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The two houses of Congress are much alike in their concern with local and special-interest legislation, their intricate legislative and parliamentary procedure, their tendency toward voting by blocks and interest groups in defiance of party ties. Yet the upper chamber has a character all its own.

Senators are a somewhat different breed of political animal from the average representative. Most of the members of the upper house represent larger and more populous areas than do representatives. They have much more political elbow room. A representative, elected by a smaller constituency both geographically and numerically (in most cases), may feel somewhat cramped by the necessity of devoting himself to the needs of a few interest groups and a handful of local party bosses. A senator, on the other hand, can often find more chance to maneuver in representing a broader and more varied constituency. He is less exposed to the consequences of minute shifts in opinion among smaller groups.

Senators tend also to have important places in their state political parties. Sometimes they virtually dominate those parties. Their party position often rests partially on their control of federal patronage dispensed to the state, and their patronage power largely rests in turn on the constitutional provision requiring Senate confirmation of major presidential appointments.

This power of the Senate to confirm nominations is important constitutionally as a part of our checks and balances system.