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Summary Article: **Senate**

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The framers of the U.S. Constitution viewed the Senate as a check on the more passionate whims of the House of Representatives. Known as the “greatest deliberative body,” the Senate has traditionally valued procedure over expediency, thereby frustrating action-oriented House members and presidents. Despite its staid reputation, however, the Senate has produced many of American history's most stirring speeches and influential policy makers. Indeed, the upper chamber of Congress has both reflected and instigated changes that have transformed the United States from a small, agrarian-based country to a world power.

In its formative years, the Senate focused on foreign policy and establishing precedents on treaty, nomination, and impeachment proceedings. Prior to the Civil War, “golden era” senators attempted to keep the Union intact while they defended their own political ideologies. The Senate moved to its current chamber in 1859, where visitors soon witnessed fervent Reconstruction debates and the first presidential impeachment trial. Twentieth-century senators battled the executive branch over government reform, international relations, civil rights, and economic programs as they led investigations into presidential administrations. While the modern Senate seems steeped in political rancor, welcome developments include a more diverse membership and bipartisan efforts to improve national security.

The Constitutional Convention

Drafted during the 1787 Constitutional Convention, the Constitution's Senate-related measures followed precedents established by colonial and state legislatures, as well as Great Britain's parliamentary system. The delegates to the convention, however, originated the institution's most controversial clause: “The Senate of the United States shall be composed of two Senators from each State, chosen by the Legislature thereof...” Although delegates from large states supported James Madison's Virginia Plan, which based Senate representation on state population, small-state delegates wanted equal representation in both the House and the Senate. Roger Sherman sought a third option: proportional representation in the House and equal representation in the Senate. Adopted by the delegates on July 16, Sherman's Connecticut Compromise enabled the formation of a federal, bicameral legislature responsive to the needs of citizens from both large and small states.

Compared to the representation issue, the measure granting state legislatures the right to choose senators proved less divisive to convention delegates. Madison dismissed concerns that indirect elections would lead to a “tyrannical aristocracy,” and only James Wilson argued that senators chosen in this manner would be swayed by local interests and prejudices. By the late nineteenth century, however, corruption regarding the selection of senators triggered demands for electoral reform. Ratified in 1913, the Seventeenth Amendment established direct election, allowing individual voters to select their senators.

As outlined in Article I of the Constitution, the Senate's primary role is to pass bills in concurrence with the House of Representatives. In the event that a civil officer committed “high crimes and misdemeanors,” the Constitution also gives the Senate the responsibility to try cases of impeachment brought forth by the House. And, under the Constitution's advice and consent clause, the upper

chamber received the power to confirm or deny presidential nominations, including appointments to the cabinet and the federal courts, and the power to approve or reject treaties. The Senate's penchant for stalling nominations and treaties in committee, though, has defeated more executive actions than straight up-or-down votes.

Within a year after the Constitutional Convention concluded, the central government began its transition from a loose confederation to a federal system. In September 1788, Pennsylvania became the first state to elect senators: William Maclay and Robert Morris. Other legislatures soon followed Pennsylvania's lead, selecting senators who came, in general, from the nation's wealthiest and most prominent families.

The Early Senate

The first session of Congress opened in the spring of 1789 in New York City's Federal Hall. After meeting its quorum in April, the Senate originated one of the most important bills of the era: the Judiciary Act of 1789. Created under the direction of Senator Oliver Ellsworth, the legislation provided the structure of the Supreme Court, as well as the federal district and circuit courts. Although advocates of a strong, federal judiciary system prevailed, the bill's outspoken critics indicated the beginning of the states' rights movement in the Senate, a source of significant division in the nineteenth century.

Between 1790 and 1800, Congress sat in Philadelphia as the permanent Capitol underwent construction in Washington, D.C. During these years, the first political parties emerged: the Federalists, who favored a strong union of states, and the anti-Federalists, later known as Republicans, who were sympathetic to states' rights. The parties aired their disputes on the Senate floor, especially in debates about the controversial Jay Treaty (1794) and the Alien and Sedition Acts (1798).

