

Lesson Resources - Glossary Terms from "The Legislative Branch Overview"

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Glossary Terms from: ▼

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acquit

to find not guilty of a charge

adjourn

suspend, as in a session of Congress

apportioned

distributed, as in seats in a legislative body

appropriate

to assign to a particular use

at-large

election of an officeholder by the voters of an entire governmental unit (e.g., a state or country) rather than by the voters of a district or subdivision

bankruptcy

the legal proceeding by which a bankrupt person's assets are distributed among those to whom he or she owes debts

bicameral

an adjective describing a legislative body composed of two chambers

bill

a proposed law presented to a legislative body for consideration

censure

to issue a formal condemnation

cloture

a procedure to limit or end floor debate, especially during a filibuster

commerce power

exclusive power of Congress to regulate interstate and foreign trade

concurrent resolution

a statement of position on an issue used by the House and Senate acting jointly; does not have the force of law and does not require the president's signature

conference committee

temporary joint committee created to reconcile any differences between the two houses' versions of a bill

constituencies

the people and interests that an elected official represents

continuous body

governing unit (e.g., the U.S. Senate) whose seats are never all up for election at the same time

copyright

the exclusive, legal right of a person to reproduce, publish, and sell their own literary, musical, or artistic creations

deficit financing

the practice of funding government by borrowing to make up the difference between government spending and revenue

discharge petition

enables members to force a bill that has remained in committee 30 days (7 for the Rules Committee) onto the floor for consideration

eminent domain

the power of a government to take private property for public use

expressed powers

those delegated powers of the national government that are spelled out, expressly, in the Constitution; also called the "enumerated powers"

filibuster

a way of delaying a vote on a proposed bill in the Senate

gerrymandering

the drawing of electoral district lines to the advantage of a party or group

impeach

to bring formal charges against a public official

implied powers

those delegated powers of the national government that are suggested by the expressed powers set out in the Constitution; those "necessary and proper" to carry out the expressed powers

inherent powers

powers the Constitution is presumed to have delegated to the national government because it is the government of a sovereign state within the world community

joint resolution

a proposal for action that has the force of law when passed; usually deals with special circumstances or temporary matters

naturalization

the legal process by which citizens of one country become citizens of another

Necessary and Proper Clause

the final clause of Article I, Section 8 in the Constitution, which gives Congress the power to make all laws "necessary and proper" for executing its powers

off-year election

congressional election that occurs between presidential election years

oversight function

review by legislative committees of the policies and programs of the executive branch

partisans

lawmakers who owe their first allegiance to their political party and vote according to the party line

patent

a license issued to an inventor granting the exclusive right to manufacture, use, or sell his or her invention for a limited period of time

perjury

the act of lying under oath

pocket veto

a type of veto a chief executive may use after a legislature has adjourned when the chief executive does not sign or reject a bill within the time allowed to do so

prorogue

adjourn, as in a legislative session

public debt

all of the money borrowed by the government and not yet repaid, plus the accrued interest on that money; also called the national debt or federal debt

quorum

the minimum number of legislators needed to make a meeting valid

reapportion

redistribute, as in seats in a legislative body

select committee

legislative committee created for a limited time and for some specific purpose; also known as a special committee

session

period of time each year during which Congress assembles and conducts business

single-member district

electoral district from which one person is chosen by the voters for each elected office

special session

an extraordinary session of a legislative body called to deal with an emergency situation

standing committee

permanent committee in a legislative body to which bills in a specified subject area are referred; see select committee

subpoena

an order for a person to appear and to produce documents or other requested materials

tax

a charge levied by government on persons or property to raise money to meet public needs

term

two-year period of time during which Congress meets

trustees

lawmakers who vote based on their conscience and judgment, not the views of their constituents

veto

chief executive's power to reject a bill passed by a legislature; literally (Latin) "I forbid"