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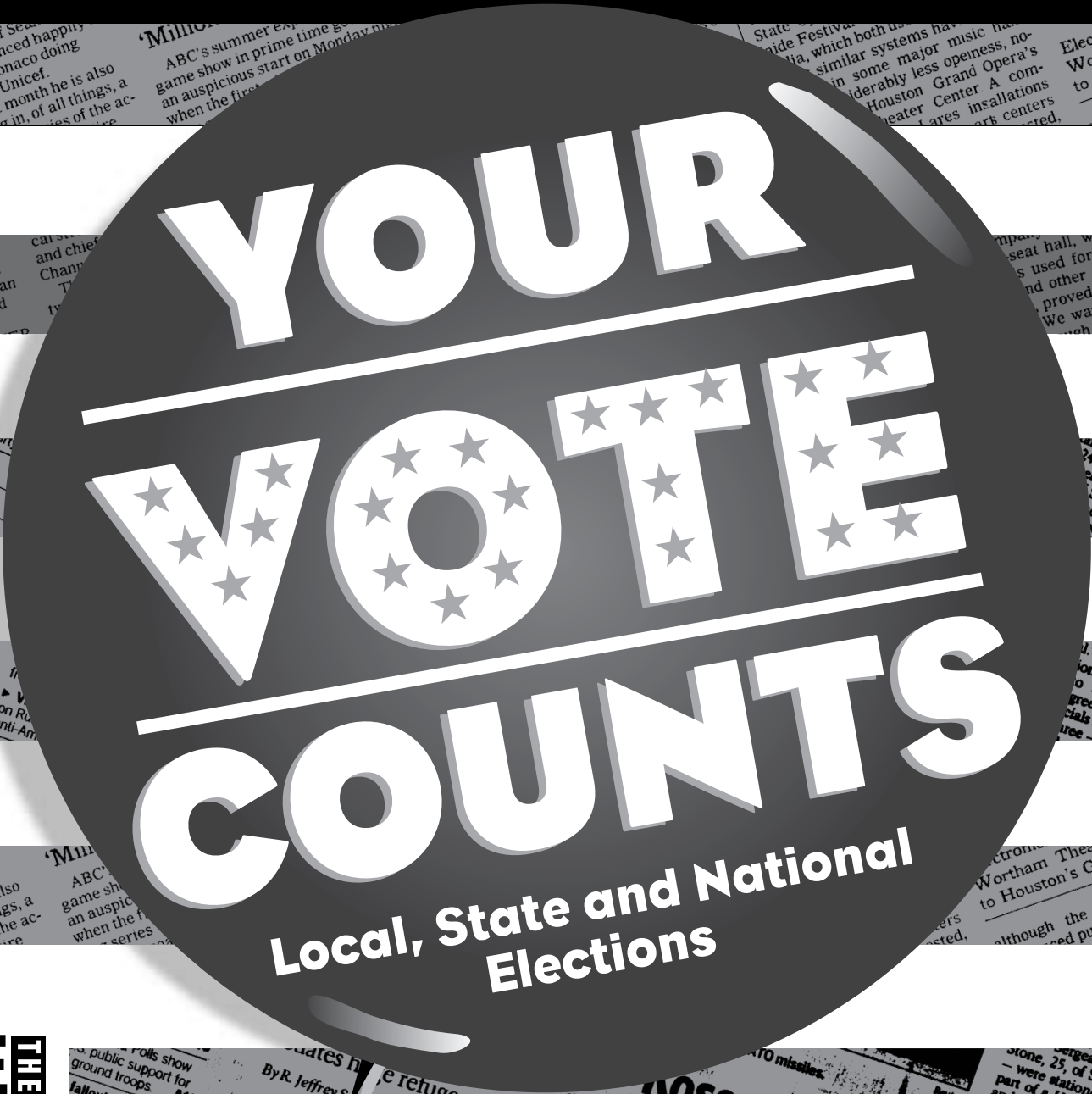
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TEACHER'S GUIDE



USE THE NEWS



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A MESSAGE TO TEACHERS

BECOME AN INFORMED, INVOLVED AND ACTIVE VOTER

The “Your Vote Counts” Teacher Guide and Student Supplement are instructional materials designed to help students learn more about government through their newspaper. We believe the presidential election provides a wonderful springboard for a serious exploration of government at all levels. It’s important for all of us to understand how local, state and national government bodies form the framework that makes our democracy work.

