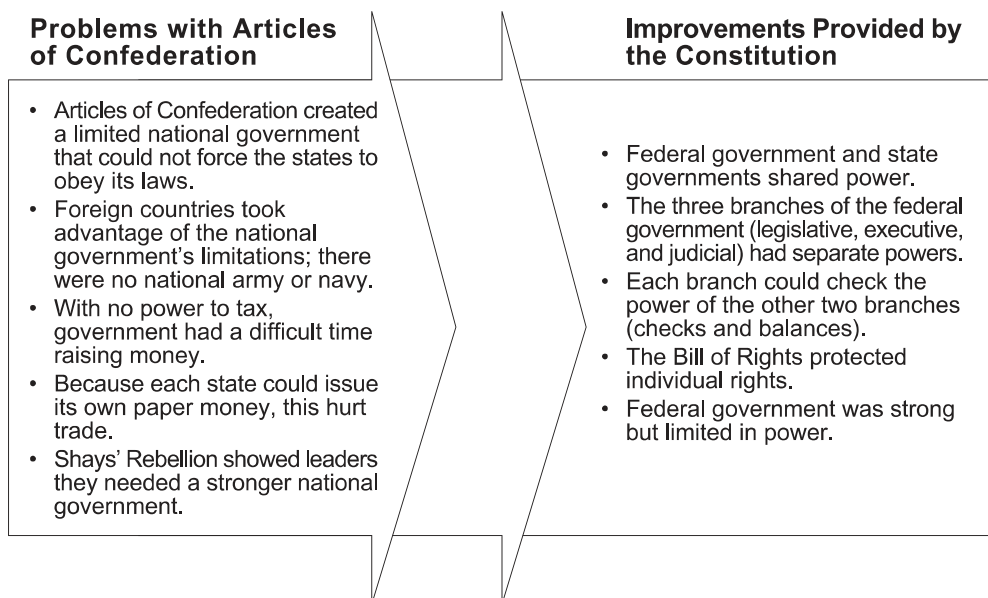
## Introduction

The **Constitution** of the United States is a plan of **government** that was written over 200 years ago (see Appendix B). The people who wrote our Constitution understood the reason that a nation needs a strong government. The Constitution created a type of **democracy** called a **republic**. A republic is a nation in which the voters elect representatives to govern them.

In 1787, when delegates to the Constitutional Convention met and decided that the Articles of Confederation (see Appendix D) caused too many problems to be resolved, they wrote the Constitution. Below is a chart showing some of the problems in the Articles of Confederation and improvements provided by the Constitution. Before Americans would accept the Constitution, changes called **amendments** had to be written. The resulting 10 amendments became known as the **Bill of Rights** (see Appendix E).

After many years of adjusting to its new government, America began to **prosper**. Since 1791, seventeen other changes have been made to the Constitution, making a total of 27 amendments. But, basically, we use the same plan of government today—more than 200 years later.

In 1803 Britain and France went to war again. The United States wanted to remain **neutral**. However, trouble at sea in the early 1800s eventually led to the United States declaring war against Britain.

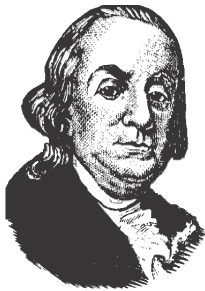


## Need to Ratify the Constitution

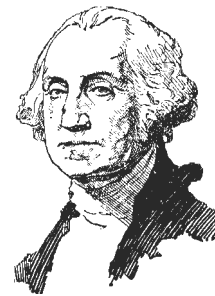
The Constitution provided a procedure for **ratification**, or approval, that called for each state to hold a special convention. As soon as nine of the 13 states' conventions approved the Constitution, the new government would go into effect in those states. In 1787 and 1788, voters in each state elected delegates to the special state conventions. However, before ratification, those who approved, called **Federalists**, and those who opposed, called **Antifederalists**, campaigned for their different views.

## Federalists and Antifederalists

Federalists favored a strong national government. They included framers of the Constitution such as *George Washington* and *Benjamin Franklin*. They received support from urban centers (with merchants, skilled workers, and laborers) and small states. Urban centers saw the benefit of national government that could control trade; small states favored it to protect their interests.

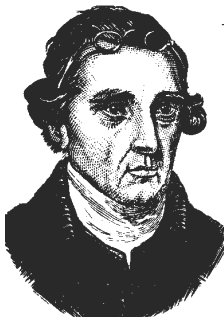


*Benjamin Franklin*



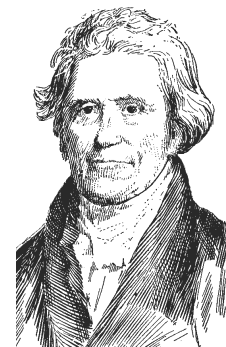
*George Washington*

Leading Antifederalists included revolutionary heroes and political leaders such as *Patrick Henry*, *Samuel Adams*, *John Marshall*, *James Monroe*, and *Richard Henry Lee*. They received support from rural areas and large states. Rural areas worried about a strong government adding to their tax burden. Large states with strong economies felt they had more freedom under the Articles of Confederation (see Appendix D).



