

Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Period: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

## Legislative Branch Reading Comprehension

**Directions: Read the following and answer the following questions**

### **What is the Legislative Branch?**

The legislative branch is one of three branches of the U.S. government—the executive and judicial are the other two—and it is the one charged with creating the laws that hold our society together. Article I of the Constitution established **Congress**, the collective legislative body made up of the Senate and the House.

The primary function of these two bodies is to write, debate and pass bills and to send them on to the president for his approval or veto. If the president gives his approval to a bill, it immediately becomes law. However, if the president vetoes the bill, Congress is not without recourse. With a two-thirds majority in both houses, Congress may override the presidential veto.

Congress may also rewrite a bill in order to win presidential approval; vetoed legislation is sent back to the chamber where it originated for reworking. Conversely, if a president receives a bill and does nothing within 10 days while Congress is in session, the bill automatically becomes law.

### **Investigative Duties**

Congress can also investigate pressing national issues and it is charged with supervising and providing a balance to the presidential and judicial branches as well. It has the authority to declare war; in addition, it has the power to coin money and is charged with regulating interstate and foreign commerce and trade. Congress also is responsible for maintaining the military, though the president serves as its commander in chief.

Founded in 1921, as the General Accounting Office, the investigative Government Accountability Office (GAO) audits all budgets and financial statements sent to Congress by the Secretary of the Treasury and the Director of the Office of Management and Budget. Today, the GAO audits and generates reports on every aspect of the government, ensuring that taxpayer dollars are spent effectively and efficiently.

### **Government Oversight**

Another important function of the legislative branch is oversight of the executive branch. Essential to the doctrine of **checks and balances** envisioned by the nation's Founders and implemented by the Constitution, congressional oversight allows an important check on the president's power and a balance against his discretion in implementing laws and making regulations.

One of the main ways Congress conducts oversight of the executive branch is through hearings. The House Committee on Oversight and Government Reform and the Senate Committee on Homeland Security and Government Affairs are both devoted to overseeing and reforming government operations, and each committee conducts oversight in its policy area.

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### **Why Two Houses of Congress?**

In order to balance the concerns of smaller but more populated states against those of larger but more sparsely populated ones, the framers of the Constitution formed two disparate chambers.

### **The House of Representatives**

The House of Representatives is made up of 435 elected members, divided among the 50 states in proportion to their total population according to the system of apportionment based on the latest **U.S. Census**. The House also has six non-voting members, or “delegates,” representing the District of Columbia, the Commonwealth of Puerto Rico, and four other territories of the United States.

**The Speaker of the House**, elected by the members, presides over meetings of the House and is third in the line of **presidential succession**.

Members of the House, referred to as U.S. Representatives, are elected for two-year terms, must be at least 25 years old, U.S. citizens for at least seven years, and residents of the state from which they are elected to represent.

### **The Senate**

The Senate is made up of 100 Senators, two from each state. Before the ratification of the 17<sup>th</sup> Amendment in 1913, the Senators were chosen by the state legislatures, rather than the people. Today, Senators are elected to by the people of each state to six-year terms. The terms of the Senators are staggered so that about one-third of the Senators must run for reelection every two years. Senators must be 30 years old, U.S. citizens for at least nine years, and residents of the state they represent. The Vice President of the United States presides over the Senate and has the right to vote on bills in the event of a tie.

### **Unique Duties and Powers**

Each house has some specific duties as well. The House can initiate laws that require people to pay taxes and can decide whether public officials should be tried if accused of a crime. Representatives are elected to two-year terms.

The Senate can confirm or reject any treaties the president establishes with other nations and is also responsible for confirming presidential appointments of Cabinet members, federal judges, and foreign ambassadors. The Senate also tries any federal official accused of a crime after the House votes to **impeach** that official. The House also has the power to elect the president in the case of an **electoral college** tie.

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### Legislative Branch Questions

#### Matching

- |                                   |  |
|-----------------------------------|--|
| _____ 1. Checks and Balances      | a. a system to prevent any one branch from exerting too much power |
| _____ 2. Impeach                  | b. a group of electors who vote for the President                  |
| _____ 3. U.S. Census              | c. a count of the population every 10 years                        |
| _____ 4. Electoral College        | d. the presiding officer of the House of Reps.                     |
| _____ 5. Congress                 | e. charge with misconduct  |
| _____ 6. The Speaker of the House | f. line of succession for the President                            |
| _____ 7. Presidential Succession  | g. made up of the House of Reps. and the Senate                    |

#### Multiple Choice

8. What requirements must a person meet to be a U.S. Representative?
- |                                      |  |
|--------------------------------------|--|
| a. At least 25 years old             | b. Residents of the state he/she is elected from |
| c. U.S. citizen for at least 7 years | d. All choices are requirements                  |
9. What is the role of the Legislative Branch?
- |                       |                    |
|-----------------------|--------------------|
| a. to interpret laws  | b. to enforce laws |
| c. to create the laws | d. all the above   |
10. How can congress override a president's veto?
- |                                |                                       |
|--------------------------------|---------------------------------------|
| a. 2/3 majority in Senate      | b. 2/3 majority in the House of Reps. |
| c. 2/3 majority in both houses | d. majority in both houses            |

