

Q24 – How many voting members are in the House of Representatives?

DOUGLAS GINSBURG, Federal Judge, U.S. Court of Appeals, D.C. Circuit:

The House of Representatives has 435 voting members. So how did we get to this number? We grew.

A state's delegation in the House is based on the size of its population: the more people, the more representatives. Article I, Section 2 provides that each state will have at least one representative, and no more than one for each 30,000 people.

The Constitution set the size of the first House of Representatives at 65 members. As the nation grew, the House grew based on the outcome of the census every ten years. After the first census in 1790, the

House ballooned to 105 members. After the next census: 142 members. By the early 20th century: 435 members.

The 1920 census revealed most Americans now lived in cities. Adding more representatives would have favored urban states over rural states. As a result, the Congress passed the Permanent Apportionment Act of 1929 – freezing the number of members at 435. The Constitution doesn't cap the number of constituents per representative – now at more than 750,000.

Some people advocate expanding the House of Representatives so that each member represents only 30,000 residents. The result would be more than 11,000 members – more like a stadium than a house.