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Written by Alex J. Schmidt

# TIMELINE OF CONSTITUTIONAL EVENTS

Listed below are a sampling of the important events that led up to America's independence and the adoption of a new Constitution. You will find the year and the significant event that happened during that time.



North Carolina and Rhode Island become the last two of the original 13 colonies to ratify the Constitution.

Eleven states ratify the Constitution and it is put into effect. America prepares to operate under this new document.

On May 14th, The **Constitutional Convention** meets in Philadelphia, it lasts until September 17th. Here the delegates reviewed and approved the Constitution.

The **Articles of Confederation** are adopted by the states.

On July 4th, The **Second Continental Congress** adopts the **Declaration of Independence** (written by **Thomas Jefferson** and a committee). A few days later the Liberty Bell is rung in Philadelphia to call the people to the first public reading of the Declaration.



In response to the Boston Tea Party, the Parliament passes several acts to punish Massachusetts. The colonies name delegates to a congress, **The First Continental Congress**. On September 5th, 12 of the 13 colonies send a total of 56 delegates to meet in Philadelphia mainly to deal with Britain's actions.



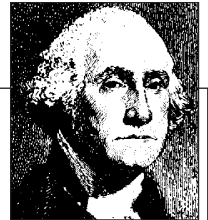
Colonists reduce their boycott of British goods when they withdraw all of the Townshend Act, except the tax on tea. **Boston Massacre** occurs when an angry crowd of citizens surround a group of soldiers causing them to open fire.

The American colonists begin organized protests against British rule. Patriotic groups such as the **Sons of Liberty** are formed. Laws such as the **Quartering Act**, **Stamp Act**, and **Sugar Act** anger the colonists, who are forced to pay unjust taxes and provide supplies to British troops.

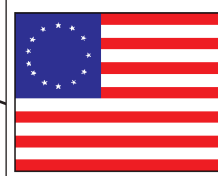


- 1791
- 1790
- 1789
- 1788
- 1787
- 1781
- 1777
- 1776
- 1775
- 1774
- 1773
- 1770
- 1767
- 1765
- 1763

On December 15th, Virginia ratifies the Bill of Rights, making it part of the United States Constitution.



On March 4th, the new federal government is inaugurated in New York. In April, the first House of Representatives is organized. **George Washington** is elected the first President on April 6th. He is inaugurated on April 30th. On September 25th, the first 10 amendments (**Bill of Rights**) are adopted by Congress.



On June 14th, Congress declares that the flag of the United States will consist of 13 alternating red and white stripes and a blue field of 13 white stars.

When the Americans learn the British plan to seize their guns and ammunition, **Paul Revere** is sent to alert the countryside and gather the Minute Men. An unidentified shot triggers this **Battle at Lexington**. This starts the **American Revolution** and also leads to another famous battle, **Bunker Hill**.



With the American colonists and merchants still angry over British tax policies, an uprising called the **Boston Tea Party** occurs.



Parliament continues to tax colonies without proper representation, and the colonists continue their boycott of British imports. The British pass the **Townshend Act**, which taxes glass, lead, paper, and tea.

England decides on a program of taxation and control of the colonies.

# CHECKS AND BALANCES

The authors of the Constitution wanted to be sure that no person or group would seize power and control the American government. To insure that this would not happen, our United States government, under the Constitution, was divided into three parts: the executive, the legislative, and the judicial. Each of these three branches has a check on the powers of the others. These checks provide a system of balance in our government, and that is why we call the system *checks and balances*.

You may also hear this system referred to as a *separation of powers*. Although not directly mentioned in the Constitution, the first three articles mark the responsibilities of the executive, legislative, and judicial branches. It gives some power to each branch of government instead of giving all the power to one branch.

These are the most important checks and balances:

1. Executive branch has the power to check the legislative branch by vetoing laws that Congress wants to pass
2. Legislative branch may check the executive branch by passing laws over the veto by two-thirds vote in each house.

