Theme 6 THE POLITICAL SYSTEM

OF THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA AND CANADA

The United States is a federal state. The Constitution sets the basic form of government: it has three branches – legislative, executive and judiciary.

The legislative power is vested in Congress. It is made up of two houses: the Senate and the House of Representatives. There are 100 senators (two from each state) and 435 members (the number from each state depends on the size of the states population) in the House of Representatives. Both Houses must approve the bill for it to become law. But before each bill is sorted by a committee. There are 16 standing committees in the Senate and 20 in the House of Representatives.

The members of the House of Representatives are elected for two years, and one-third of the Senators are elected every two years for six-year terms of office. Each state, regardless of the population, has two senators, while the House of Representatives has more members from more populated states.

The executive branch is headed by the President, who proposes bills to Congress, enforces federal laws, administers national Government, makes treaties, serves as commander-in chief of the armed forces and appoints higher officers. The President is the head of the Cabinet which today has eleven members. At present the USA is headed by the 43d president of the USA, George Bush, and the leader of the Republican Party (2005). The President is chosen in nation-wide elections every four years together with the Vice-President. There are now 14 departments, including Treasure, State, Defence, Health and Human Services.

The judicial branch is made up of Federal District Courts, 11 Federal Courts and Supreme Court .Federal judges are appointed by the President for life.

Capital city

Washington, D.C., the city on the East Coast, was founded in 1791. It was named after the first American President George Washington .Today the population of Washington D.C. is over 3,4 million. Washington, D.C. is the seat of US Government. All organs of power are situated in the capital city.

Washington’s government buildings include the White House and the Capitol. The White House, the official home of the US President, was constructed in 1792-1829.It was built of stone painted white. Tourists can visit parts of it, including the Blue Room and the State Dining Room.

The Capitol which stands on Capitol Hill is the building where the US Congress meets.

Political Parties and Elections

Today, there are two major political parties in the United States, the Democratic and the Republican. The Democratic Party evolved from the party of Thomas Jefferson, formed before 1800. The Republican Party was established in the 1850s by Abraham Lincoln and others.

The Democratic Party is considered to be the more liberal party, and the Republican, the more conservative. Democrats generally believe that government has an obligation to provide social and economic programs for those who need them. Republicans are not necessarily opposed to such programs but believe they are too costly to taxpayers. Republicans put more emphasis on encouraging private enterprise in the belief that a strong private sector makes citizens less dependent on government.

The Republicans have more support among the upper classes while the democrats have more support among the working class and the poor.

The donkey has come to symbolize the Democratic Party .The Republican Party is represented by the elephant.

At the national level, elections are held every two years.

State and Local Government

Each State has its own constitution. Like the national government, State governments are divided into legislative, executive and judicial branches. There are State senators and representatives and state court system. Just as the President is the leader of the national government, each state has a governor as its leader. Below the state level of government, there are county and city governments.

Constitution

The Constitution of the USA was written more than 200 years ago. It was signed in 1789 by representatives from 13 states including some of the most important figures in early American history, George Washington, Alexander Hamilton, Benjamin Franklin and James Madison.

The Constitution defines a federal system of government in which certain powers are delegated to the national government; other powers fall to the states.

The American Constitution is based on the doctrine of the separation of powers between the executive, legislative and judiciary. The main text of the Constitution comprises seven articles.

Since the Constitution was ratified there have been 26 amendments to it.

Each state has its own constitution with an executive branch (headed by a governor), a legislative branch (headed by a state legislature) and a judicial branch (headed by a state supreme court).

**Canadian System of Government**

Canada is a federation under a system of parliamentary democracy and a constitutional monarchy. Its Head of State and Sovereign is Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II with the title of Queen of Canada.

The Queen’s representative in Canada is the Governor General, a prominent Canadian appointed by the Queen on the advice of the Prime Minister of Canada.

Both the Queen and the Governor General are primarily figureheads, with little real power as they almost always act on the advice of Canada’s Head of Government, the Prime Minister, who is also the government party leader who controls such tools of governance as party discipline and patronage appointments.

Federal legislative authority is vested in the Parliament of Canada, which consists of the sovereign of Canada, the Senate, and the House of Commons. The Senate has 104 members, who are appointed on a provincial basis and may hold office until they are 75 years of age. The 301 members of the House of Commons are elected by the people of Canada for a maximum terms of five years. Each electoral district elects one member of Parliament to the House of Commons on a universal suffrage basis.

The leader of the party winning the most seats in a general election is called upon by the governor-general to form a government. He becomes the Prime Minister and generally chooses party colleagues from among the elected members to from the Cabinet. Almost all Cabinet ministers are also heads of executive departments of the government, for the work of which they are responsible to the House of Commons. The Cabinet is responsible for determining all important polices of government and securing the passage of such legislation, financial measures, and administrative provisions as their supporters may approve.

Canada is divided into 10 provinces and 3 territories. The provinces have a reasonably large amount of autonomy from the federal government, while the territories have somewhat less.

The provinces are responsible for most of Canada’s social programs (such as healthcare, education, and welfare).

**Answer the questions:**

1. What kind of political system does the USA have?

2. What can you say about the US Constitution?

3. What branches of power are represented by the President, Congress and the Court?

4. Give the comparative characteristics of both houses of Congress.

5. Where is the seat of the US Government?

6.What kind of country is Canada?

7.How many provinces and territories are there in Canada?

8.What are the provinces responsible for in Canada?

**Task for independent work:**

Find material about symbols of American nation:

* The Liberty Bell
* Statue of Liberty
* The Great Seal
* Uncle Sam
* The Bald Eagle
* Mount Rushmore