

DBQ: US Congress: A Bicameral Nightmare?***Historical Context:***

Practically since the beginning of time, there has been a debate over whether or not to have a unicameral [one-house] or bicameral [two-house] legislature. Since the ratification of the US Constitution on September 17th, 1787, the US Federal Government has had a bicameral legislature. Article I, Sections 1-3 set up the creation of the bicameral legislature, "vested in a Congress of the United States, which shall consist of a Senate and House of Representatives." Later on, in Article V, it explicitly states, "no State, without its Consent, shall be deprived of its equal Suffrage in the Senate." Each particular chamber has its own set of rules, advantages and disadvantages, and differences. For example; Article I, Section 7, Clause 1 states, "All Bills for raising Revenue shall originate in the House of Representatives; but the Senate may propose or concur with amendments as on other Bills," Article I, Section 2, Clause 5 states, "[The House of Representatives] shall have the sole Power of Impeachment," and Article I, Section 3, Clause 6 states, "The Senate shall have the sole Power to try all Impeachments." These are just some of the differences between the two chambers, and the list is non-exhaustive. Every US state, (with the exception of Nebraska) has a bicameral state legislature as well. Outside of the US, there are democracies which use a unicameral system and democracies that use a bicameral system. Costa Rica, Portugal, and Hungary all have unicameral systems; while Germany, the UK, and Switzerland have bicameral systems.

- **Directions:** The following question is based on the accompanying documents in Part A. Part B will be the organization of your thoughts into an argument to use for a discussion. As you analyze the documents, take into account both the source of the document and the author's point of view. Be sure to:
 1. Carefully read the document-based question. Consider what you already know about the topic. Based on your current knowledge of the topic, how would you answer the question if you had no documents to examine?
 2. Now, read each document carefully, underlining key phrases and words that address the document-based question. You may also wish to use the margin to make brief notes. Answer the questions which follow each document.
 3. Based on your own knowledge and on the information found in the documents, formulate a thesis that directly answer the question.
 - a. **YOU MUST PICK A SIDE - BICAMERAL or UNICAMERAL**
 4. Organize supportive and relevant information into a brief outline.
 5. Write a well-organized essay proving your thesis. The essay should be logically presented and should include information both from the documents and from your own knowledge outside of the documents.

Question: *Should the United States stick with a bicameral legislature, or move toward a unicameral legislature?*

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- **Part A:** Examine each document carefully, and answer the questions that follow

Document 1

*One Chamber or Two? Deciding Between a Unicameral and Bicameral Legislature.*¹ pgs. 2,3

Advantages of a bicameral legislature:

- Formally represent diverse constituencies (e.g., state, region, ethnicity, or class);
- Facilitate a deliberative approach to legislation;
- Hinder the passage of flawed or reckless legislation; and
- Provide enhanced oversight or control of the executive branch.

Advantages of a unicameral system:

- The potential to enact proposed legislation rapidly (since only one body is needed to adopt legislation thereby eliminating the need to reconcile divergent bills);
- Greater accountability (since legislators cannot blame the other chamber if legislation fails to pass, or if citizen's interests are ignored);
- Fewer elected officials for the population to monitor; and
- Reduced costs to the government and taxpayers

1. Are there any problems you can see with bicameralism?

2. Are there any problems you can see with unicameralism?

¹ Benda, Susan, Patrick Henry, John Whaley, and Richard Verma. *One Chamber or Two? Deciding Between a Unicameral and Bicameral Legislature*. Rep. no. Legislative Research Series Paper #3. N.p.: n.p., n.d. National Democratic Institute for International Affairs. Web. 27 Jan. 2014. <http://www.ndi.org/files/029_ww_onechamber.pdf>.

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Document 2

One Chamber or Two? Deciding Between a Unicameral and Bicameral Legislature pg. 6²

"[In the United States] the length of time each member serves represents a major distinction between the two houses. The House of Representatives was intended to function as a body that would be "closer" to citizens and more responsive to their will. ... The Senate was conceived as a more deliberative body, intended to temper the politically impulsive nature of the House."

1. What has changed about the House and the Senate since the time the Constitution was written and now?

2. How long is a term for a Representative? A Senator?

3. What is the age requirement for a Representative? A Senator?

² Benda, Susan, Patrick Henry, John Whaley, and Richard Verma. *One Chamber or Two? Deciding Between a Unicameral and Bicameral Legislature*. Rep. no. Legislative Research Series Paper #3. N.p.: n.p., n.d. National Democratic Institute for International Affairs. Web. 27 Jan. 2014. <http://www.ndi.org/files/029_ww_onechamber.pdf>.

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Document 3

The Gridlock Illusion by R. Shep Melnick



1. What is the meaning of this political cartoon? How does this pertain to the idea of unicameralism or bicameralism? What problems are demonstrated in this political cartoon? What is this political cartoon depicting when each party controls a different chamber? (4-5 sentences, please).

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Document 4

*Bicameralism or Unicameralism?*³

"Pennsylvanian Benjamin Rush explained the rationale behind such arrangements: the legislature should reflect the "natural distinctions of rank," with one chamber based on 'superior degrees of industry and capacity' and the other to represent 'the men of middling fortunes.'

However, three states - Pennsylvania, Georgia, and Vermont - established unicameral legislatures in their initial constitutions. These states favored a simpler form of government in which there were fewer impediments to the enactment of the popular will. Benjamin Franklin, who favored a unicameral legislature, likened a bicameral legislature to 'putting one horse before a cart and another behind it, both pulling in opposite directions.' These unicameral states were also concerned about removing barriers to good legislation. To quote Franklin again: 'If one part of the legislature may control the operations of the other, may not the impulses of passion, the combinations of interest, the intrigues of faction, the haste of folly, or the spirit of encroachment in one of those bodies obstruct the good proposed by the other, and frustrate its advantages to the public?' Finally, the unicameral states rejected institutionalizing the divisions in society in separate chambers of the legislature - the legislature should represent the people, not social classes."

- 1. According to this passage, what was Benjamin Franklin's view on bicameralism?**
- 2. What were the reasons these states adopted unicameralism?**
- 3. Do these states still have a unicameral state legislature?**

³ Tarr, G. A. "Bicameralism or Unicameralism?" *Rutgers University*. N.p., Apr. 2010. Web. 27 Jan. 2014.
<<http://camlaw.rutgers.edu/statecon/publications/bicameralism.pdf>>.

Name: _____ Date: _____ Number: _____

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Document 6

Go to the following website, read the short article, (don't watch the video right now) and answer the questions below: http://nebraskalegislature.gov/about/history_unicameral.php



- 1. Have other states attempted to follow the Nebraska model of unicameralism?**

- 2. What did the Supreme Court have to say about representation for a bicameral system?**

- 3. What are some of the results of the Nebraska model? (state at least 3).**

Name: _____ Date: _____ Number: _____

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PART B: For this portion of the DBQ, you will need to take the ideas you came across through the sources and apply them to the Question, *Should the US stick with a bicameral legislature, or move toward a unicameral legislature?* Most of these documents above dealt with state legislatures, apply those principles to the national level, if possible. Use the persuasion map on the next page to organize your thoughts and facts into an organized web. Must be completed for use on the discussion portion.

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Persuasion Map

Write your goal in the first box. Write three reasons in the next boxes. List facts and examples in the branching boxes.

