

Evaluate the claim that the senate is far more powerful than the House of Representatives within congress (30 marks)

When the founding fathers set out the powers and limits of the House of Representatives and the Senate, they created a bicameral system with power shared between the two houses. Whilst it would be ideal for the 2 houses to have equal power and status, it is often argued that The Senate is more powerful than the House of Representatives. Is the Senate more prestigious and important in status and are Senators more powerful than Representatives?

Some would argue not, The House of Representatives and Senate whilst each having exclusive powers, also have equal and concurrent powers in the passing of legislature, this makes the two houses equal unlike the bicameral legislative system in the UK. This equal sharing of power as set out by the Framers shows that Senate isn't more important than the House of Representatives in the passing of legislature.

Another argument for the equality of the House of Representatives and The Senate is the parallelism of the powers each house has in the initiation of constitutional amendments. The process and weighting of the decision of each house is the same, meaning that the two Houses are equal with neither the Senate nor House of Representatives being more powerful. The House of Representatives and Senate are also equal in the pay given to the representatives and senators, a fixed rate of \$174,000 per annum, a figure which demonstrates how the senate is not more prestigious or seen as a promotion from the House of Representatives.

Despite these equal powers and pay figures, it is still widely seen that The Senate is more powerful. This stems partly from the significance of the exclusive powers held by The Senate, those of ratifying treaties and confirming appointments made by The President e.g. The Senate judiciary committee who have to approve all federal judges. These powers are seen as more important than the exclusive powers of the House of Representatives such as the initiation of money bills.

Another indicator to the powerful status of The Senate is the benefits enjoyed by Senators, those of wider name recognition, both state-wide and nationwide such as Senator John McCain and also benefits such as a longer 6 year term, meaning they are not constantly under the pressure of re-election. They also appear to have a more important job through representing an entire state as opposed to only a congressional district.

Senators are also benefited by the difference in membership numbers of The Senate and the House of Representatives, whilst a representative is one out of 435; a Senator is only one out of a hundred. This makes it a lot more likely for a Senator to chair a committee; an example of this is when the number of committees and sub-committees exceeds the number of majority members,

meaning that each majority member chairs at least one subcommittee/committee and can also allow minority part senators to chair a committee. Senators are also a lot more likely to hold a leadership position e.g. Bill Frist who became majority leader in The Senate after only 8 years, whilst it took Nancy Pelosi 16 years to become minority leader in The House of Representatives.

The Senate is also more powerful as it is often seen as a recruiting post for Presidents and Vice Presidents e.g. Obama, Truman, Nixon, Kennedy and Johnson were all Senators before becoming President. This in itself is also the cause of another example of the power and importance of the Senate – the frequent seeking of re-election to the Senate by House members. This displays the idea that senate is seen as a promotion from the House of Representatives. In 2005 there were 52 ex -House members in the Senate, yet no ex-senators in the House, this shows that The Senate is seen as more important as people see it as the next stepping stone from The House, and not as an equal part of Congress.

In conclusion, whilst the powers of the Senate and House of Representatives are often equal and were created as equal parts of Congress – in reality the powers of the Senate have increased. This could be due to the increased need for foreign policy, meaning the power of ratifying treaties is more significant than when the Constitution was first written in the 18th century. The benefits enjoyed by Senators and the appearance of it as a promotion from The House, make it appear more important and powerful, however the increase in its importance and the prestigious ness is not in correlation with the increase in power – meaning that whilst the Senate appears a lot more powerful than the House of Representatives, a lot of this is appearance and the actual powers of the Senate haven't changed that much.