

THE MEMBERS OF CONGRESS

TEXT SUMMARY

Most members of Congress are white, upper-middle class, and male, although more women and minorities have been elected in recent years. Most also have previous political experience, such as being a State governor or legislator.

On committees, members of Congress screen proposed bills and decide which should be acted on. Committees also exercise the **oversight function**, checking that the executive branch is working effectively and in line with the policies that Congress has set.

Members of Congress also act as servants of their constituents. Through this duty they help those they represent solve problems with the National Government.

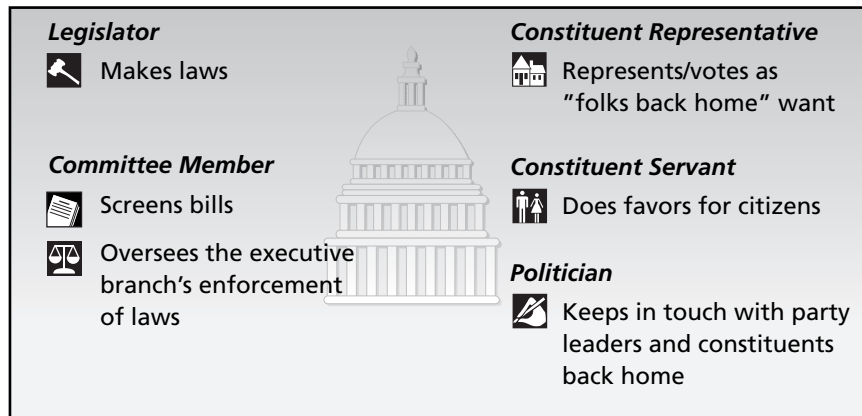
In performing the above roles, members of Congress carry out five key duties: they act as legislators, representatives of their constituents, committee members, servants of their constituents, and politicians. For their work, they receive a salary and benefits such as the **franking privilege**, the right to send mail postage-free.

THE BIG IDEA

Members of Congress, who receive generous pay and good benefits, fulfill various roles.

Typically, the members of Congress take on one of the following roles as they vote on bills. As **trustees**, they consider each bill's merits, regardless of the views of constituents. As delegates, they base their votes on the wishes of the "folks back home," their constituents. As **partisans**, they vote in line with their political party. As **politicos**, they consider all of these factors when they vote.

GRAPHIC SUMMARY: Duties of Members of Congress



Members of Congress have many duties beyond making laws.

REVIEW QUESTIONS

1. Name four roles members of Congress can take on when voting on a bill.

2. **Chart Skills** What is different about being a constituent representative and a constituent servant?