

## **Explain the Major Similarities and Differences between the Two Chambers of the US Congress.**

The Congress of the United States is comprised of two chambers, the Senate (the upper house) and the House of Representatives (the lower house). The two are very different, having varying powers and responsibilities as well as different compositions and membership qualifications.

The House of Representatives is made up of 435 individual members from State delegations. They are appointed to the House based on population, with one member representing a specific area of similar population – since the membership number was capped at 435 in 1911, each member now represents approximately 620,000 people, but this is reapportioned every ten years according to census figures. Each State, even if its population is beneath this level (such as Wyoming) is guaranteed at least one Representative. Representatives are directly elected, and are re-elected every two years.

The Senate, however, has a far simpler composition. Its members serve six-year terms of office, with one third of the Senate up for re-election every two years. (One can see, therefore, that the rolling membership of the Senate and the longer terms of office are the reasons behind its consideration as the upper house of the US Congress). Each State has two Senators, regardless of population, and they have been elected by popular direct election since the seventeenth amendment in 1913, but were originally elected by State legislatures.

The House of Representatives is, however, also similar to the Senate in many ways. For example, it is the case in both Houses that the incumbents are nearly always re-elected, with 98.2% of Representatives who sought re-election keeping their seat in 1998. There are similar rules on who can and cannot become a member of each House – the only restrictor is the candidate's age (25 to become a Representative, 30 to become a Senator), and the duration of their citizenship of the US (6 years to become a Representative, 9 to become a Senator). There is no property qualification. Neither House is subject to recall, and there is no limit on the number of terms that any member of either House can serve.

The powers and duties of the House of Representatives and Senate are, nonetheless, very different. Most bills start their life in the House of Representatives, and have to be passed by both the Senate and the Representatives before they can go to the President for his or her approval. Money bills have to start in the House of Representatives, much like in Britain with the House of Commons as the only institution able to originate a money bill. In the event of a Presidential election not being decided by the Electoral College the vote goes to the House of Representatives, which elects the new President by allocating each Representative one vote to choose their preferred candidate. The Senate, conversely, has no say in this matter. It is evident, therefore, that there are many significant differences between the House of Representatives and the Senate, both in terms of composition and function, but they are both vital to the democratic and constitutional running of the United States and her Congress.