Students need to understand how the voting process impacts every level of government. They also need to understand the importance of local and state decision-makers, who often have more direct influence on citizens than decision-makers at the national level. “Your Vote Counts” explores these issues and guides students through the political offices that affect their lives.

The Teacher’s Guide, geared to students in grades six through twelve, provides background material for teachers as well as reproducible activity sheets for classroom use. It is designed as a stand-alone curriculum guide to encourage students to make connections between the voting process and how it impacts their lives. The guide follows the topics established in the Student Supplement, and can be used as a companion piece to that publication.

The Student Supplement, geared to students in grades two through five, is presented in a 16-page tabloid format. It includes student activity pages with room for students to answer questions and complete puzzles. The Student Supplement is designed to be used by parents at home or teachers in the classroom.

All activities send students to their local newspaper. Age appropriate Internet links are provided.

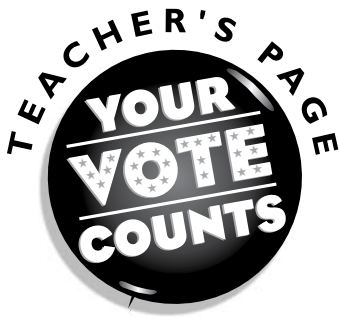


YOUR VOTE COUNTS

Teacher's Guide

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EVERY CITIZEN COUNTS

INTRODUCTION

The Constitution of the United States begins with the words “We the people...” because each and every citizen holds the power to change the country through the simple but elegant act of voting. Your job, your taxes, your health care – almost every part of your life – is touched by some level of government.

Yes, local, state and federal government bodies reach into your life. But they can only do what you permit them to do. With your vote, you can influence every action your government takes. If you are happy with the decisions your Congressional representatives are making, you can reelect them for another term. If you are unhappy with them, you can put someone else in office.

BECOME A VOTER!

Today, any United States citizen who is 18 years or older can vote in local, state and national elections. Voter registration is easier than ever – but there were times when the right to vote was not so universal. Many segments of the population had to fight to have their voices heard.

Voting qualifications are a function of state governments. In the past, each state set its own requirements for registering and voting. In the early days of this country, voting was generally restricted to white males who were 21 years or older. Some states required voters to own property. By the end of the Civil War, most states had extended the right to vote to all adult free males; free black males had the right to vote in most northern states.

States still set basic qualifications for voting, but a series of constitutional amendments and federal laws has limited the restrictions states might impose on voters:

- ★ The 15th Amendment, ratified in 1870, guaranteed the right to vote to Americans regardless of race.
- ★ The 19th Amendment, ratified in 1920, gave all women the right to vote.
- ★ The 26th Amendment, ratified in 1971, extended the voting privilege to anyone 18 years or older.
- ★ The Voting Rights Act of 1965 reversed the discriminatory practice of requiring literacy tests for voters. Literacy tests were used extensively in the South as a way to discourage and prevent blacks from registering and voting. This act empowered the U.S. Attorney General to abolish literacy tests and to replace local registration officials with federal agents who would register voters under federal procedures.
- ★ The Voting Rights Act of 1975 extended the 1965 Act to include minority members who can not read, write or speak English.
- ★ The National Voter Registration Act of 1995 required states to allow citizens to register to vote when they received their driver’s licenses. The law also allowed mail-in voter registration and registration at offices and agencies that offered public assistance. Today, you can find a universal voter registration form on the Internet.

States retain the right to set deadlines for registration and to establish polling locations and hours. In some states, you must register to vote at least 30 days before an election. In other states, you may register the day of the election. It’s important to check with your local election board for registration deadlines.

WHO ARE YOU ELECTING?

The Founding Fathers who wrote the United States Constitution were fearful of a government that was too powerful. They had broken away from the authoritarian excesses of a monarchy. They wanted to rule themselves, but they didn't want any individual or group of individuals to exercise control over the general population. They established three branches of government and a system of checks and balances that would prevent any one branch from controlling the other two. The legislative branch, Congress, would write the laws. The executive branch, the president, would enforce the laws. The judicial branch, the Supreme Court and lower courts, would try cases involving federal law and would rule on the constitutionality of laws.

Most state and local governments follow the Constitutional model. States have governors and local governments have mayors or commissioners. States have legislatures and local governments have councils, boards and commissions.