*Patrick Henry*

Both sides waged a war of words in public debate over ratification. Federalists *John Jay*, *Alexander Hamilton*, and *James Madison* wrote a series of 85 essays called *The Federalists Papers*, defending the Constitution. Richard Henry Lee published *Letters from the Federal Farmer*, an Antifederalist publication, in which Lee listed individual rights that Antifederalists believed should be protected.



*John Marshall*

Both sides had strong arguments, but most newspapers favored the Federalist cause. Despite the Federalist advantage, the lack of a bill of rights—a formal summary of citizens’ rights and freedoms—was a strong Antifederalist argument.

## Political Parties Take Shape

By the 1790s, two political parties formed.

Federalists	Democratic-Republican*
1. consisted of the well-to do upper classes: merchants, manufactures, bankers, and large landowners	1. consisted of Southern plantation owners and the common people: farmers, small shopkeepers, city workers, and immigrants
2. strongest in the North, especially in New England	2. strongest in the South and West
3. believed in government by and for the “rich, well-born, and able,” distrusted the common people, and feared what Federalists termed the “excesses of democracy”	3. believed in government by capable leaders, emphasized that government should work in the interests of the common people, and strongly advocated democratic principles
4. favored a strong central government and consequently urged a loose interpretation of the Constitution	4. favored states’ rights and consequently urged a strict interpretation of the Constitution
5. supported Alexander Hamilton’s financial program as beneficial to the economic interests of the party’s supporters	5. opposed Alexander Hamilton’s financial program as harmful to the economic interests of the party’s supporters
6. in foreign affairs, tended to favor Britain, whose government was dominated by the upper class	6. in foreign affairs, tended to favor France, whose people had revolted in 1789 for liberty and equality
7. principle supporters: Alexander Hamilton, John Adams, John Marshall, and George Washington	7. principle supporters: Thomas Jefferson, James Madison, and James Monroe

\* Often the name was shortened to ‘Republican’. However, it was not the same as today’s Republican Party. Instead it grew into today’s Democratic Party.

## Bill of Rights Leads to Ratification

All state constitutions guaranteed individual rights. Even Democratic-Republican *Thomas Jefferson* viewed the lack of a *bill of rights* a serious drawback to ratification. Finally, the Federalists agreed to people's overwhelming desires and promised to add the Bill of Rights if states would ratify the Constitution.

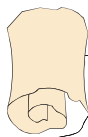


*Thomas Jefferson*

By June 21, 1788, the required nine states ratified the Constitution—Delaware, Pennsylvania, New Jersey, Georgia, Connecticut, Massachusetts, Maryland, South Carolina, and New Hampshire. Virginia ratified it on June 25, 1788. New York ratified it on July 26, 1788. North Carolina joined in 1789. And although Rhode Island did not accept the Constitution until 1790, the new government became a reality in 1789.

## Bill of Rights

By December 1791, three-fourths of the states had ratified 10 amendments. These 10 amendments became part of the Constitution and are known as the *Bill of Rights*. The Bill of Rights protects certain basic rights. James Madison, who wrote the amendments, said that the Bill of Rights are natural rights that belong to all human beings. The Bill of Rights prevents the government from simply taking away these rights. However, the protection of rights and freedoms did not apply to all Americans. Native Americans, African Americans, and women were excluded. Despite these gaps, the flexibility of the United States Constitution made it a model for governments around the world.



### Amendment

*By December 1791, three-fourths of the states had ratified 10 amendments.*



## Basic Principles of the Constitution

There are five basic principles upon which the United States Constitution is based. The principles include a **federal system** (or *federalism*), **separation of powers, checks and balances, popular sovereignty, and limited government** (see chart below).

The United States government is a federal system. A federal system (or *federalism*) is a form of government in which powers are divided or shared between the national government and the state governments. The Constitution set up a strong national government. To keep the government from becoming too powerful, the framers turned to the idea of separation of powers between the three branches of national government: **legislative branch** (Congress), **executive branch** (President), and **judicial branch** (courts). To provide further protection, a system of checks and balances was set up by the Constitution to limit the actions of each branch.

The United States government is also based on the principle of popular sovereignty, meaning that the people of the United States hold the *final* power. The last principle is limited government. Limited government means that the government is *not* all-powerful. The government can *only* do what the people say it can do.

**Five Principles of the Constitution**

Principle	Definition
<b>Federal System or Federalism</b>	Division of power between the national government and the state governments
<b>Separation of powers</b>	Division of the operations of the national government into three branches, each with its own powers and responsibilities
<b>Checks and balances</b>	Means by which each branch of the national government is able to check, or control, the power of the other two branches
<b>Popular sovereignty</b>	Principle of government in which the people hold the final authority or power
<b>Limited government</b>	Principle that the government is not all-powerful but can do only what the people say it can do

# The Constitution of the United States of America

The Constitution includes a **preamble**, seven articles, and 27 amendments.