Negotiated by Chief Justice John Jay, the Jay Treaty sought to resolve financial and territorial conflicts with Great Britain arising from the Revolutionary War. In the Senate, the pro-British Federalists viewed the treaty as a mechanism to prevent another war, while the Republicans, and much of the public, considered the treaty's provisions humiliating and unfair to American merchants. By an exact two-thirds majority, the treaty won Senate approval, inciting anti-Jay mobs to burn and hang senators in effigy.

Partisan battles erupted again in 1798, when the Federalist-controlled Congress passed four bills known as the Alien and Sedition Acts. Meant to curtail Republican popularity, the legislation, in defiance of the First Amendment, made it unlawful to criticize the government. Ironically, the acts unified the Republican Party, leading to Thomas Jefferson's presidential election and a quarter-century rule by Senate Republicans.

The Federalist-Republican power struggle continued in the new Capitol in Washington. In 1804 the Senate, meeting as a court of impeachment, found the Federalist U.S. district court judge John Pickering guilty of drunkenness and profanity and removed him from the bench. The following year, the Senate tried the Federalist Supreme Court justice Samuel Chase for allegedly exhibiting an anti-Republican bias. Chase avoided a guilty verdict by one vote, which restricted further efforts to control the judiciary through the threat of impeachment.

Prior to the War of 1812, foreign policy dominated the Senate agenda. Responding to British interference in American shipping, the Senate passed several trade embargoes against Great Britain before declaring war. In 1814 British troops entered Washington and set fire to the Capitol, the White

House, and other public buildings. The Senate chamber was destroyed, forcing senators to meet in temporary accommodations until 1819. In the intervening years, the Senate formed its first permanent committees, which encouraged senators to become experts on such issues as national defense and finance.

When the war concluded in 1815 without a clear victor, the Senate turned its attention to the problems and opportunities resulting from territorial expansion. As lands acquired from France, Spain, and Indian tribes were organized into territories and states, senators debated the future of slavery in America, the nation's most divisive issue for years to come.

The Antebellum Senate

In 1820 the 46 senators were split evenly between slave states and free states. The Senate considered numerous bills designed to either protect or destroy this delicate balance. Legislation regulating statehood produced the Missouri Compromise (1820–21), the Compromise of 1850, and the Kansas-Nebraska Act (1854). While the compromises attempted to sustain the Union, the Kansas-Nebraska Act, with its controversial “popular sovereignty” clause, escalated the conflict between slave owners and abolitionists.

Senate historians consider the antebellum period to be the institution's golden era. The Senate chamber, a vaulted room on the Capitol's second floor, hosted passionate floor speeches enthralling both the public and the press. At the center of debate stood the Senate's “Great Triumvirate”: Henry Clay, Daniel Webster, and John C. Calhoun.

As Speaker of the House, Clay had overseen the formation of the Missouri Compromise, which stipulated that Missouri would have no slavery restrictions, while all territories to the north would become free states. Later, as senator, Clay led the opposition against President Andrew Jackson's emerging Democratic Party. In 1834 he sponsored a resolution condemning Jackson for refusing to provide a document to Congress. Although the first (and only) presidential censure was expunged in 1837, it sparked the rise of the Whig Party in the late 1830s.

Webster, one of the greatest American orators, defended the importance of national power over regional self-interest, declaring in a rousing 1830 speech, “Liberty and Union, now and forever, one and inseparable!” His views challenged Vice President Calhoun's theory of nullification, which proposed that states could disregard laws they found unconstitutional. By the time Calhoun became a senator in 1832, the Senate had divided between those who promoted states’ rights and those with a nationalist view.

The Mexican-American War inflamed the issue of slavery. Led by Calhoun, the Senate blocked adoption of the House-sponsored Wilmot Proviso (1846) that would have banned slavery in the territories won from Mexico. Fearing a national crisis, Clay drafted new slavery regulations. When Calhoun, now gravely ill, threatened to block any restrictions, Webster responded with a famous address upholding the Missouri Compromise and the integrity of the Union.