Both states and local governments have courts that rule on laws that are passed by legislation.

WHAT IS THE ELECTION PROCESS?

The public officials who lead government are elected in a two-step process. They must advance through a primary and a general election. First, states hold primary elections. In these elections, individuals within a party vie for the party's nomination.

The general election is a run-off between the candidates who win their party's nomination in the primary election.

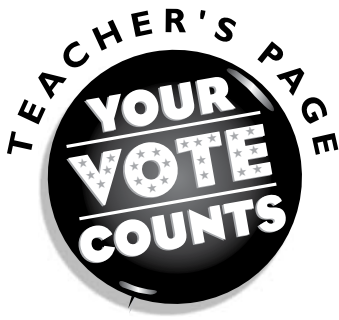
Although there have been many political parties in the history of the United States, today there are essentially two parties. The Democratic and Republican parties account for about 60 percent of the electorate. In addition, there are more than a dozen other parties with representation in one or more states.

Twenty-one states hold "closed primaries" in which voters choose a candidate from their declared party. Fifteen states hold "open primaries" in which voters may select a candidate from any party. Fourteen states hold closed or open caucuses.

A SINGLE VOTE DOES COUNT

You may think that your "one" vote won't make much of a difference in the outcome of an election. Here's why it does:

- ★ In 1829, Jackson Democrat Nicholas Coleman defeated National Republican Adam Beatty 2,520 to 2,519 to represent Kentucky in the U.S. House of Representatives.
- ★ In the 1854 election for a U.S. House of Representatives seat in Illinois, Democratic candidate James C. Allen beat Republican William B. Archer, 8,452 to 8,451.
- ★ In 1868, president Andrew Johnson was impeached by the U.S. House of Representatives but was not convicted because of the vote of one senator.



LOCAL ELECTIONS

DECISIONS AT YOUR DOORSTEP

INTRODUCTION

Look around you. What elements of your environment have the most direct impact on the quality of your life? The street you live on, the location of houses and businesses in your community, the schools in your area, the security of good police and firefighting protection, the economic viability of local banks, businesses and health care facilities – all of these are the primary responsibility of local and state governments. This is why it's important to pay close attention to the individuals you elect in your local government.

There are many different variations in local government. You may be electing officials at the county, township, town or city level. You may also be selecting members of the local school board. Each level of government has officials who make the decisions that affect their constituency.

“Counties” are creations of the state and are usually described in state constitutions. They are major units of local government in all states except Connecticut and Rhode Island. The word “county” is not used in Louisiana, where government units are called “parishes,” or in Alaska, where they are called “boroughs.” Counties are generally administered by a panel of commissioners; three to five commissioners for smaller counties and 10 or more for larger counties.

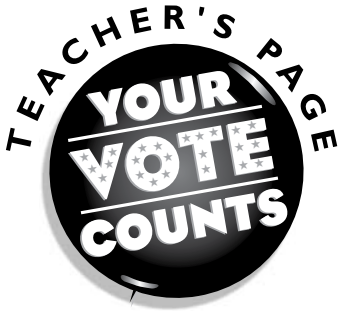
“Townships” are an intermediate form of government in many Middle Atlantic and Midwestern states. Township administrators are often called supervisors or commissioners.

“Towns” are the basic form of local government in New England states. Towns traditionally included a village and the surrounding farms. Town board administrators are generally called “selectmen.”

The “city” is the governmental unit in areas with larger populations. City government may follow one of several models:

- ★ **Weak mayor-council:** The City Council is the legislative and executive body, appointing administration officials, making policy and preparing the budget. The mayor’s strength depends upon his or her personal appeal or the strength of his or her local political party.
- ★ **Strong mayor-council:** The mayor controls the budget, appoints and removes city officials and can veto ordinances passed by the City Council. The mayor is elected directly by the voters and serves a designated term. This model is used in large cities where firm leadership and direction are required to meet the complex needs of the population.
- ★ **Council-manager:** A council manager, who is a professional administrator, is appointed by the City Council and serves the same role as a mayor. The manager presents proposals to Council members, prepares the city budget, supervises the hiring and firing of city personnel, and negotiates with labor unions.
- ★ **Commission:** A group of three or more commissioners are elected to serve both executive and legislative roles.