<b>Contents of the Constitution</b>	
<b>Preamble</b>	Purpose of the government.
<b>Article</b>	
1	Legislative branch
2	Executive branch
3	Judicial branch
4	Relations among the States
5	Amending the Constitution
6	National supremacy
7	Ratification
<b>Bill of Rights</b>	
<b>Amendment</b>	
1	Freedom of religion, speech, press, assembly, and petition*
2	Right to bear arms*
3	Freedom from housing troops in private homes*
4	Right to fair search and seizure*
5	Right of persons accused of a crime*
6	Right to a fair and speedy trial by jury*
7	Right to sue and jury trial in civil cases*
8	Right to fair bail, fines, and punishment*
9	Rights reserved to the people not listed in the Constitution*
10	Powers reserved to the states
<b>Additional Amendments</b>	
<b>Amendment</b>	
11	Right to sue a state*
12	Election procedure for the President and Vice President
13	Freedom from slavery*
14	Rights of citizens*
15	Right of all male U.S. citizens to vote*
16	Income tax
17	Direct election of Senators*
18	Prohibition of alcoholic beverages
19	Women's right to vote*
20	Terms of President, Senators, and Representatives
21	Repeal of Prohibition*
22	Limit on number of President's terms
23	Presidential electors for District of Columbia
24	Abolition of poll tax in elections
25	Presidential succession and disability
26	Voting age lowered from 21 to 18*
27	Congressional compensation changes
<i>* individual rights guaranteed to citizens of the United States</i>	

## Preamble: Purpose of the Constitution

Although technically not a part of the Constitution, the introduction or Preamble to the Constitution tells us the purpose of our government in just one sentence.

*We the People of the United States, in Order to form a more perfect Union, establish Justice, insure domestic Tranquility, provide for the common defense, promote the general Welfare, and secure the Blessings of Liberty to ourselves and our Posterity, do ordain and establish this Constitution for the United States of America.*

When we look closely at this very important sentence, we get a clear understanding of what it means.

*"We the People of the United States"* tells us and the world that the government of our nation belongs to the people and is run by the people.

*"...to form a more perfect Union"* means that our government under the Constitution will unite the states into a better nation.

*"...establish Justice"* means that the government will pass **laws** and set up courts to make sure all people are treated fairly.

*"...insure domestic Tranquility"* means the government will keep the country itself orderly and peaceful.

*"...provide for the common defense"* means that the government will keep other nations from taking over our country.

*"...promote the general Welfare"* means that the government will see to it that the citizens of our country enjoy good fortune, health, and happiness as much as possible. The government is supposed to do things that will benefit everyone, not just a few people.

*"...secure the Blessings of Liberty to ourselves and our Posterity"* means that the government will make sure that we, our children, and all future generations will have freedom.

*"...ordain and establish this Constitution for the United States of America"* means that we agree that the Constitution of the United States will be the plan of government for our nation.

These words form the Preamble to the Constitution of the United States and make it very clear to everyone that our government has a *purpose* and some goals to reach.

## Article I: Legislative Branch

The *legislative branch* or Congress makes the laws. The legislature is divided into two houses (bicameral), the House of Representatives (435 members currently) whose membership is selected based on *proportional representation* of the population, and the Senate (100 members) whose membership is based on *equal representation*, with two senators from each state.

### House of Representatives

- qualifications: persons must be at least 25 years old
- term of office: two years without term restrictions
- may bring impeachment charges
- initiates all **bills** concerning money
- because of its size, debate is limited, except in special situations (Committee of the Whole)
- Speaker of the House presides over the proceedings (elected by the representatives)

### Senate

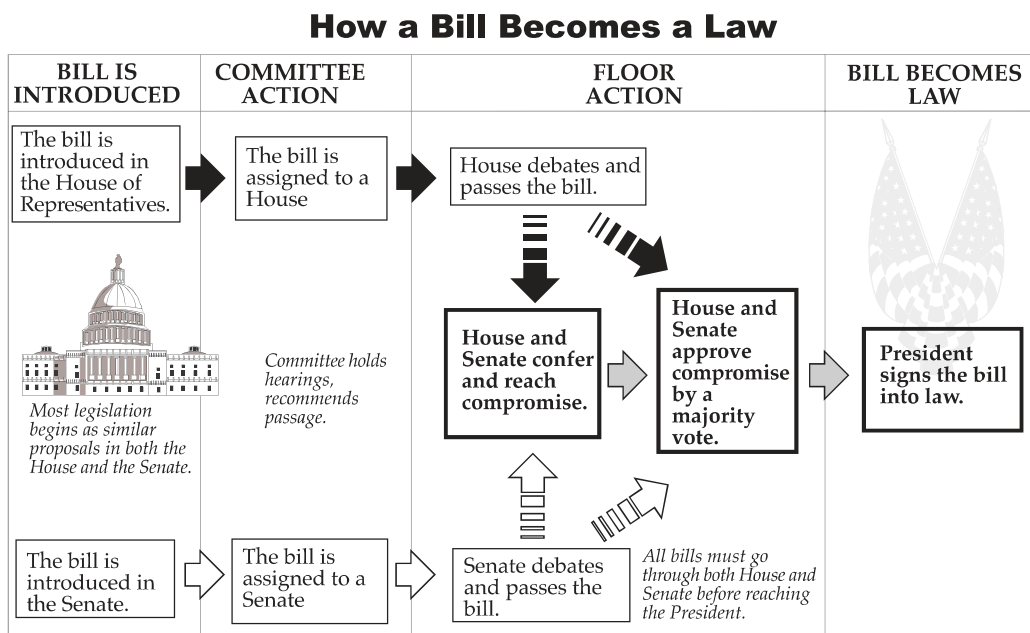
- qualifications: persons must be at least 30 years old
- term of office: six years without term restrictions
- the Vice President is the presiding officer, but a President *Pro Tempore* elected from the Senate membership usually presides (the Vice President may vote only in a tie)
- originally, senators were elected by state legislatures, but the 17<sup>th</sup> Amendment (1913) provided for the direct election of senators by the people