3. Judicial branch may check both the legislative and executive by declaring laws unconstitutional.

Obviously, this is not the whole system, but it is the main idea. Other checks and balances include:

**Executive over the judicial branch.** The president appoints all federal judges.

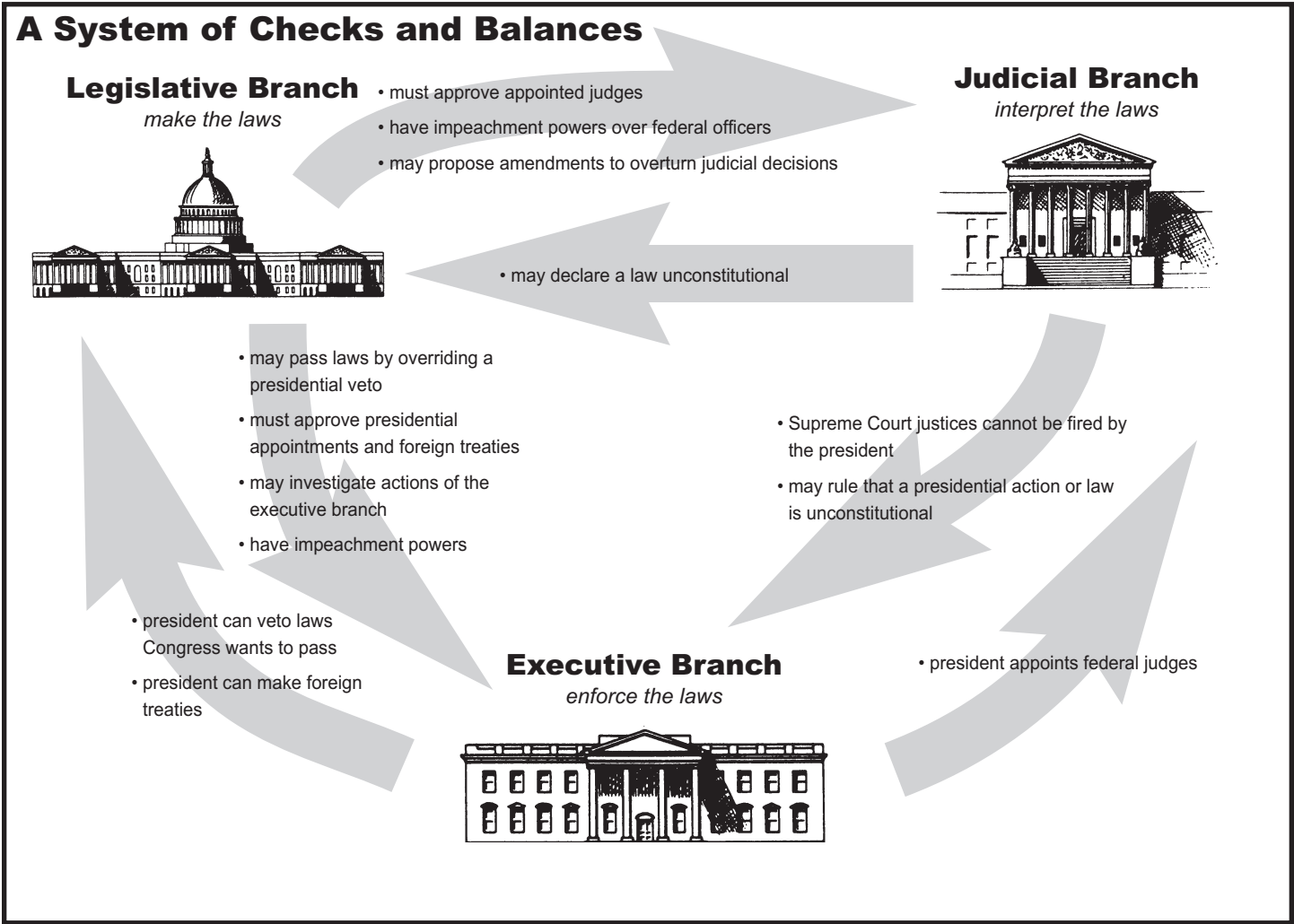
**Legislative over the executive branch.** The legislative branch must approve appointments that the president makes; the Senate must approve treaties that the president makes; and the legislative branch may investigate the executive branch.

**Legislative over the judicial branch.** The legislative branch must approve the president's choice of judges to the judicial branch; may propose constitutional amendments to overturn judicial decisions.

**Legislative over the executive and judicial branch.** The legislative branch has impeachment powers over all federal officers.

**Judicial over the executive branch.** Supreme Court justices cannot be fired by the president.

(continued)



FEDERAL UNIT SELF-TEST

The following test will help you prepare for your final Constitution test. It will give you an indication of how well you might score and areas that you need to review. It is suggested that you write your answers on a sheet of paper so that you may take the test over, if needed.

