

The American Citizen
Chapter 12: Congress: Its Powers, Structure, and Members
Vocabulary and Key Concepts



Learning these terms and concepts is necessary to understand the basic principles of government. In this course, you must be able to recognize definitions of these terms for classroom lecture/discussions and (eventually) quizzes and tests.



at large

A system of election by which the voters of a city, state, or country -- as a whole -- elect government officials

casework

Work done by public officials (or members of their staff) to help individual constituents solve problems

censure

An official declaration of disapproval of the actions of a member of Congress

census

An official survey of the population of the U.S., taken to determine how representatives should be re-apportioned among the states

code of ethics

The rules and guidelines for behavior of the members of Congress

congressional immunity

Freedom from arrest granted to members of Congress while they are attending or traveling to and from legislative sessions

copyright

The exclusive right to publish, produce, distribute, perform, display, or sell a literary or artistic work.

duty, impost

A tax on goods imported into a country (through customs officials)

elastic clause

Clause in the Constitution that gives Congress the right to pass any laws that are "necessary and proper" to carry out its functions.

excise tax

A tax paid on specific activities, services, or goods (such as alcohol, tobacco, or gasoline) that are produced, manufactured, sold, transported, or used within the U.S.

expressed powers

Sometimes referred to as *delegated* powers, these powers are specifically granted to the national government by the Constitution.

franking privilege

Free postal service for mail sent by members of Congress to their constituents

gerrymander

To draw district boundary lines in such a way that favors a particular candidate of political party, or reduces the voting power of a racial or ethnic group.

impeach

To bring criminal charges against a government official for "high crimes and misdemeanors" (in the executive and judicial branches of our national government)

implied powers

Those powers of the national government that are not specifically stated in the Constitution but that derive from the *elastic clause*.

incumbent

A person who holds a political office is called this, most often when he or she is running for re-election.

legislative veto

The power of Congress to review or cancel an action taken by the executive branch (this has been declared to be unconstitutional)

patent

The exclusive right to produce, sell, or use an invention

perquisite

A benefit, allowance, or service that is awarded in addition to a regular salary (sometimes called a "perk")

pork, pork-barrel

A project or grant of funds that chiefly benefits a legislator's home district

post roads

Routes over which the mail is carried (and, therefore, can be maintained by the federal government)

reapportionment

The redistribution of legislative seats (most often after a census is taken)

redistrict

To redraw the boundary lines of legislative districts (most often, after a census is taken).

sunbelt

The region stretching across the U.S. from the U.S. from the southeastern Atlantic coast to southern California, where most population growth has happened since World War Two.