- approves or rejects presidential nominations and treaties
- serves as the court and jury in impeachment proceedings
- debate is unlimited

Each house judges the qualifications of its members.

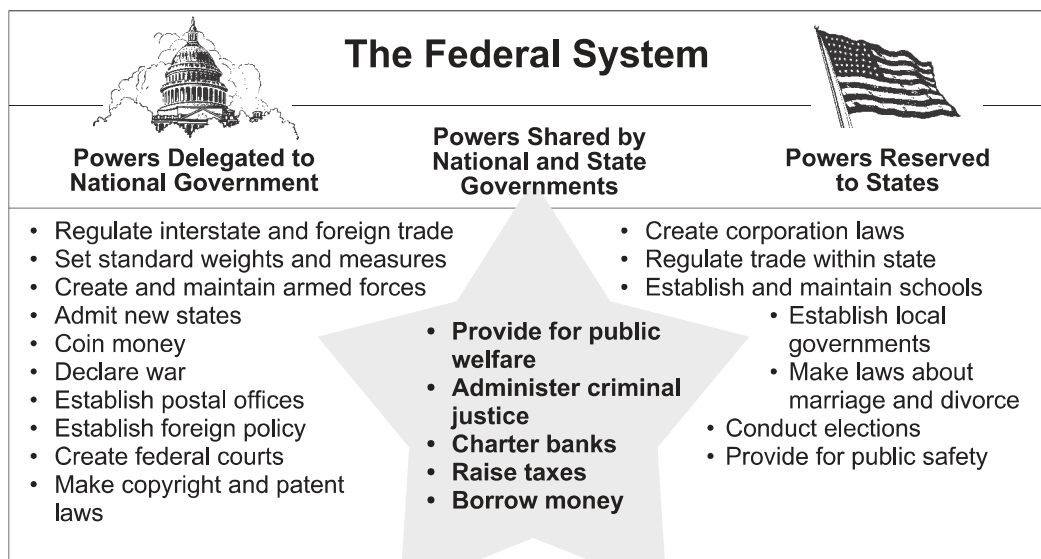


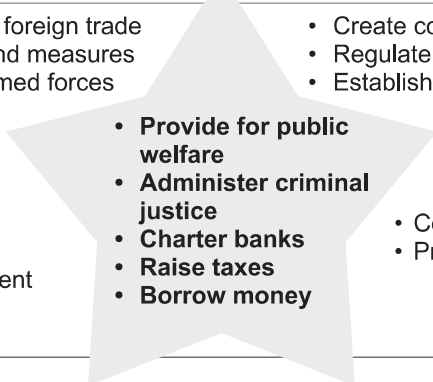
### Lawmaking Process

The main duty of the legislative branch is to make laws. Out of the thousands of *bills* or proposed laws that Congress considers each year, only about five percent become law. The lawmaking process has many steps, as noted below.



## Delegated Powers

The Constitution divided government authority by giving certain powers to the national and state governments. The national government has certain *specified* powers called **delegated powers**. Other powers called **reserved powers** are *reserved* to the states or to the people. There are also some *shared* powers called **concurrent powers** and some specifically *forbidden* powers called **denied powers** that apply to each level of government.

		
 <b>Powers Delegated to National Government</b>	<b>Powers Shared by National and State Governments</b>	 <b>Powers Reserved to States</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Regulate interstate and foreign trade</li> <li>• Set standard weights and measures</li> <li>• Create and maintain armed forces</li> <li>• Admit new states</li> <li>• Coin money</li> <li>• Declare war</li> <li>• Establish postal offices</li> <li>• Establish foreign policy</li> <li>• Create federal courts</li> <li>• Make copyright and patent laws</li> </ul>	 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Provide for public welfare</b></li> <li>• <b>Administer criminal justice</b></li> <li>• <b>Charter banks</b></li> <li>• <b>Raise taxes</b></li> <li>• <b>Borrow money</b></li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Create corporation laws</li> <li>• Regulate trade within state</li> <li>• Establish and maintain schools                             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Establish local governments</li> <li>• Make laws about marriage and divorce</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Conduct elections</li> <li>• Provide for public safety</li> </ul>

## Article II: Executive Branch

The *executive branch*, or the President, enforces the laws (see Appendix F for a list of Presidents of the United States).

