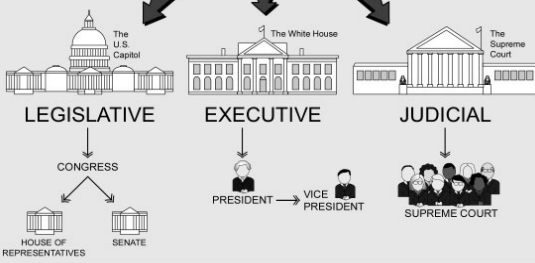


Parent Ambassadors Civics 101 – Just the Basics

January 2011



CONSTITUTION



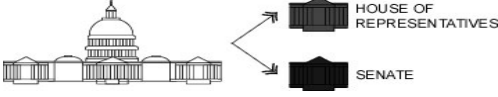
Executive Branch = President & Cabinet



- **President Barack Obama**
- **Vice President Joe Biden**
- **Cabinet (Secretary of State, Secretary of Education, etc, etc)**
- **Federal Departments and Agencies**
 - Office of Head Start (Yvette Sanchez Fuentes, Director)
 - Child Care Bureau





Legislative Branch = Congress

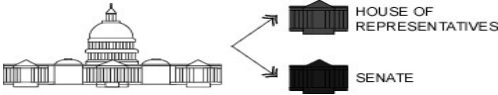


U.S. Senate:

- 100 members, 2 from each state
- Elected every 6 years
- Who are our Senators?






U.S. Congress



U.S. House of Representatives

- 435 members, based on population
- Elected every 2 years
- Washington has 9 Representatives – and we'll add one more due to the 2010 Census
- Who are our Reps?

State Government

Our state government is very similar to the Federal structure:

- **Executive Branch – Headed by Governor Christine Gregoire**
- **Legislative Branch – House and Senate**
 - Senate – 1 Senator per district (49 total). Senate Majority Leader is Senator Lisa Brown.
 - House – 2 House members per district (98 total). Speaker of the House is Rep. Frank Chopp
- **Judicial Branch**






Differences between State & Federal

U.S. Congress meets all year, every year
They pass a federal budget every year

WA Legislature passes a 'biennial budget' every two years.
In 2010 (even numbered years) they have a 60 day session.
In 2011 (odd numbered years) there will be a 105 day session.

Washington has a "line item veto" so the Governor can veto parts of a big bill, while the President can only veto the whole bill.

Washington has to pass a 'balanced budget'.



How a Bill becomes a Law

Step 1: INTRODUCTION OF A BILL

- The bill can come from a variety of sources:
 - Individual citizens,
 - Special interest groups
 - Corporations,
 - Non-governmental organizations (NGOs)
- Only a member of Congress (federal) or the Legislature (state) can introduce the bill
- A bill can start in either House or Senate.



How a Bill becomes a Law

Step 2: The Bill is Assigned to Committee


- Each House has standing committees that consider their bills.
- Each committee has a chair (from the Majority) and a ranking member (from the minority).
- They "mark-up" (edit) the bill so it will pass on the floor (full House or Senate).
- They can also kill the bill in committee by voting it down or by not passing it.
- The bill must also pass through the Rules Committee on its way to the floor.



How a Bill becomes a Law

Step 3: The Bill is Reported To the Floor


- If the bill is passed by the committee, it is sent to the whole House for debate and vote.
- The Speaker determines which bills are discussed and for how long.
- Committee chairs and ranking members give out time to debate to other members.



How a Bill becomes a Law

Step 3: The Bill is Debated and Voted on in the full House or Senate


- Votes are done electronically in the House, by voice in the Senate. This is a “roll call vote”.
- A tote board on the wall shows the tally. Red = oppose. Green = Agree Yellow = Abstain
- Votes can be taken by voice “yeas and nays” or a “teller vote” where members file past the sergeant at arms.



How a Bill becomes a Law

Step 4: The Bill passes, and goes to the other House


- The same process follows:
 - The bill must be referred to the appropriate standing committee.
 - Committees hold hearings and make changes to the bill.
 - The committee can ‘report’ the bill to the floor.
 - The full house or senate debates and votes on the bill



How a Bill becomes a Law

BOTH HOUSES MUST PASS THE BILL!


- A simple majority in both houses is needed to pass the bill (51%).
- In the U.S. House: 218 needed to control the House. (50 in the state legislature)
- In the US Senate: 51 senators needed to pass the bill (25 in the state Senate)



How a Bill becomes a Law

Step 5: Differences between House and Senate must be reconciled and made into one bill


- The bill is considered by a conference committee, made up of both House and Senate members.
- They negotiate and compromise and send the combined bill back to both houses.
- A vote on the “conference report” must be taken and passed by both Houses.



How a Bill becomes a Law

Step 6: The Bill is Sent to the President or Governor


- The president can sign the bill if he wants it to become law.
- He can include “signing statements” that say how the law should be enforced or if parts will not be enforced.
- The president can veto or reject the bill. He must include his reasons and recommendations for correction.
- The president can choose not to act on the bill. If Congress is in session, the bill becomes law after 10 days.
- If Congress is not in session, the bill dies after 10 days. This is called a “pocket veto.”



How a Bill becomes a Law

Step 7: The Bill becomes Law

- If the president vetoes the bill, both Houses can reconsider the bill.
- Two-thirds (67%) of both Houses are needed to override the President's veto.
- In the House: 369 needed for override. Senate: 67.
- If president signs the bill, it is a federal law that each state must follow.



Political Parties

In the USA we have two major political parties:

Republican – the more “conservative” party, also known as the “GOP”. In general, their platform includes:

- Support of “free market” solutions and a philosophy of personal responsibility over welfare programs
- Opposition to taxes
- Support of defense spending, and opposition to most spending for social programs
- Conservative social positions (anti-abortion, anti-gay marriage, pro-school prayer, pro-school vouchers, etc)



Political Parties

Democratic – the more “liberal” party. In general, their platform includes:

- Support of government regulation of business and industry
- Support for a social “safety net” for families in need
- Support for protections against discrimination
- Support for a more progressive tax structure
- “Liberal” social positions (pro-choice, pro-gay marriage, anti-school vouchers, etc)



Which Party Has More Power?

In Washington State – the Democrats.

- Governor Christine Gregoire is a Democrat
- House of Representatives has a majority of Democrats
- Senate has a majority of Democrats

This means Democrats chair all committees, control what bills get voted on, and write the budget.

This does NOT mean they win all the time!




Which Party Has More Power?

In Washington DC – power is divided.

- President Obama is a Democrat
- As of January 2011, the House of Representatives has a majority of Republicans. New Speaker: John Boehner
- Senate has a majority of Democrats

This means Democrats chair all Senate committees and control the agenda, while Republicans chair all House committees and control that agenda.

It's important that we talk to both parties!




What Next?

- What does this mean for ECEAP?
- What does this mean for Head Start?
- What do Republicans and Democrats say about Early Learning?
- How can we influence their decisions?