

Glossary of Terms

admiralty and maritime law: comes from the general maritime law of nations and has been modified to also apply to the Great Lakes and all navigable rivers in the United States.

amendment: a formal change to the United States Constitution. As of 2008 there are twenty-seven amendments or “changes” to the Constitution.

bad tendency doctrine: allows legislatures to make illegal speech that could encourage people to engage in illegal action.

balanced budget: a philosophy with the objective of not spending more money than is taken in by the government.

bicameral legislature: refers to a two-house legislature.

bill of attainder: a legislative act that authorizes punishment for a person even though he or she was not found guilty by a court of law.

Bill of Right: the first ten amendments to the Constitution that were adopted in 1791. These are the basic rights that all Americans have and its purpose is protect the people from the government.

bipartisanship: emphasizes cooperation between the major political parties.

cabinet: a group of governmental officials who head various departments in the Executive Branch and advise the president.

checks and balances: a system set by the Constitution in which the executive, legislative, and judicial branches of government have the power to check each other to maintain a “balance” of power.

clear and present danger: an interpretation of the First Amendment to the Constitution that gives the government the right to curtail activities that may in some way threaten the security of the United States.

cloture: the procedure for ending debate in the United States Senate

coattail effect: the influence on the outcome of an election that a popular or unpopular candidate has on the other candidates on the same party ticket.

concurrent powers: powers that are shared by the federal government and the state governments.

Fun Zone: Glossary of Terms *(Continued)*

Constitutional home rule: constitutional authorization for parts of the local government to conduct their own affairs.

cooperative federalism: when the state governments, local governments, and the federal government share responsibility. This has been referred to as the “New Federalism.”

crossover voting: this is part of the open primary system in which the voters are not required to vote based upon their party affiliation.

deficit spending: a practice by the government of spending more money than it takes in during a specific time period.

delegated power: powers that are exclusively for the federal government and are “enumerated” in Article I, Section 8 of the Constitution.

democracy: the governmental philosophy in which the people ideally have a high degree of control over political leaders.

detente: a relaxation of tension between countries.

direct democracy: a political process in which the people are able to have direct control over the government in making decisions. In colonial America this was the New England town meeting and today could be exemplified by the referendum.

discharge petition: a petition signed by a majority of the members of the House of Representatives to force a bill from committee and bring it to the floor for consideration.

domestic tranquility: peace at home.

Electoral College: the name for the “indirect” process by which the people elect the president. The “electors” are determined by the number of representatives each state (including Washington, D.C.) has in the House of Representatives and Senate. In a presidential election year the “electors” meet in their respective state capitals on the first Monday after the second Wednesday to “vote” for the President.

ex post fact law: a law that makes an act a crime after it was committed.

exclusionary rule: this is a judicial doctrine based on the Fourth Amendment to the Constitution which protects the American people from illegal searches and seizures. Any evidence obtained in this manner would be inadmissible in a court proceeding.

Fun Zone: Glossary of Terms *(Continued)*

executive agreement: an agreement between the President of the United States and another country that does not require the advice and consent of the Senate.

executive branch: one of the three branches of our government with the purpose of enforcing laws.

express powers: powers specifically granted to the federal government as enumerated in Article I, Section 8 of the Constitution.

faction: an organized group of politically active persons who are trying to attain special goals. This group is usually less than a majority.

federal supremacy clause: this refers to Article VI, Section 2 of the United States Constitution that states that the Constitution and all federal laws and treaties shall be the “supreme law of the land.”

federalism: the division of power between the national government (delegated power) and the state governments (reserved power).

filibuster: the technique used in the United States Senate to delay proceedings and prevent a vote on a controversial issue.

free enterprise: an economic system in which one makes decisions on what products to make, how much of that product to produce, and how to establish the price.

full faith and credit clause: a constitutional provision in Article IV of the Constitution that requires all states to honor the laws, judgments, and public documents of every other state.

gerrymandering: the construction of an election district so as to give a distinct advantage to one party or group over another. This process was named after Elbridge Gerry.

home style: the technique used by a member of Congress to properly present himself/herself to constituents.

House of Representatives: the “lower” house of Congress in which states are represented based on population. Presently there are 435 members in this body.

Fun Zone: Glossary of Terms *(Continued)*

ideology: an interrelated set of attitudes and beliefs about political philosophy and the role of power in the government.

impeachment: a Constitutional “check” the Congress has on the President or other high federal officials. It involves an accusation against that official.

implied power: a power that is not really stated directly but is “implied” in Article I, Section 8, clause 18 of the Constitution. This is called the “necessary and proper” clause of the “elastic” clause.

impoundment: when the president refuses to allow an agency of the government to spend funds authorized and allocated by Congress.

inalienable rights: the natural rights of all men defined by John Locke as life, liberty, and property that can only be taken away by God. Government is created to protect these rights.

incumbency: one who holds public office that normally carry some type of electoral advantage.

indirect democracy: a political process in which the people control the government through elected political officials. This is also called a republic.

inherent powers: those powers the federal government exercises in foreign affairs which are not specifically stated in the Constitution. They are available because of the status the United States has as a national government.

initiative: the procedure that allows voters to “initiate” legislation by obtaining signatures on a petition

interstate compact: an agreement among or between states that is approved by Congress. **line item veto:** the authority of the executive (often the governor) to veto parts of a bill without vetoing the entire piece of legislation.

joint committee: a committee made up of members of both houses of government in order to speed action on the legislation

Judicial Branch: one of the three branches of our government with the purpose of interpreting laws.

judicial review: a power the Supreme Court conferred upon itself in the 1803 case of *Marbury v. Madison* (1803) to review the constitutionality of acts passed by Congress or actions by the president.

jus sanguinis: citizenship acquired by citizenship of the parents.

jus soli: citizenship acquired by place of birth.

