

From *Congressional Government*, Woodrow Wilson (1885)

"The Congress in session is Congress on exhibition, whilst Congress in its committee-rooms is Congress at work."

From *James A. Garfield* (1877)

"Now more than ever, the people are responsible for the character of their Congress."

Article I of the U.S. Constitution assigns Congress the responsibility to create laws, allocate resources, and represent the people. While its debates are often public and highly visible, much of its power is exercised through committee work, negotiations, and policy-making that unfold outside the spotlight. Often, the work of Congress is influenced by the voice of the people, who can contact their representatives and engage in the legislative process. In an essay, examine how Congress fulfills its constitutional responsibilities in today's political environment. Consider the evolving expectations of transparency and productivity, and the ever-growing population, and how these mounting pressures may impact effective representation. You may explore topics such as legislative gridlock, major bipartisan achievements or Congressional responses to national challenges as you seek to answer the question: **How does Congress today balance the constitutional demand for effective governance with its obligation to represent the interests of the American people?**

**Essays must contain the following essential components:**

**1. Thesis Statement**

Present a central argument that directly addresses the guiding question, clearly taking a position on how effectively Congress balances constitutional efficiency with democratic representation.

**2. Understanding of Constitutional Structure**

Demonstrate an understanding of the structure, powers and intentions of the Congress found in Article I of the U.S. Constitution; specifically, the Framers' goals for a capable, deliberative legislature.

**3. Interpretation of the Quoted Ideas**

Analyze how Woodrow Wilson's and James Garfield's quotes reflect the influence of public opinion on the Congress's function and whether that influence extends to legislative work outside the Congressional session.

**4. Explanation of Congressional Responsibility**

Explain how the obligation to represent a diverse and often divided population can complicate or challenge legislative efficiency. Consider the role of districts, constituencies, partisanship, or committee structures.

**5. Inclusion of a Contemporary Example**

Provide and analyze one or more recent examples where Congress either succeeded or struggled to balance governance with representation (e.g., debates over infrastructure, healthcare, debt ceilings, or social issues).

**6. Use of Evidence**

Support claims with primary and secondary sources from various points of American History.

**7. Structural Tensions**

Examine how features of the U.S. legislative system can create friction between the goals of efficient governance and accurate representation. Consider whether these tensions are a flaw or a deliberate safeguard in the constitutional design.

**8. Connection to Civic Expectations**

Reflect on how public perception of Congressional effectiveness influences civic engagement, political division and confidence in democratic institutions (tie back to Garfield's assertion that "the people are responsible for the character of their Congress").

**9. Conclusion that Synthesizes Ideas**

Reinforce the thesis while considering what an ideal balance between efficiency and representation might

look like in the future. Suggest how Congress might evolve to meet constitutional expectations while remaining responsive to the people it serves.

### **YOUR ESSAY SUBMISSION:**

- MUST NOT have a cover page.
- MUST be typed and double-spaced.
- MUST have your name at the top of the first page.
- MUST NOT exceed two pages (if you have a works cited page, it will not count as part of your page count).

**ESSAY EVALUATION:** The rubric that will be used to evaluate and score your essay will be based on the question prompt and its nine essential components.

---

**HELPFUL WRITING TIPS** - Keep the following information in mind as you write and proof your essay.

### **COHERENT AND LOGICAL INTRODUCTION**

- *Essay has a historical and practical background on the topic or issue addressed by the question.*
- *Essay has supporting ideas and facts. (No representation of personal or political opinions of the essay writer.)*
- *There is a thesis statement that speaks to the question asked.*
- *The thesis statement is clear and logically expressed.*

### **ESSAY DETAILS AND SUPPORT**

- *The main points of the prompt are addressed in the essay.*
  - *The essay addresses what has been asked for in the essay prompt.*
  - *Arguments or information are presented for the points being addressed.*
  - *Supporting evidence is provided for any arguments or information presented.*
  - *The essay is detailed with information and evidence to support the thesis statement.*
  - *Examples used to highlight make a logical connection to what they illustrate.*
- *The essay uses evidence that offers historical, contemporary, and current examples/descriptions.*
- *Personal conclusions are supported with data and information to support the writer's perspective.*
- *ALL the elements or components of the essay prompt are addressed with information, examples, data, etc.*

#### **Caution:**

- *Avoid flowery writing and descriptions full of imagery.*
- *Avoid opinion unless to address the portion of the essay which asks that an opinion be provided.*
- *Focus on writing a well-detailed paper based on research and facts to support your views.*
- *You are writing an expository essay which presents a balanced analysis of a topic.*

### **ORGANIZATION**

- *The essay is written with a clear flow that is easy to read and comprehend. Sentence flow, paragraph and thought transitions, and appropriate word choice are important.*
- *Information is organized and structured in a logical manner.*
- *There is a clearly defined introduction.*
- *There is a clearly defined conclusion.*

### **ACCURACY OF INFORMATION**

- *Information is correct and researched.*
- *Information is not value laden.*

### **A STRONG CONCLUSION**

- *The concluding thoughts make a clear connection to the question or thesis based on the support and evidence presented in the essay.*

### **MECHANICS**

- *Spelling is correct.*
- *Punctuation is correct.*
- *Capitalization is appropriate.*