

**The Great Compromise**

Perhaps the greatest debate undertaken by the delegates to the Constitutional Convention in 1787 centered on how many representatives each state should have in the new government's lawmaking branch, the U.S. Congress. As is often the case in government and politics, resolving a great [debate](http://grammar.about.com/od/d/g/debateterm.htm), required a great compromise. In this case, the Great Compromise of 1787. Early in the [Constitutional Convention](http://americanhistory.about.com/od/usconstitution/p/constitutional_convention.htm), delegates envisioned a Congress consisting of only a single chamber with a certain number of representatives from each state.

The burning question was, how [many representatives](http://usgovinfo.about.com/od/censusandstatistics/a/apportionment.htm) from each state? Delegates from the larger, more [populous states](http://geography.about.com/cs/censuspopulation1/a/2003estimates.htm) favored the Virginia Plan, which called for each state to have a different number of representatives based on the state’s population. Delegates from smaller states supported the [New Jersey](http://usatravel.about.com/od/States/ss/New-Jersey.htm) plan, under which each state would send the same number of representatives to Congress.

Connecticut delegate Roger Sherman is credited with proposing the alternative of a "bicameral," or two-chambered Congress, made up of a Senate and a House of Representatives.

Each state, suggested Sherman, would send an equal number of representatives to the Senate, and one representative to the House for each 30,000 residents of the state.

At the time, all the states except Pennsylvania had bicameral legislatures, so the delegates were familiar with the structure of Congress proposed by Sherman.

Sherman’s plan pleased delegates from both the large and small states and became known as the Connecticut Compromise of 1787, or the Great Compromise.

The structure and powers of the new U.S. Congress, as proposed by the delegates of the Constitutional Convention, were explained to the people by [Alexander Hamilton](http://americanhistory.about.com/od/biographiesgl/p/alexander_hamilton.htm) and [James Madison](http://americanhistory.about.com/od/jamesmadison/tp/10-Things-To-Know-About-James-Madison.htm) in the Federalist Papers 52-66.

Today, each state is represented in Congress by two Senators and a variable number of members of the House of Representatives based on the state’s population as reported in the most recent decennial census. The process of fairly determining the number of members of the House from each state is called "[apportionment](http://usgovinfo.about.com/library/census/blcensus01.htm)."

The [first census](http://usgovinfo.about.com/od/censusandstatistics/a/apportionment.htm) in 1790 counted 4 million Americans. Based on that count, the total number of members elected to the House of Representatives grew from the original 65 to 106. The current House membership of 435 was set by Congress in 1911.