Another local government agency whose decisions directly affect your life is the local school board. Almost 15,000 school districts in the United States are financially and administratively independent of other local government units. School boards can levy taxes, hire and fire superintendents and teachers, spend money to cover the operation of the schools, and make decisions about instruction and curriculum. Education is a function of state government, so while school boards are autonomous, they must operate within state education policies and laws.



LOCAL GOVERNMENT OFFICIALS

WHO ARE YOU ELECTING?

County Commissioner
Township Supervisor
Town Selectman/Selectwoman
City Council Representative

YOUR VOTE COUNTS BECAUSE THIS OFFICIAL...

- ★ Sets local tax rates.
- ★ Administers state and federal funds designated for local needs.
- ★ Makes decisions about providing medical services, mental health services, welfare distribution, educational support and criminal justice issues.
- ★ Maintains local roads.
- ★ Keeps records of human events such as property ownership, marriages, births and deaths.
- ★ Provides for police and fire protection.

Mayor

- ★ Prepares the budget for the city.
- ★ Oversees the work of city employees.
- ★ Serves as ambassador for the city, attracting businesses and investment.
- ★ Provides political support for cultural and educational projects and events.

School Board Member

- ★ Sets property tax rates.
- ★ Collects miscellaneous taxes such as per capita taxes, real estate transfer taxes and occupational privilege taxes.
- ★ Makes decisions about the quantity and qualifications of teachers hired in the district.
- ★ Determines the instructional content of the school curriculum (in accordance with state requirements).
- ★ Determines which extracurricular activities will be permitted and funded.
- ★ Sets behavioral-standards policy, such as dress codes and zero tolerance programs.
- ★ Oversees the creation and operation of charter schools.

Zoning Commissioner

- ★ Establishes zoning regulations that determine where homes, businesses and commercial establishments may locate in the community.
- ★ Provides exemptions from zoning regulations for individual homeowners or businesses.



LOCAL GOVERNMENT SERVES YOU

What form of local government serves your community? Find a news story about a local issue. Describe the issue, the officials involved, and the steps the local government wants to take.

Headline:

Issue:

Local officials:

Government plans:

Your opinion about the issue:



WHO'S IN CHARGE IN YOUR COMMUNITY?

Read news stories in the local section of your newspaper over several days. Collect the names and positions of local government representatives. Explain how these officials serve your community.

1. Name and Position: _____

How the person's work affects the community:

2. Name and Position: _____

How the person's work affects the community:

3. Name and Position: _____

How the person's work affects the community:

4. Name and Position: _____

How the person's work affects the community:



OUR COMMUNITY CARES!

Local citizens who are not elected officials often work for changes in the community. Find a news story about citizens banding together to address a local problem.

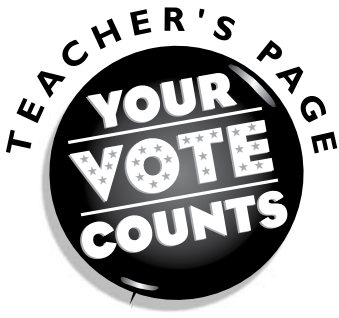
Headline:

Which citizen groups are involved?

What problem do they want to resolve?

What do they want local government to do?

What is your opinion about their concern?



STATE ELECTIONS

THE STATE OF YOUR STATE

INTRODUCTION

You do not live in just one community, you are a member of a larger population as well. You are the resident of one of 50 states in the United States. And the state you live in can make a difference in your life. Legislators in your state decide on the requirements you need to drive a car, when and where you will vote, how banks and utilities must treat you, and what standards health care providers must meet. The state has a claim on your money, too. Most states have an individual income tax and almost all states have sales taxes on goods and services. State-level decisions affect your lifestyle and your pocketbook, so it is important that you think carefully about the public officials you help elect.

Each state has its own constitution which establishes the structure of the state government and defines the powers granted to public officials, terms of office and means of election. Most states follow the three-branch model of government used at the national level. The governor is the chief executive, a bicameral (two-house) legislature makes the laws, and a system of trial and appellate courts interpret the laws. Nebraska is the only state in the union with a unicameral (one-house) legislature.

