Q20 – Name one power of the U.S. Congress.

DOUGLAS GINSBURG, Federal Judge, U.S. Court of Appeals, D.C. Circuit:
The Constitution grants many powers to the Congress. Among the most important are writing laws, declaring war, and making a federal budget.

Individuals and businesses have to live within a budget: spending no more than they earn. Or eventually they will go broke. But the federal government has been deeply in debt for most of our history. In fact, the United States was born into debt. The Congress had to borrow money to finance the American Revolution. The debt mounted during the Barbary Wars in the early 1800s – then the War of 1812, which doubled the debt.
In 1835, President Andrew Jackson not only balanced the budget but ran a surplus and paid off the debt – which he called “a national curse.” Only in his administration was the federal government debt free.
Congress promptly went back into debt. Three decades later, the mammoth costs of the Civil War increased the debt forty-fold. In the twentieth century, the debt skyrocketed through a series of crises and conflicts: World War I, the Great Depression, and the laws creating government programs to combat it. World War II, the Vietnam War, and the laws establishing the costly programs of President Lyndon Johnson’s Great Society. And the arms race with the Soviet Union. Then came the War on Terror, the Great Recession, and the COVID epidemic.
So you can see how, in coping with these crises and conflicts, the major powers of the Congress often overlap: Writing laws, declaring war, and making the federal budget.