After Calhoun's death in March 1850, the atmosphere in the Senate chamber grew so tense that Henry S. Foote drew a pistol during an argument with antislavery senator Thomas Hart Benton. After months of such heated debates, however, Congress passed Clay's legislation. As negotiated by Senator Stephen A. Douglas, the Compromise of 1850 admitted California as a free state, allowed New Mexico and Utah to determine their own slavery policies (later known as popular sovereignty), outlawed the slave trade in Washington, D.C., and strengthened the controversial fugitive slave law.

Webster and Clay died in 1852, leaving Douglas, as chairman of the Senate Committee on Territories, to manage statehood legislation. Catering to southern senators, Douglas proposed a bill creating two territories under popular sovereignty: Nebraska, which was expected to become a free state, and Kansas, whose future was uncertain. Despite the staunch opposition of abolitionists, the bill became law, prompting pro- and antislavery advocates to flood into “Bleeding Kansas,” where more than 50 settlers died in the resulting conflicts.

Opponents of the Kansas-Nebraska Act formed the modern Republican Party, drawing its membership from abolitionist Whigs, Democrats, and Senator Charles Sumner's Free Soil Party. In 1856 Sumner gave a scathing “crime against Kansas” speech that referred to slavery as the wicked mistress of South Carolina senator Andrew P. Butler. Three days after the speech, Butler's relative, Representative Preston S. Brooks, took revenge in the Senate chamber. Without warning, he battered Sumner's head with blows from his gold-tipped cane. The incident made Brooks a hero of the South, while Sumner, who slowly recovered his health, would become a leader of the Radical Republicans.

The Civil War and Reconstruction

In the late 1850s, to accommodate the growing membership of Congress, the Capitol doubled in size with the addition of two wings. The new Senate chamber featured an iron and glass ceiling, multiple galleries, and a spacious floor. It was in this setting that conflicts with the Republican-majority House led to legislative gridlock, blocking a series of Senate resolutions meant to appease the South. In December 1860, South Carolina announced its withdrawal from the Union. One month later, in one of the Senate's most dramatic moments, the Confederacy's future president, Jefferson Davis, and four other southern senators resigned their seats, foretelling the resignation of every senator from a seceding state except Andrew Johnson, who remained until 1862.

Following the fall of Fort Sumter in April 1861, Washington, D.C., was poised to become a battle zone. A Massachusetts regiment briefly occupied the Senate wing, transforming it into a military hospital, kitchen, and sleeping quarters. Eventually, thousands of troops passed through the chamber and adjacent rooms. One soldier gouged Davis's desk with a bayonet, while others stained the ornate carpets with bacon grease and tobacco residue.

Now outnumbering the remaining Democrats, congressional Republicans accused southern lawmakers of committing treason. For the first time since Senator William Blount was dismissed for conspiracy in 1797, Senate expulsion resolutions received the required two-thirds vote. In total, the Senate expelled 14 senators from the South, Missouri, and Indiana for swearing allegiance to the Confederacy.

Within the Republican majority, the Senate's Radical Republican contingent grew more powerful during the war. Staunch abolitionists formed the Joint Committee on the Conduct of the War to protest President Abraham Lincoln's management of the army. Radicals demanded an end to slavery and investigated allegations of government corruption and inefficiency. They also passed significant domestic policy laws, such as the Homestead Act (1862) and the Land Grant College Act (1862).

When a northern victory seemed imminent, Lincoln and the congressional Republicans developed different plans for reconstructing the Union. In December 1863, the president declared that states would be readmitted when 10 percent of their previously qualified voters took a loyalty oath. Radicals countered with the Wade-Davis Bill requiring states to administer a harsher, 50 percent oath. Lincoln vetoed the legislation, outraging Senator Benjamin R. Wade and Representative Henry W. Davis.

In the closing days of the war, the Senate passed the Thirteenth Amendment abolishing slavery. After Lincoln's assassination in April 1865, the new president, former senator Andrew Johnson, infuriated congressional Republicans when he enabled Confederate politicians to return to power and vetoed a bill expanding the Freedmen's Bureau, which assisted former slaves. Republicans, in turn, enacted the Fourteenth Amendment, providing blacks with citizenship, due process of law, and equal protection by laws.

