

Summary: The United States Government

The Federal Government

After the American Revolution, the colonies created a new plan for the government. It was called the Articles of Confederation. The Articles let the states act as separate countries. Soon the states began to disagree on things. Most agreed that they needed a better plan.

In 1787, state delegates created a new government. This new plan is explained in the Constitution of the United States. It describes a system in which the federal government and the states share power. The federal government can make decisions that affect the whole nation. It can print money, control the military, and make treaties with other governments. It can also tax citizens. States can set up state and local governments, make state laws, and elect state officials. States have their own courts. They can raise money by collecting taxes from people living in that state.

Some states would not agree to sign the Constitution until citizens' rights were added. As a result, the Bill of Rights was created. It protects rights, such as freedom of speech, freedom of religion, and freedom of the press.

Sharing Power

The Constitution divides the federal government into three branches. The legislative branch makes the nation's laws. The U.S. Congress is the legislative branch. The President leads the executive branch. It carries out the laws. The judicial branch settles disagreements about laws. Each of these branches can check, or hold back, choices made by the other two branches. This system is called "checks and balances." It gives each branch equal power.

Politicians represent voters in Congress. They work to pass laws that represent voters' ideas. Congress is made up of the Senate and the House of Representatives. Voters in each state elect two senators. A senator serves for six years. State voters also elect representatives to the House of Representatives. The number of representatives for each state depends on its population. Florida has 25 representatives. Each representative serves for two years.

Before You Read

Find and underline each vocabulary word.

legislative branch *noun*, the branch of the federal government that makes laws

executive branch *noun*, the branch of the federal government that carries out the nation's laws

judicial branch *noun*, the branch of the federal government that settles disagreements about laws and what they mean

politician *noun*, a person who holds or seeks a political office

After You Read

REVIEW In what way do states and the federal government share power? Draw a box around the paragraph that tells what the states and the Federal government do.

REVIEW In what way is the federal government's power divided? The power of the federal government is divided into three branches. Highlight the name and job of each branch.