- qualifications: must be at least 35 years old, a native-born citizen, and must have lived in the United States for at least 14 years before taking office
- term of office: four years, originally without term restrictions, but since the 22<sup>nd</sup> Amendment (1951) the office has been limited to two terms, and no one should serve more than 10 years



## Duties and Responsibilities

- Chief of State
- Chief Executive
- Commander-in-Chief
- Chief Diplomat
- Chief Legislator
- Party Chief

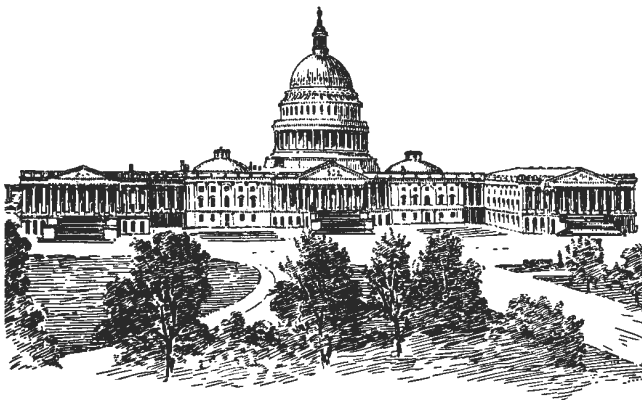
## Article III: Judicial Branch

The *judicial branch* or the courts explains, or interprets, the meaning of laws.

- qualifications: none
- term of office: life

The Constitution described the Supreme Court but left the actual construction of the entire judiciary system to Congress. Consequently, the Judiciary Act of 1789 provided for a Supreme Court (a Chief Justice and five Associate Justices); 13 district courts; and three circuit courts, each made up of two Supreme Court Justices and a District Judge. It also provided for an Attorney General—the nation’s top lawyer.

**Jurisdiction:** The Supreme Court has jurisdiction or power over the federal courts and cases on appeal or review from lower courts.



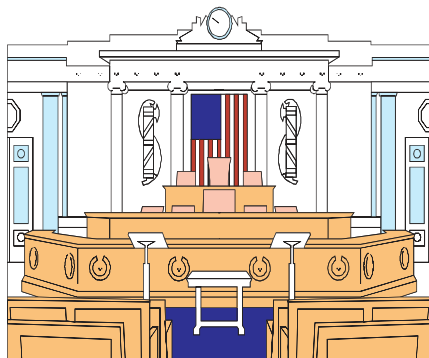
*The Capitol is a federal government building in Washington, D.C., which houses the United States Congress. The Capitol was designed by William Thornton in 1792, and work was begun the next year when President George Washington laid the cornerstone. The Capitol was built on a little more than three acres of high ground known as Capitol Hill in Washington’s center.*

## Separation of Powers: Checks and Balances

The first three articles of the Constitution separated the government into three branches. This *separation of powers* was intentional. The framers of the Constitution wanted to assign different duties and responsibilities to make sure that no one person or group had too much power. As a further precaution, a method of *checks and balances* was also established.




While each branch of government has its own duties to perform, it is also given the responsibility of watching the other two branches. In this way, one branch may check, or limit, the power of another branch. Some examples of checks and balances are listed below.

- If Congress passes a law that the President does not agree with, the President may **veto** or refuse to sign the bill. However, Congress may override the veto, with the exception of a *pocket veto* by which the President may kill a bill during the last 10 days Congress is in session by refusing to act on it.
- The President appoints federal judges. However, all appointments must be approved by the Senate.
- The Supreme Court examines laws passed by the Congress. However, if the Supreme Court decides that a law goes against the Constitution, the law must be thrown out. The power to declare a law unconstitutional is known as **judicial review**.



*The House of Representatives is one of the two chambers of the United States Congress—the legislative branch of the federal government. The House consists of elected members apportioned from each state according to population.*

Further examples of the separation of powers and checks and balances are in the following graphic.

Branch	Separation of Powers	Minimum Age and Term Length	Residency	Citizenship
 <b>Executive Branch (President)</b>	<b>Carries out laws</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Proposes laws*</li> <li>Can veto laws*</li> <li>Can call special sessions of Congress**</li> <li>Appoints federal judges,* ambassadors, and other high officials**</li> <li>Negotiates foreign treaties**</li> <li>Can grant pardons to federal offenders*</li> <li>Serves as Commander-in-Chief of the armed forces</li> </ul>	35 minimum age  4 year term	14 years in the United States	natural-born
 <b>Legislative Branch (Congress)</b>	<b>Passes laws</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Can override President's veto***</li> <li>Approves treaties*** and presidential appointments*</li> <li>Can impeach and remove President*** and other high officials*</li> <li>Can propose amendments to overrule judicial decisions*</li> <li>Approves appointments of federal judges*</li> <li>Creates lower federal courts*</li> <li>Prints and coins money</li> <li>Appropriates money***</li> <li>Raises and supports the armed forces</li> <li>Regulates foreign and interstate trade</li> <li>Can declare war</li> </ul>	Representative  25 minimum age  2 year term	state in which elected	7 years
		Senator  30 minimum age  6 year term	state in which elected	9 years
 <b>Judicial Branch (Supreme Court)</b>	<b>Interprets laws</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Can declare laws unconstitutional***</li> <li>Can declare executive actions unconstitutional***</li> </ul>	no minimum age  life term	none	none