Multiple Choice - circle one

- 1. The president of the Senate is: a. The Vice President b. The Governor c. The Chief Justice d. The Speaker of the House
2. The legislative branch: a. makes the laws b. enforces the laws c. declares laws unconstitutional d. same as judicial branch
3. The national budget is presented by: a. Secretary of State b. The Vice President c. The President d. The Governor
4. How many branches of government are there? a. 1 b. 2 c. 3 d. 4
5. The president assumes the office on: a. September 1st b. January 20th c. January 4th d. Veteran's Day

Fill in the Blank

- 6. How many stars on the U.S. Flag?
7. The vice president of the United States is
8. How many members in the U.S. Senate?
9. How many members in the U.S. House?
10. Name the three branches of government.
11. Which amendment limits the president to two terms?
12. What government officer can veto bills?

Senate or House? Answer Senate or House to the following statements.

- 13. Approves or rejects treaties
14. Elected every two years
15. Has two from each state

Which Cabinet officer does the following?

- 16. Chief legal officer
17. Carrying out a war
18. Farm programs

True or False?

- 19. Nixon was the only U.S. president to resign.
20. The Declaration of Independence was signed in 1787.
21. There are 15 justices on the U.S. Supreme Court.
22. The president is head of the legislative branch.
23. A three-fourths vote is required for Congress to pass a law over the president's veto.
24. Patrick Henry said, "Give me liberty or give me death."
25. The 16th Amendment changed the way we elect a senator.
26. The building in which the Constitutional Convention met is now called Independence Hall.
27. The judicial branch has no check on the other branches.
28. Thomas Jefferson looked after the interests of the common man at the Constitutional Convention.
29. There are 21 Cabinet positions.
30. States may not make treaties.
31. Term limitation refers to the idea that political leaders can run for office as many times as they like.
32. The Gross Domestic Product (GDP) is larger than the National Debt.
33. The president of the United States now has line-item veto power.
34. Only the Supreme Court can amend the U.S. Constitution.

Answers: 1. a, 2. a, 3. c, 4. c, 5. b, 6. 50, 7. see almanac, 8. 100, 9. 435, 10. Legislative, executive, judicial, 11. 22nd, 12. President, 13. Senate, 14. House, 15. Senate, 16. Attorney General, 17. Secretary of Defense, 18. Secretary of Agriculture, 19. T, 20. F, 21. F, 22. F, 23. F, 24. T, 25. F, 26. T, 27. F, 28. F, 29. F, 30. T, 31. F, 32. T, 33. T, 34. F

STATE JUDICIAL BRANCH

Part 2

Local Courts

Indiana communities are served by 48 city courts and 27 town courts. This group of courts' jurisdiction is very limited. Many are limited to handling misdemeanors, ordinance violations, and civil cases involving disputes less than \$500. The more serious cases are heard in circuit or superior courts. Judges in city and town courts are elected for four-year terms by their local voters. Some counties require that these judges be attorneys.

Probate Courts

Saint Joseph County has the only remaining probate court in Indiana. This court has one judge, with jurisdiction over wills, estates, juveniles, guardians, and adoptions. The county voters select the probate judge at general election for a six-year term.

Juries

The Indiana Constitution guarantees the right of trial by jury. A jury of six (unless the parties agree to a lesser number) is called for on any civil action that requests a jury. A unanimous verdict must be reached, unless a lesser stated majority is agreed upon before the trial. In criminal cases, misdemeanors also have a jury of six, requiring a unanimous vote from all six. Murder or felony cases, punishable by imprisonment in a state prison, have a jury of 12, all which must agree on the verdict. Jurors are chosen from a list of registered voters and may be rejected after being questioned by the attorneys and the judge in the case.

QUESTIONS

Multiple choice - circle one

- 1. Which of the following is NOT a state court?
a. Court of Appeals c. Circuit Court
b. Supreme Court d. all are state courts
2. The state is divided into how many judicial circuits?
a. 1 c. 90
b. 32 d. 99
3. How are Supreme Court judges selected?
a. by the people c. by the governor
b. by the legislature d. by the president
4. Which courts deal mainly with misdemeanors and ordinance violations?
a. Court of Appeals c. Probate
b. Local d. Supreme
5. Which one is the chief trial court?
a. Tax c. Probate
b. Circuit d. Supreme
6. A jury of \_\_\_ is required for murder or felony cases that are punishable by imprisonment.
a. 6 c. 12
b. 9 d. 15

Define

- 1. jurisdiction: \_\_\_\_\_
2. appeal: \_\_\_\_\_
3. nonpartisan: \_\_\_\_\_

Organizational Chart of the Indiana Judicial System

