



THE POLICY  
CIRCLE®

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# U.S. House

## Discussion Guide

### Let's get started

Each member is invited to give a **two minute reaction** to the brief answering the following questions. You may want to use a timer as you go around the room. And don't forget to decide who will take notes and post a discussion recap.

- What lens did you wear when reviewing this brief (e.g. personal, professional, etc.)?
- What did you find most interesting from reading the brief?
- What do you most care about regarding this issue?

### Let's discuss

- What are some of the advantages and disadvantages with the structure of the U.S. House of Representatives? Do you think the structure and process works? Why or why not?
- Do you know who your representative is and how to find out how he or she voted on a given issue?
- How could you participate in a committee hearing, or if you weren't able to travel to Washington, how could you follow a committee hearing from your home?
- Please share an example of a bill that was initiated by constituents, small businesses or groups.

### Let's act

- What legislation are we interested in following? How could we influence our Congressional Representative on an issue? If so, who could serve as point people?
- What organizations, legislators and journalists could we contact to ask questions, learn more and get engaged?
- Who can post a meeting recap of this discussion and be a resource to other circles on this issue?

# Key Facts

- According to house.gov “To ensure a separation of powers, the U.S. Federal Government is made up of three branches: legislative, executive and judicial. To ensure the government is effective and citizens’ rights are protected, each branch has its own powers and responsibilities, including working with the other branches.”
- The legislative branch makes laws, declares war, regulates interstate and foreign commerce and controls taxing and spending policies.
- Each House Representative is elected to a two-year term. To be elected, a representative must be at least 25 years old, a United States citizen for at least seven years and an inhabitant of the state he or she represents but are not required to live in the congressional district they represent.
- January 2017 started the 115th Congress, which will conclude on January 3, 2019. Each Congress lasts two years.
- As of September 2018, Republicans currently hold 236 seats in the House; Democrats hold 193 seats. There are currently six vacancies (due to deaths and resignations).
- 218 votes are needed to reach a majority vote.
- The Freedom Caucus consists of 36-38 members, as of 2018. Tuesday Group, moderate members, is made up of approximately 50 members.
- To contact your representative about an issue important to you follow these tips:
  - **Research.** Make sure you know your facts about the issue you are raising.
  - **Write.** It may come as a surprise in the digital age, but writing an old-fashioned letter to your local elected representatives or to members of Congress is still one of the most effective ways to influence lawmakers.
  - **Mobilize a group.** Work with colleagues, neighbors, friends and local organizations to mobilize an effort to bring attention to your issue to your local Congressional office.
- According to ProPublica, during the 115th Congress (January 2017 – present):
  - 12,334 bills have been sponsored: 8,167 House bills and 4,167 Senate bills
  - 239 bills have been signed into law