\* Checks on the Judicial Branch  
 \*\* Checks on the Legislative Branch  
 \*\*\* Checks on the Executive Branch

## Article IV: Interstate Relations

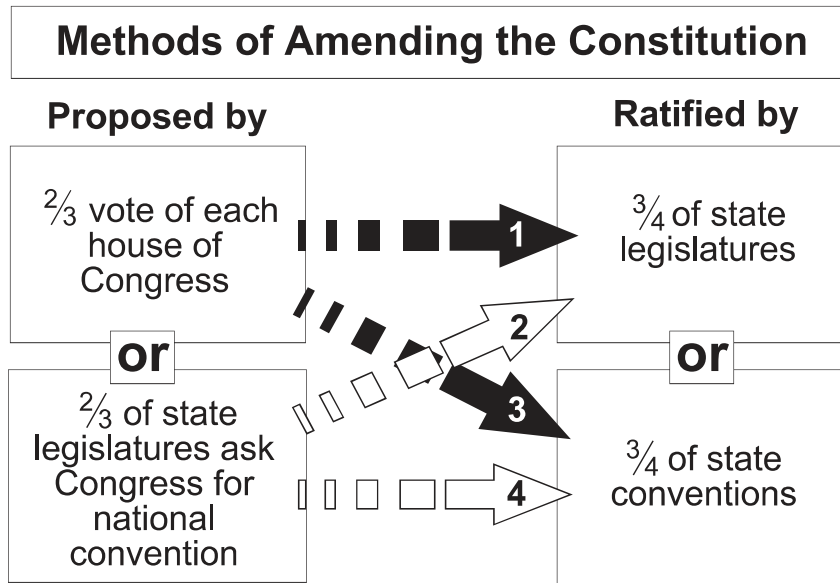
- guarantees that court decisions and other legal actions (e.g., marriage, divorce, incorporations) that are valid in one state are valid in another
- extradition of criminals (and originally runaway slaves) and the exchange of citizenship benefits (between state and nation) are guaranteed
- provides for the admission of new states and guarantees federal protections against invasion and violence for each state
- states admitted maintain the same status as the original 13
- all states are guaranteed and required to have a republican form of government

## Article V: Amendment Process

No document is perfect. When the Constitution was written, it included ways that it could be amended, or changed, to meet changing needs. It is not easy, however, to change the Constitution.

- amendments are proposed by two-thirds vote of each house of Congress or by a special convention called by Congress (a Constitutional Convention), upon the request of two-thirds of the state legislatures
- amendments are *ratified* or approved by three-fourths of the state legislatures or state conventions

Below is a chart which shows the two methods for proposing and the two methods for ratifying amendments. The arrows show that either proposal method can be used with either ratification method to amend the Constitution, making a total of four amendment methods.



### Article VI: Supremacy Clause

- establishes the hierarchy of laws in the United States
- the Constitution is the “supreme law of the land” and supersedes treaties
- treaties supercede federal laws
- federal laws supercede state constitutions, state laws, and local laws respectively
- all federal and state officials, including judges, must take an oath to support and defend the Constitution

### Article VII: Ratification

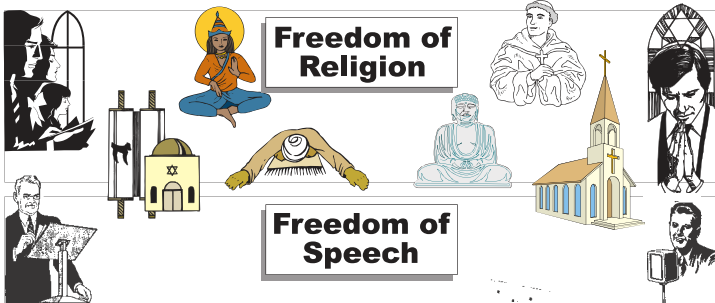
In order for the Constitution to take effect, nine of the original 13 states were required to ratify (approve) the document.

## Amendments to the Constitution

The Amendments to the Constitution guarantee certain individual rights and alter or abolish original dictates of the Constitution. The first 10 amendments are collectively known as the *Bill of Rights* (see Appendix E), and were passed in 1791.

