Form of Government - US

- The United States, under its Constitution, is a federal, representative, democratic republic, an indivisible union of 50 sovereign States.
- With the exception of town meetings, a form of pure democracy, we have at the local, state, and national levels a government which is:
  - "federal" – because power is shared among these three levels;
  - "democratic" – because the people govern themselves and have the means to control the government; and
  - "republic" – because the people choose elected delegates by free and secret ballot.

From *Our American Government*, HDoc 106-216, p. 1

Basic Principles of US Constitution

- All States are equal
  - National government cannot give special privileges to one State
- Three branches of government
  - one to make the laws (Legislative Branch)
  - another to execute them (Executive Branch), and
  - a third to interpret them (Judicial Branch).
- "A government of laws, not of men."
  - No one is above the law
  - No officer of the Government can use authority unless and except as the Constitution or public law permits
- All men are equal before the law
  - Anyone can demand the protection of the law.
- The authority of the Government can be changed by changing the Constitution.
- That the Constitution, and the laws of the United States and treaties made pursuant to it, are "the supreme Law of the Land."

From *Our American Government*, HDoc 106-216, pp 2-3
We hold these truths to be self-evident,
- that all men are created equal,
- that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights,
  - that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness.
- --That to secure these rights, Governments are instituted among Men, deriving their just powers from the consent of the governed,
- --That whenever any Form of Government becomes destructive of these ends, it is the Right of the People to alter or to abolish it, and to institute new Government, laying its foundation on such principles and organizing its powers in such form, as to them shall seem most likely to effect their Safety and Happiness.
  - Prudence, indeed, will dictate that Governments long established should not be changed for light and transient causes; and accordingly all experience hath shewn, that mankind are more disposed to suffer, while evils are sufferable, than to right themselves by abolishing the forms to which they are accustomed. But when a long train of abuses and usurpations, pursuing invariably the same Object evinces a design to reduce them under absolute Despotism, it is their right, it is their duty, to throw off such Government, and to provide new Guards for their future security.

Legislative Branch - US Congress

- The Congress of the United States
  - Legislative and oversight duties
  - Consists of two Houses
    - The Senate and the House of Representatives
- Other organizations
  - Architect of the Capitol
  - Government Printing Office
  - Library of Congress
    - (supervises the implementation of copyright laws)
- Support agencies
  - Congressional Budget Office
  - Congressional Research Service
  - General Accounting Office
75. How does a bill become law?
(from Our American Government, 2000 version; H.Doc. 106-216; p. 30)

All measures must pass both the House and the Senate in identical form before being presented to the President.

- Measure introduced in the House
- Measure referred to committee(s) which holds hearings and reports measure to the House
- For important measures, special rule reported by the Rules Committee and adopted by the House
- Leadership schedules measure for floor consideration
- House debates and can amend measure
- House passes measure

or

- Measure introduced in the Senate
- Measure referred to committee which holds hearings and reports measure to the Senate
- Leadership schedules measure for floor consideration
- Senate debates and can amend measure
- Senate passes measure

75. How does a bill become law (cont’d)?
(from Our American Government, 2000 version; H.Doc. 106-216; p. 30)

All measures must pass both the House and the Senate in identical form before being presented to the President.

- One house agrees to the other house’s version
- House and Senate members appointed to a conference committee and agree to a conference report
- House and Senate exchange amendments to bill and reach agreement
- Conference report approved in the House
- Conference report approved in the Senate
- Legislation presented to the President

or

- If Congress is in session, measure becomes law without the President’s signature after 10 days
- Congress can override veto by 2/3 vote in each house
- If Congress is not in session, measure fails to become law without the President’s signature after 10 days (pocket veto)
Executive Branch

- Headed by the President
- Consists of various entities and organizations of largely an administrative, regulatory, or policy-implementing character.
- Most prominent are the 14 departments, whose heads compose the Cabinet
- A number of agencies (such as the Central Intelligence Agency and Environmental Protection Agency) plus separate smaller boards, committees, commissions, and offices created by law or Presidential directive.
- Immediately assisting the President are the agencies and entities of the Executive Office of the President.

Judicial Branch

- Headed by Supreme Court
  - Constitutionally Established
- Lower Courts Created By Legislative Branch
- "Jurisdiction" Determines Which Court Hear Cases
  - "Original Jurisdiction"
  - Appellate Jurisdiction
- Supreme Court
  - Original Jurisdiction
    - Cases involving Ambassadors..., and where a State is a party
  - Appellate Jurisdiction
    - All other Constitutionally defined judicial roles, or
    - Those defined by the Legislature

source: http://www.uscourts.gov/outreach/structure.jpg