Chaired by Senator William P. Fessenden, the Joint Committee on Reconstruction declared that the restoration of states was a legislative, not an executive, function. Accordingly, Congress passed the Reconstruction Acts of 1867, which divided the South into military districts, permitted black suffrage, and made the adoption of the Fourteenth Amendment a condition of state readmittance. To protect pro-Radical civil officials, Republicans proposed the Tenure of Office Act, requiring Senate approval before the president could dismiss a cabinet member.

Johnson violated the act by firing Secretary of War Edwin M. Stanton, and the House of Representatives impeached him on February 24, 1868. A week later, the Senate convened as a court of impeachment, and on May 16, 35 senators voted to convict Johnson, 1 vote short of the two-thirds majority needed for removal. The case centered on executive rights and the constitutional separation of powers, with 7 moderate Republicans joining the 12 Democrats in voting to acquit.

While Johnson retained his office, he was soon replaced by Ulysses S. Grant, the Civil War general. Marked by corruption, the Grant years (1869–77) split the congressional Republicans into pro- and antiadministration wings. The party was weakened further when representatives and senators were caught accepting bribes to assist the bankrupt Union Pacific Railroad. And after two senators apparently bought their seats from the Kansas legislature, much of the press began calling for popular Senate elections to replace the indirect election method outlined by the Constitution.

Meanwhile, Republicans still dominated southern state legislatures, as most Democrats were unable to vote under Radical Reconstruction. In 1870 Mississippi's Republican legislature elected the first black U.S. senator, Hiram R. Revels, to serve the last year of an unexpired term. Another black Mississippian, Blanche K. Bruce, served from 1875 to 1881. (Elected in 1966, Edward W. Brooke was the first African American to enter the Senate *after* Reconstruction.)

The 1876 presidential election ended Radical Reconstruction. Although the Democrat, Samuel J. Tilden, won the popular vote, ballots from Florida, Louisiana, and South Carolina were in dispute. To avert a constitutional crisis, Congress formed an electoral commission composed of five senators, five representatives, and five Supreme Court justices, who chose Republican Rutherford B. Hayes by a one-vote margin. As part of the Compromise of 1877, Republicans agreed to end military rule in the South in exchange for Democratic support of the Hayes presidency.

The Gilded Age and the Progressive Era

During the late nineteenth century, corruption permeated the public and private sectors. While the two major parties traded control of the Senate, the Republicans divided between those who wanted institutional reform and those in favor of retaining political patronage, the practice of dispensing government jobs in order to reward or secure campaign support.

New York senator Roscoe Conkling epitomized the problem of patronage. In the 1870s, he filled the New York Custom House with crooked friends and financial backers. Moderates from both parties

called for a new method to select government workers. In 1881 a disturbed patronage seeker assassinated President James A. Garfield. The act motivated Democratic senator George H. Pendleton to sponsor legislation creating the merit-based civil service category of federal jobs.

In 1901 William McKinley's assassination elevated progressive Republican Theodore Roosevelt to the White House, while Republicans once again dominated the Senate. As chairman of the Republican Steering Committee, as well as the Appropriations Committee, William B. Allison dominated the chamber along with other committee chairmen. In a showdown between two factions of Republicans, Allison's conservative Old Guard blocked progressives' efforts to revise tariffs. Despite the continued opposition of conservatives, however, Roosevelt achieved his goal of regulating railroad rates and large companies by enforcing Senator John Sherman's Antitrust Act of 1890.

Prior to World War I, Progressive Era reformers attempted to eradicate government corruption and increase the political influence of the middle class. The campaign for popular Senate elections hoped to achieve both goals. In 1906 David Graham Phillips wrote several muckraking magazine articles exposing fraudulent relationships between senators, state legislators, and businessmen. His "Treason of the Senate" series sparked new interest in enabling voters, rather than state legislatures, to elect senators. But although the Seventeenth Amendment (1913) standardized direct elections, the institution remained a forum for wealthy elites.

In 1913 reform-minded Democrats took over the Senate, as well as the presidency under Woodrow Wilson, resulting in a flurry of progressive legislation. Wilson's Senate allies, John Worth Kern and James Hamilton Lewis, ushered through the Federal Reserve Act (1913), the Federal Trade Commission Act (1914), and the Clayton Antitrust Act (1914). As chairman of the Democratic Conference, Kern acted as majority leader several years before the position was officially recognized, while Lewis served as the Senate's first party whip. As such, he counted votes and enforced attendance prior to the consideration of important bills.