- 1<sup>st</sup> guarantees personal freedoms of religion, speech, press, assembly, and petition

### Freedom of Religion



- 2<sup>nd</sup> guarantees the right to bear arms in a militia (does not guarantee the right to own a weapon for merely personal reasons)
- 3<sup>rd</sup> limits the government's right to use private homes to house soldiers
- 4<sup>th</sup> protects against unreasonable searches and seizures
- 5<sup>th</sup> protects rights of the accused
- 6<sup>th</sup> protects right to a speedy trial by jury



- 7<sup>th</sup> guarantees the right to a jury trial in lawsuits exceeding \$20
- 8<sup>th</sup> protects against unreasonably high fines and bail and forbids cruel and unusual punishment
- 9<sup>th</sup> allows for certain rights to be reserved to the people
- 10<sup>th</sup> allows for certain rights to be reserved to the states

After the Constitution was ratified, the nation began to grow and prosper. Despite this new prosperity, problems existed, leading America toward international conflict.

### **Beginnings of the War of 1812**

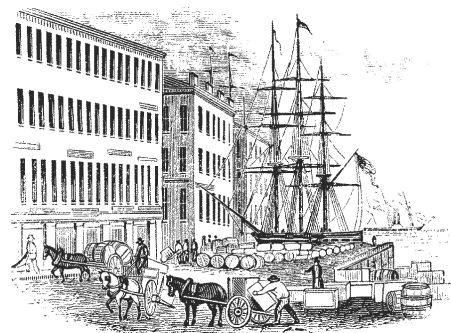
In the early 1800s, United States ships were facing a major problem at sea. As Britain and France went to war in 1803, American ships were being attacked by Britain as they headed to and from France. Hundreds of American ships were **seized** by Britain and France.

Britain did not seize American ships and cargo only. They also forced American sailors into the British navy. This practice was called **impressment**. Being at war with France, Britain needed all the sailors it could get.

Impressment angered many Americans. Many citizens called on the United States government to declare war on Britain. Instead of declaring war immediately, the United States government passed two acts in an attempt to end the war between Britain and France, and avoid war itself.

In 1807 the United States government passed the *Embargo Act*. An **embargo** is a **ban** on trade with other countries. The Embargo Act made it illegal for Americans to import and export any goods to Britain.

The American government hoped the embargo would force Britain and France into peace, due to a lack of supplies. However, the Embargo Act hurt American farmers and businessmen more than it did Britain and France because trade with all nations had been stopped. The Embargo Act did not bring peace in the war between Britain and France.



Because the Embargo Act failed, the United States government replaced it with a second act called the *Nonintercourse Act*. The Nonintercourse Act allowed Americans to trade with any country except Britain and France. It also stated that if Britain and France stopped seizing American ships, the United States would lift the ban on trade with them.

Over the next few years, tension arose between the United States and Britain. Finally, on June 18, 1812, President James Madison asked Congress to declare war. His request was approved.

### Causes of the War of 1812

- Great Britain and France were seizing United States ships, which interfered with American trade.
- The United States made a deal with France: if the United States stopped trading with Britain, then France would stop taking United States ships.
- The United States thought the British were arming Native Americans to attack settlers in the Northwest Territory. (The Northwest Territory was north of the Ohio River between organized states and the Mississippi River.)
- The United States felt that Britain was still trying to interfere with its former colonies.
- The United States wanted to capture neighboring lands by taking Canada from Britain and Florida from Spain.

### Major Events and Results of the War of 1812

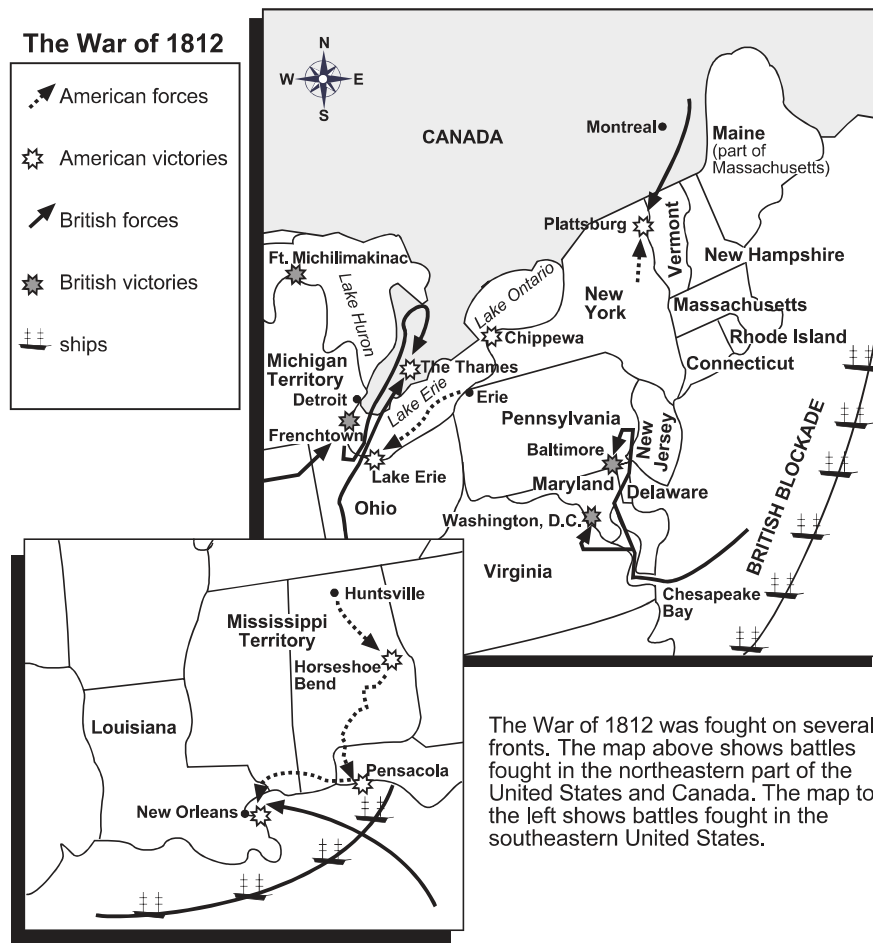
America was not ready for war in 1812. The American army and navy were both small and inexperienced. Britain had a large and powerful navy, well trained and experienced. The British used a naval **blockade** to prevent the United States from trading with other countries. They hoped to cut America off from the rest of the world and then defeat it.