States are fairly autonomous, but they do have some restrictions. The U.S. Constitution requires states to cooperate in several ways:

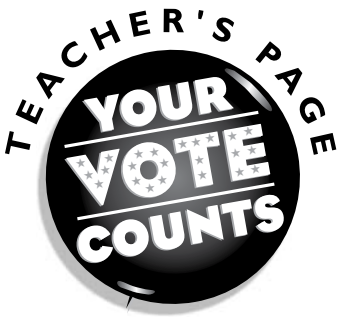
- ★ States must recognize the validity of civil actions in other states, such as property sales and domestic relations.
- ★ Residents of one state can acquire property, enter into contracts and have access to courts in another state.
- ★ States must return fugitives who have fled from justice in another state.
- ★ States may enter into compacts with other states only with the consent of Congress.

The U.S. Constitution specifically forbids states from entering into treaties or alliances, coining money or passing ex post facto laws (which makes an act illegal that was legal when committed).

There are many ways states find revenue to pay for the services they provide residents. Most states generate revenue from individual and corporate incomes taxes, sales taxes and property taxes. They may charge excise taxes on particular commodities such as cigarettes, alcoholic beverages or gasoline. They put taxes on admission fees to entertainment events, inheritances and stock transfers.

States collect user fees for the use of state facilities and they retain a percentage of money from state-operated or regulated gambling activities. States with natural resources may levy a severance tax on the extraction and removal of coal, oil, natural gas or timber.

Policies set by your state impact the everyday life of you and your family. This is why it is necessary to become familiar with the candidates who may influence these decisions.



STATE GOVERNMENT OFFICIALS

WHO ARE YOU ELECTING?

YOUR VOTE COUNTS BECAUSE THIS OFFICIAL...

Governor

- ★ Serves as the “chief of state” for the state, greeting dignitaries and representing the state at regional or national meetings.
- ★ Serves as the head of the state’s National Guard. The governor appoints officers, but the U.S. Congress organizes the arms and finances the guard. The governor calls the guard into service for emergencies such as flood, tornadoes or riots.
- ★ Appoints cabinet members.
- ★ Appoints heads of agencies and commissions.
- ★ Prepares the state budget.
- ★ Recommends policy to the state legislature.
- ★ Has veto power over the state legislature.

Lieutenant Governor

- ★ Serves as acting governor and makes binding decisions when the governor is out of the state.

Secretary of State

- ★ Keeps records and supervises federal and state elections. The secretary of state is elected in 38 states and selected by the governor or legislature in the others.

Treasurer

- ★ Has responsibility for collecting taxes and spending money. The treasurer is elected in 38 states and appointed in the others.

Controller

- ★ Approves state spending before it takes place. The controller is elected in 9 states.

Auditor

- ★ Verifies that money was spent as the legislature intended. The auditor is elected in 25 states and appointed by the governor or legislature in the others.

Legislator

- ★ Represents constituents in dealing with state administrative agencies.
- ★ Passes laws.
- ★ Reviews the effectiveness and operation of state agencies and monitors the efficiency of state programs.

Judge

- ★ Rules on cases involving state criminal laws, domestic relations, property ownership, contracts, zoning, wills and estates, and automobile accidents. Some judges are elected, some are appointed and some are selected on a merit system.



DECISIONS HAPPEN HERE!

INTRODUCTION

Most of the government decisions that directly affect your life take place at the local and state levels.

Are the cultural arts in your community affected by spending cuts?

Are there major traffic jams next to the new mall?

Is there a good hospital near you?

Local and state governments are responsible for several important areas:

- * Education — administering public schools and colleges
- * Transportation — determining highway routes and construction
- * Welfare — determining eligibility rules and benefits
- * Criminal justice — trying most criminal cases and housing 90 percent of the prison population
- * Commerce — regulating industries, banks and utilities
- * Health — inspecting and licensing health care facilities.

Look through your newspaper for stories about education, transportation, welfare, criminal justice, commerce and health. Select a story about a problem that affects your community. Identify the local and/or state official or agency who must address the issues related to the problem. Then indicate what the candidates for local or state offices say about the issues.

What is the problem or issue?

What government official or agency has responsibility for the decision-making?

What do the candidates say?

What do you think should happen?



LEADERS OF THE STATE

State elected leaders represent the state’s citizens in a variety of ways. Find three newspaper stories about the official activities of different state leaders. Explain how each activity serves citizens.

Headline 1: _____

Official: _____

Activity: _____

How does this activity serve citizens?

Headline 2: _____

Official: _____

Activity: _____

How does this activity serve citizens?

Headline 3: _____

Official: _____

Activity: _____

How does this activity serve citizens?