World War I and the 1920s

Following Europe's descent into war in 1914, domestic concerns gave way to foreign policy, and Wilson battled both progressive and conservative Republicans in Congress. On January 22, 1917, Wilson addressed the Senate with his famous "peace without victory" speech. Shortly thereafter, a German submarine sank an unarmed U.S. merchant ship, and the president urged Congress to pass legislation allowing trade vessels to carry weapons. Non-interventionist senators, including progressive Republicans Robert M. La Follette and George W. Norris, staged a lengthy filibuster in opposition to Wilson's bill, preventing its passage. Furious, Wilson declared that a "little group of willful men" had rendered the government "helpless and contemptible." Calling a special Senate session, he prompted the passage of Rule 22, known as the cloture rule, which limited debate when two-thirds (later changed to three-fifths) of the senators present agreed to end a filibuster.

The 1918 elections brought Republican majorities to both houses of Congress. As the Senate's senior Republican, Massachusetts senator Henry Cabot Lodge chaired the Foreign Relations Committee and his party's conference. Angered by the lack of senators at the Paris Peace Conference (1919), the de facto floor leader attached 14 reservations to the war-ending Treaty of Versailles, altering the legal effect of selected terms, including the provision outlining Wilson's League of Nations (the precursor to the United Nations), which Lodge opposed. The Senate split into three groups: reservationists, irreconcilables, and pro-treaty Democrats, who were instructed by Wilson not to accept changes to the

document. Unable to reach a compromise, the Senate rejected the treaty in two separate votes. Consequently, the United States never entered the League of Nations and had little influence over the enactment of the peace treaty.

In the 1920s, the Republicans controlled both the White House and Congress. Fearing the rising numbers of eastern Europeans and East Asians in America, congressional isolationists curtailed immigration with the National Origins Act of 1924. Senators investigated corruption within the Harding administration, sparking the famous Teapot Dome oil scandal.

Two years after the Nineteenth Amendment gave women the right to vote, Rebecca Latimer Felton, an 87-year-old former suffragist, served as the first woman senator for just 24 hours between November 21 and 22, 1922. Felton considered the symbolic appointment proof that women could now obtain any office. The second female senator, Hattie Wyatt Caraway, was appointed to fill Thaddeus Caraway's seat upon his death in 1931. She became the first *elected* female senator, however, when she won the special election to finish her husband's term in 1932. Caraway won two additional elections and spent more than 13 years in the Senate.

In 1925 the Republicans elected Charles Curtis as the first official majority leader, a political position that evolved from the leadership duties of committee and conference chairmen. Curtis had the added distinction of being the first known Native American member of Congress (he was part Kaw Indian) and was later Herbert Hoover's vice president.

The New Deal and World War II

The 1929 stock market crash signaled the onset of the Great Depression and the end of Republican rule. Democrats swept the elections of 1932, taking back Congress and the White House under Franklin Roosevelt, who promised a "new deal" to address the nation's economic woes. The first Democratic majority leader, Joseph T. Robinson, ushered through the president's emergency relief program, while other senators crafted legislation producing the Federal Deposit Insurance Corporation, the Tennessee Valley Authority, the Social Security Administration, and the National Labor Relations Board.

In 1937 the Senate majority leader worked furiously to enlist support for Roosevelt's controversial Court reorganization act, designed to expand the Supreme Court's membership with liberal justices. Prior to the Senate vote, though, Robinson succumbed to a heart attack, and the president's "Court-packing" plan died with him. The debate over the bill drove a deep wedge between liberal and conservative Democrats.

In the late 1930s, another war loomed in Europe. Led by Republican senators William E. Borah and Gerald P. Nye, Congress passed four Neutrality Acts. After Germany invaded France in 1940, however, Roosevelt's handpicked Senate majority leader, Alben W. Barkley, sponsored the Lend-Lease Act (1941), enabling the United States to send Great Britain and its allies billions of dollars in military equipment, food, and services. The monumental aid plan invigorated the economy, ending the Depression, as well as American neutrality.