This was only partly successful because Britain was still at war with France and could not give all its attention to the war with the United States. It appeared as if America might have an early advantage in the war.

In 1812, many **War Hawks** (representatives from the South and the West who wanted war with Britain) encouraged America to invade Canada. Americans believed that the people of Canada wanted their freedom from Britain. They were wrong. The people of Canada supported the British, and America was unsuccessful in its invasion of Canada.

In 1814 Britain defeated France and now turned its full attention to the United States. Britain planned a major invasion of America, which included attacking by way of Canada from the North and New Orleans from the South. Britain also planned to attack the major cities on America's East Coast.

In August 1814, British ships sailed into Chesapeake Bay and from there launched an invasion of Washington, D.C. The British captured the city, setting many public buildings on fire, including the President's mansion, more popularly known as the *White House*.



After witnessing the night bombardment of Fort McHenry by the British in September 1814, *Francis Scott Key*, an American lawyer, wrote the words to the *Star-Spangled Banner*. The song became the national anthem of the United States by act of Congress in 1931.

Late in 1814, the British decided to attack New Orleans. However, on Christmas Eve, before the attack, General *Andrew Jackson's* troops surprised the British outside New Orleans and forced them to retreat. Two weeks later, the British launched an all-out attack on New Orleans. The Battle of New Orleans was a complete success for General Jackson and the United States. Americans would only find out later that the fighting might have been avoided. The Battle of New Orleans took place two weeks after the United States and Britain had signed a peace treaty in Europe, but communications were slow then, and American and British troops in New Orleans did not know this.

In Ghent, Belgium, peace talks began in late 1814 in an attempt to end the war. On December 24, 1814 the **Treaty of Ghent** was signed, ending the War of 1812. Both sides agreed to stop fighting and return to life as it had been before the war. The treaty did not mention anything about impressment; however, Britain and France were no longer at war, and the British had no need for more sailors. Thus, the practice of impressment ended.

#### Events of the War of 1812

- The United States attempted to invade Canada several times but failed.
- When the British tried to invade the United States from Canada, they were stopped by Captain *Oliver Perry* on Lake Erie and Captain *Thomas Macdonough* on Lake Champlain. Perry told of his victory with his famous line, "We have met the enemy, and they are ours."
- Early victories by the ships *U.S.S. Constitution* and *U.S.S. United States* became famous throughout the country. However, the British eventually won back control of the seas.
- Washington, D.C. was captured and burned by the British, who then bombed Fort McHenry in Baltimore, Maryland.
- The British tried to capture New Orleans in January 1815, not knowing that a peace treaty had been signed in Paris in December 1814. The invasion was defeated by Andrew Jackson.

### Results of the War of 1812

- The boundaries of the United States were recognized by the British, who also agreed to stay out of the Northwest Territory.
- The victories at sea and at New Orleans helped the United States gain national pride.
- The United States proved its military strength.
- When trade stopped with Britain, American industry had to make more products at home, leading to economic independence.
- The Federalist Party of John Adams and Alexander Hamilton had opposed the war. After the war, the Federalist Party disappeared.

### Summary

In 1787, delegates for 12 states met at the Constitutional Convention in Philadelphia and drew up a new Constitution. The Constitution set up a system of sharing powers between state governments and the federal government. Within the federal government, separation of powers and a system of checks and balances limit the powers of each branch of governments. The Constitution was ratified by the states in 1789. Soon after, in 1791, the Bill of Rights was added.

After a period of adjusting to the Constitution and the Bill of Rights, the United States declared war on Britain in 1812. The two countries could not settle their differences peaceably and chose war instead.

In 1814 the Treaty of Ghent was signed, formally ending the War of 1812. The treaty brought to a close the first 25 years of the United States under the Constitution. The United States had made many remarkable achievements during these years. The most remarkable and difficult achievements were the bringing together of different regions to form a single nation and the beginning of national identity. The War of 1812 confirmed American independence and strengthened pride in the country.