Fun Zone: Glossary of Terms *(Continued)*

laissez faire: a French term meaning to let alone. This refers that the government should not get involved with the peoples' lives.

lame duck: an official who has been defeated in the election but his/her term of office has not expired.

lobbyist: a person who works for an organized special interest group, association, or corporation. An attempt is made to influence policy decisions primarily in the legislative branch of government.

localism: when states or certain areas tend to act independently and not as a part of the country.

long ballot: originated in the 1820s because of the belief that the voting population should be able to elect all of the officials that govern them.

loose interpretation: a Hamiltonian view of the Constitution that advocates the idea that the federal government has a wide range of powers as implied in Article I, Section 8, Clause 18.

maintaining election: an election that indicates the existence of a pattern of partisan support.

majority floor leader: the legislative position held by an important party member who is chosen by the majority party in caucus or conference. The job is designed to keep members of that party in line and determine the agenda of that branch of government.

minority floor leader: the party leader in each house of government elected by the minority party.

national debt: the total amount of money the government owes.

National Security Council: a part of the executive branch of government that is a planning and advisory group whose function is to assist the president on matters of national security.

necessary and proper clause: the "implied powers" clause located in Article I, Section 8, Clause 18 of the Constitution. It states that aside from the enumerated powers given to the federal government, it also has the power to pass any law that can be traced back to those powers "delegated" in the Constitution.

nominating convention: a "meeting" in which a political party will choose its candidate for president.

oligarchy: government control is in the hands of limited number of people who are chosen on the basis of wealth and power.

override: means to "overrule" and refers to the aspect of the "checks and balances" system in which Congress can override a presidential veto by a two-thirds vote.

Fun Zone: Glossary of Terms *(Continued)*

pocket veto: the constitutional procedure that president may use to prevent a bill from coming a law without giving specific reasons.

political action committee: a legal organization whose function it is to collect money and make campaign contributions to selected candidates.

political efficacy: the belief that one can have a forceful and meaningful impact on public affairs.

political machine: an organization for running a city or state government by dispensing patronage or favors from the smallest units of government (neighborhood or ward) to the largest. The head of this organization is called a "boss."

poll tax: the requirement that a person must pay a certain amount of money in order to vote. This was found to be unconstitutional in 1964 by the Twenty-Fourth Amendment to the Constitution.

president pro tempore: the senior member of the majority party in the Senate who serves as the president of the Senate when the Vice President is absent.

primary election: an election held before the general election to determine the main candidates representing the various parties.

primary election: an election held to determine the various candidates chosen from that party to run for political office.

prior restraint: limiting First Amendment rights prior to the actual activity that would carry out that freedom (a speech being made, a movie being shown, a newspaper or book being published, etc.)

public domain: the lands held by the state or federal government.

recall election: a special election called by voters to remove an elected official before his/her term expires.

red tape: a way of describing dissatisfaction with the workings of a bureaucracy in terms of inefficiency, mismanagement, and frustration.

referendum: the procedure that allows voters to vote directly on issues instead of going through the "indirect" process of having legislators vote for those issues.

representative government: also known as an "indirect democracy" or a republic. This is when the people elect "representatives" to make laws for their benefit.

republic: the type of government in which voters elect representatives to make the laws for the country.

Fun Zone: Glossary of Terms *(Continued)*

reserved power: powers that are “reserved” for the states as identified in the Tenth amendment to the Constitution.

retrospective voting: voting that takes into consideration such things as the performance of the political party, the officeholder, and/or the administration.

safe seat: an elected office where the party in power or the incumbent is so strong that being reelected is a foregone conclusion.

sedition: the attempt to overthrow a government by force or at least interrupt its activities.

Senate: one of the two houses of Congress historically known as the “upper” house that contains two representatives from each state regardless of population. Presently there are 100 members in this body.

Senatorial courtesy: the custom in the United States Senate to refer the names of possible appointees (specifically federal judges) to senators from the states from which the appointees reside and withdrawing the names of those appointees that these senators regard as objectionable.

separation of powers: the philosophy of a balanced government in which each of the three branches (executive, legislative, judicial) have their own powers.

socialism: a type of government that believes its major role should be on the concentration of national planning and public ownership of business. **sovereignty:** the source of a government’s power or authority.

Speaker of the House: the presiding officer of the United States House of Representatives who is selected by a caucus of his/her party and is formally elected by the entire House.

spoils system: the practice of rewarding those who worked in a successful political campaign by giving them governmental jobs.

standing committee: the name given to a permanent congressional committee.

states’ rights: the belief that the individual states had/have more power than the federal government.

strict interpretation: a Jeffersonian view of the Constitution that advocates the idea that the federal government has only those powers as identified in Article I, Section 8.

suffrage: the right or privilege of voting.

Fun Zone: Glossary of Terms *(Continued)*

ticket splitting: the practice of voting for candidates without taking into consideration their political affiliation.

totalitarian government: the type of government that is characterized by a single party or individual controlling the entire country and every aspect of society.

tyranny: description of a government that is cruel or unjust.

unconstitutional: a legislative act or presidential action that violates the Constitution based on the interpretation of the Supreme Court.

unicameral legislature: refers to a one-house legislature.

unitary system: a type of government that concentrates power in the central government.

unite rule: a rule that the entire delegation to a party convention must cast its vote based upon the rule of the majority.

veto: to reject or refuse to sign a bill from Congress. This is the “check” that the president has on the powers of the legislative branch of government.

Whip: the party leader who is the “intermediary” between the leadership and the rank and file in the legislature.



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