During the war, little-known senator Harry Truman headed the Senate's Special Committee to Investigate the National Defense Program. Elected as Roosevelt's third vice president in 1944, Truman assumed the presidency when Roosevelt died three months into his fourth term. The new president relied heavily on Senate support as he steered the nation through the conclusion of World War II and into the cold war.

The Cold War Senate

The Senate assumed a primary role in shaping the mid-century's social and economic culture. In 1944 Senator Ernest W. McFarland sponsored the Servicemen's Readjustment Act. Better known as the GI Bill, the legislation provided veterans with tuition assistance and low-cost loans for homes and businesses. In 1947 the Republicans regained Congress and passed the antilabor Taft-Hartley Act (1947) over Truman's veto. The act restricted the power of unions to organize and made conservative senator Robert A. Taft a national figure. Responding to the Soviet Union's increasing power, the Foreign Relations Committee approved the Truman Doctrine (1947) and the Marshall Plan (1948), which sent billion of dollars of aid and materials to war-torn countries vulnerable to communism.

The Senate itself was transformed by the Legislative Reorganization Act (1946), which streamlined the committee system, increased the number of professional staff, and opened committee sessions to the public. In 1947 television began broadcasting selected Senate hearings. Young, ambitious senators capitalized on the new medium, including C. Estes Kefauver, who led televised hearings on organized crime, and junior senator Joseph R. McCarthy from Wisconsin, whose name became synonymous with the anti-Communist crusade.

In February 1950 Republican senator McCarthy made his first charges against Communists working within the federal government. After announcing an "all-out battle between communistic atheism and Christianity," he gave an eight-hour Senate speech outlining "81 loyalty risks." Democrats examined McCarthy's evidence and concluded that he had committed a "fraud and a hoax" on the public. Meanwhile, Republican senator Margaret Chase Smith, the first woman to serve in both houses of Congress, gave a daring speech, entitled "A Declaration of Conscience," in which she decried the Senate's decline into "a forum of hate and character assassination."

Nevertheless, McCarthy continued to make charges against government officials, and as chairman of the Permanent Subcommittee on Investigations, he initiated more than 500 inquiries and investigations into suspicious behavior, destroying numerous careers along the way. In 1954 McCarthy charged security breaches within the military. During the televised Army-McCarthy hearings, the army's head attorney, Joseph N. Welch, uttered the famous line that helped bring about the senator's downfall: "Have you no sense of decency?" On December 2, 1954, senators passed a censure resolution condemning McCarthy's conduct, thus ending one of the Senate's darker chapters.

A new era in Senate history commenced in 1955, when the Democrats, now holding a slight majority, elected Lyndon B. Johnson, a former congressman from Texas, to be majority leader. Johnson reformed the committee membership system but was better known for applying the "Johnson technique," a personalized form of intimidation used to sway reluctant senators to vote his way. The method proved so effective that he managed to get a 1957 civil rights bill passed despite Senator Strom Thurmond's record-breaking filibuster, lasting 24 hours and 18 minutes. In the 1958 elections, the Senate Democrats picked up an impressive 17 seats. Johnson leveraged the 62–34 ratio to challenge President Dwight D. Eisenhower at every turn, altering the legislative-executive balance of power.

Johnson sought the presidency for himself in 1960 but settled for the vice presidency under former senator John F. Kennedy. Although popular with his colleagues, the new majority leader, Mike Mansfield, faced difficulties uniting liberal and conservative Democrats, and bills affecting minority groups stalled at the committee level. Following Kennedy's assassination in November 1963, Democrat Hubert H. Humphrey and Republican Everett M. Dirksen engineered the passage of Johnson's Civil Rights Act of

1964. They did so by first securing a historic cloture vote that halted a filibuster led by southern Democrats Robert C. Byrd and Richard B. Russell. Johnson and Mansfield then won additional domestic policy victories, including the Voting Rights Act (1965) and the Medicare/Medicaid health care programs (1965).