WE ARE THE STATE

Citizens and elected officials work together to promote their state to visitors and out-of-state businesses. Find a news story about the benefits of visiting, living or working in your state. Describe how government and citizens support and promote your state.

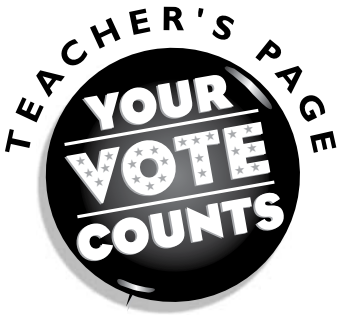
Headline:

Benefits of your state:

What government officials are involved?

What private citizen groups are involved?

Do you support the actions of the government and citizens? Why or why not?



NATIONAL ELECTIONS

THE BIGGEST CONTESTS

INTRODUCTION

Although the president of the United States doesn't live in your community and members of Congress don't meet at your local high school, there is still a strong connection between the federal government and your life. For example, if the president and Congress approve a new trade treaty, jobs may be lost in your community. Stronger environmental protection laws may determine whether you can vacation at a national park. Changes to Medicare benefits could mean that you will have to work a few extra years before you can retire.

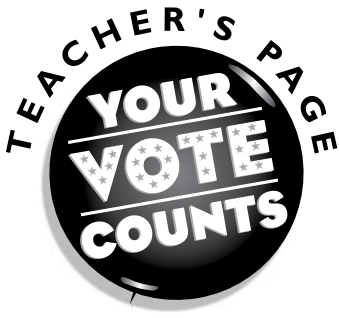
Your vote counts in national elections. In many ways, it is easier to be informed about national candidates and issues than local candidates and issues. This is because the candidates for the U.S. Presidency campaign for more than a year. Candidates appear regularly on public affairs television programs, and their positions and statements are debated in great detail on newspaper editorial pages. In addition to the big race for the Presidency, there are contests for one-third of the seats in the U.S. Senate and all of the seats in the U.S. House of Representatives.

The decisions of the president, vice president, U.S. Senators and members of the U.S. House of Representatives affect the entire country. Your vote should be based on a clear understanding of the offices and the candidates running for those offices.

"CHECKS AND BALANCES" IN THE GOVERNMENT

The early leaders of this country had experienced authoritarian governments in Europe. Because of this, they wanted to be sure U.S. citizens were protected from the excesses of any government official. When the Constitution was established in 1787, it made provisions for three branches of government. Theoretically, each branch is equal and can "check" any harmful decisions made by the other branches.

- ★ The Congress passes laws. However, the president can veto a law or the Supreme Court can declare it unconstitutional.
- ★ The president can propose policies, but he or she cannot make laws. Congress can also override a presidential veto.
- ★ The Supreme Court can rule on the constitutionality of a law.
- ★ The president appoints Supreme Court justices, but they must be approved by Congress.
- ★ The president can propose war, but Congress must declare war.



NATIONAL GOVERNMENT OFFICIALS

WHO ARE YOU ELECTING?

YOUR VOTE COUNTS BECAUSE THIS OFFICIAL...

President

- * Is the political leader of the country.
- * Serves as Commander in Chief of the Army, Navy and the National Guard.
- * Makes treaties with other countries, with the consent of Congress.
- * Nominates ambassadors, ministers and consuls, as well as justices of the Supreme Court, with the consent of Congress.
- * Gives an annual State of the Union report to Congress.
- * May call Congress into session if needed.
- * Is responsible for enforcing the laws of the United States.
- * Is the political leader of the free world.

Vice President

- * Becomes president if the president is removed from office, resigns or dies.
- * Becomes acting president if the president becomes incapacitated and is unable to fulfill the powers and duties of his office.
- * Serves as the president of the U.S. Senate and casts the determining vote when senators are equally divided on a bill.

U.S. Senator
U.S. Representative

- * Passes laws related to taxation, debt payment, common defense and general welfare of the United States.
- * Passes laws to borrow money on the credit of the United States.
- * Regulates commerce with foreign nations.
- * Coins money.
- * Establishes post offices.
- * Provides for patents and copyrights.
- * Establishes federal courts below the Supreme Court.
- * Declares war.
- * Raises and supports armed forces.
- * Approves presidential appointments.
- * Establishes federal mandates related to conditions of employment, health and welfare.