The president's foreign policy decisions, however, would come to haunt him and the 88 senators who voted for the 1964 Tonkin Gulf Resolution. Drafted by the Johnson administration, the measure drew the nation into war by authorizing the president to take any military action necessary to protect the United States and its allies in Southeast Asia. As the Vietnam War escalated, Senator John Sherman Cooper and Senator Frank F. Church led efforts to reassert the constitutional power of Congress to declare war, culminating in the War Powers Resolution of 1973, which required congressional approval for prolonged military engagements.

Although the Democrats lost the presidency to Richard M. Nixon in 1968, they controlled the Senate until 1981. In 1973 the Senate Select Committee on Presidential Campaign Activities investigated Nixon's involvement in the cover-up of the 1972 break-in at the Democratic Party's National Committee office in the Watergate complex. Chaired by Senator Samuel J. Ervin, the select committee's findings led to the initiation of impeachment proceedings in the House of Representatives. In early August 1974, prominent Republicans, including Senate Minority Leader Hugh Scott, Senator Barry Goldwater, and House Minority Leader John Rhodes, informed Nixon that he did not have the party support in either house of Congress to remain in office. Rather than face a trial in the Senate, Nixon resigned prior to an impeachment vote in the House.

The Modern Senate

From 1981 to 1987, the Republicans controlled the Senate and supported White House policy under President Ronald Reagan. During this period, the Senate began televising floor debates. Televised hearings, however, continued to captivate followers of politics, especially after the Democrats regained the Senate in 1987 and conducted hearings on the Reagan and George H. W. Bush administrations.

In 1987 the House and Senate held joint hearings to investigate the Iran-Contra affair. Later that year, senators grilled conservative Supreme Court nominee Robert Bork, before defeating his appointment. Nominated for defense secretary in 1989, retired Republican senator John G. Tower suffered a humiliating rejection from his former Senate colleagues, and in 1991 Clarence Thomas survived the Judiciary Committee's scrutiny of his Supreme Court nomination despite allegations of sexual harassment by his former staff member Anita Hill.

In 1992, the "Year of the Woman," female candidates won elections nationwide, including five seats in the Senate, with Carol Moseley Braun serving as the first African American woman senator. President Bill Clinton's early domestic policy initiatives, such as the Family and Medical Leave Act (1993), reflected the influence of mothers serving in Congress. In 1994, however, the "Republican revolution" brought the Senate under conservative rule, and Republicans thwarted Clinton's legislative agenda while they investigated his public and personal activities.

In December 1998, the House of Representatives passed two articles of impeachment against Clinton: lying under oath and obstruction of justice regarding a 1994 sexual harassment case and an affair with the White House intern Monica Lewinsky. With Chief Justice William H. Rehnquist presiding, the Senate

convened as a court of impeachment in January 1999. Although several Democratic senators voiced objections to Clinton's behavior, on February 12 every Democrat, as well as a few moderate Republicans, voted for his acquittal.

The 1990s closed with a divided Senate, bruised from in-fighting and media reports criticizing the influence of lobbyists in Washington. While it did not reduce candidate spending, the 2002 McCain-Feingold Campaign Finance Bill limited “soft money” contributions and regulated the broadcast of issue ads. The bipartisan effort demonstrated that Republican and Democratic senators could work together to achieve common goals, although they rarely chose to do so.

The September 11, 2001, terrorist attacks provided an opportunity to unite the Senate in support of national security policies. Shortly after 9/11, Congress adopted the controversial USA Patriot Act, increasing federal law-enforcement and intelligence-gathering capabilities to the possible detriment of civil liberties. The October 2001 anthrax attack on the Hart Senate Office Building prompted senators and staffers to work together to eliminate vulnerabilities in the Capitol complex. But soon tensions escalated, as senators sparred over the ongoing war in Iraq.

Despite instances of acrimony throughout its history, the Senate has maintained a more cordial environment than the much larger House of Representatives. Institutional rules keep tempers in check, although lapses in demeanor occur. However strained, friendships “across the aisle” do exist and are helpful in forging compromises prior to important votes. In the years ahead, the Senate will continue to shape American society as long as thoughtful deliberation remains the institutions most distinguishing feature.

See also House of Representatives; presidency; Supreme Court.

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