

# Chapter 15

## Alabama's Government

### Chapter Preview

#### TERMS

bill, veto, criminal court,  
trial, jury, civil court,  
county seat, municipal,  
revenue, assessment,  
motto, maritime

**Above:** *The Alabama State Capitol is the main symbol of our state government. It no longer houses the state legislature, but the governor still has his offices here. It is now a museum, and it is open to the public.*





**We are a nation that lives under the “rule of law.” This means that our system tries to protect the rights of citizens from the wrong use of government power.**

**People must have rules to live together fairly and safely. The rules that people agree to obey are made into laws. The three main purposes of government are (1) to make and enforce laws, (2) to provide services that people need, and (3) to protect the rights and safety of its citizens. In this chapter, we will look at the role of government in Alabama.**

**We have learned to share in our communities by paying for things with our tax money. Taxes pay for government services such as roads to drive on, fire and police protection, and education.**

**We are citizens of Alabama. As citizens, we have rights. We also have responsibilities to play our part in making our state a great place to live and work.**



# Focus on Reading Skills

## Using a Table

### Learning

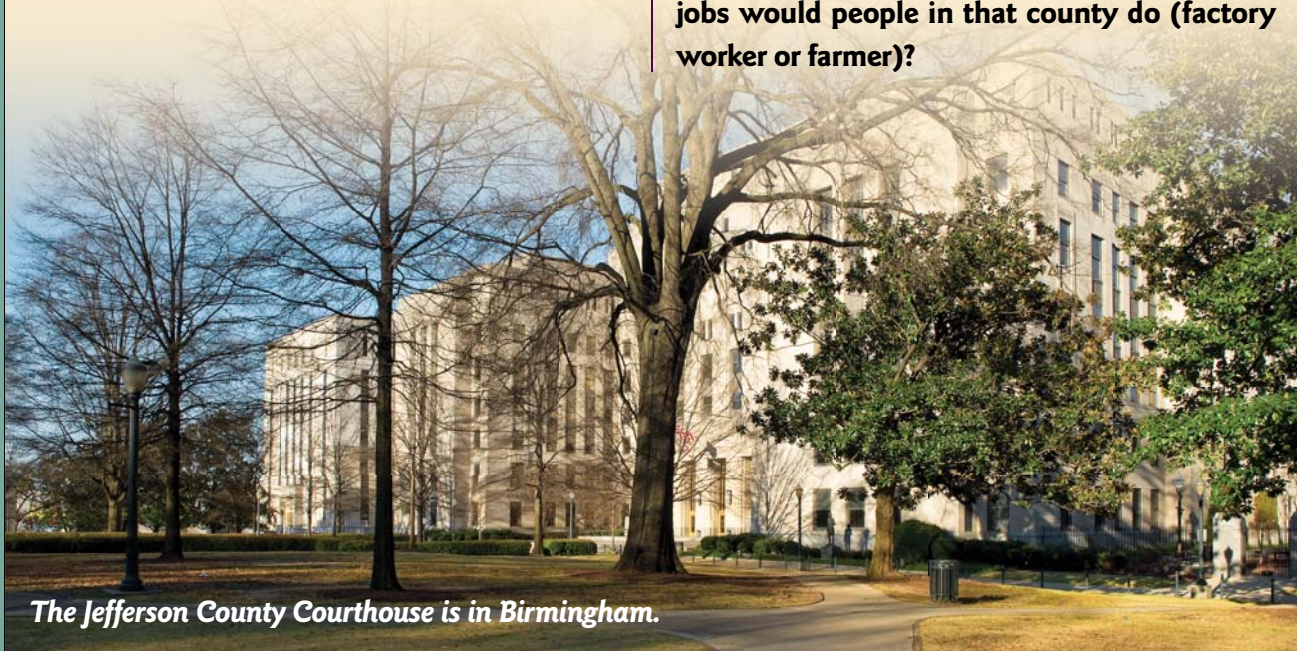
A table is a way to present a lot of information in a small space. People can find one part of the information without reading all of it. Tables usually present numbers. They are set up in columns and rows. Tables, like graphs, have a title and a source.

Look in the appendix at the table titled “Alabama Counties.” The title tells you what kind of information the table gives. For this exercise, you will only use the first three columns. The first column gives the names of all the counties in Alabama. The second column gives the area (size) of each county. The third column gives the population of each county.

### Practicing

Most people use a finger or paper guide to find a certain fact. Find the county with the largest population, the smallest population, the greatest area, and the least area. In which county would each person have the most land space? You may use a calculator. Divide the population into the land area. Find the land area per person in your county. Now compare it to other counties of a similar size. Is your county near the top of the list of those with the most area per person? Or is it near the bottom? Use your estimation skills.

What type of land would you find in a county with a large population and a small area per person (urban or rural)? Why? What kinds of jobs would people in that county do (factory worker or farmer)?



*The Jefferson County Courthouse is in Birmingham.*

# Section I

## The Levels of Government

### As you read, look for

- the levels of government;
- the three branches of government;
- which branch makes the laws;
- terms: **bill, veto, criminal court, trial, jury, civil court, county seat, municipal.**

**There are four levels of government in** our country: federal, state, county, and city. All of these governments work together for the health, education, safety, and well-being of their citizens.

### **Federal Government— Washington, D.C.**

The offices of the United States (or federal) government are in Washington, D.C. In Chapter 3, you read about the Constitution of the United States. You will remember that it defines three branches of government.

The *legislative* branch is Congress, which makes the laws. The U.S. Con-

**Right:** *The United States Congress—the Senate and the House of Representatives—meets in the U.S. Capitol.*





**Below:** On special occasions, the president speaks to a joint session of Congress in the chamber of the U.S. House of Representatives.



**Top:** The president runs the executive branch of government from the White House. **Above:** The U.S. Supreme Court is the nation's highest court.

gress is made up of the Senate and the House of Representatives. The president of the United States is head of the *executive* branch. The executive branch sees that the laws of the land are carried out. The *judicial* branch rules on the meaning of the laws. The courts are the judicial branch. The U.S. Supreme Court is the highest court in the nation.

Elected officials, the U.S. senators and U.S. representatives from Alabama and other states, work in the U.S. Capitol. The president works in the White House. The U.S. Supreme Court is in the Supreme Court Building in Washington, D.C.

## State Government—Montgomery

Alabama's first constitution was covered in Chapter 6. Today, our state government is organized under the Constitution of 1901. It is based on the United States Constitution. It tells just how the government will work. Our state government, like the

# Alabama Portrait

## Carl Elliott: The Education Congressman

**Carl Elliott was born in 1913 in Franklin County near Vina. He grew up there as the son of a tenant farmer. When he was just a child, Carl decided to improve himself. He thought the best way to do this was by reading books and going to school as long as he could. He set a goal of reading one book a week and continued to do this all of his life.**

While in high school, Carl heard a speech from the University of Alabama (UA) president. The president said that a poor but worthy (deserving) student could get a college degree at UA. After graduating from high school, the young Carl took him at his word and went to Tuscaloosa. He arrived at UA with just \$2.30 and lived for a while in an empty building. While at the university, he was elected president of the student body.

From 1949 to 1965, Elliott represented Alabama in the U.S. Congress. He had two main goals. He wanted to make it easier for all young people to get an education and to read books. The congressman had a special concern for the ones who grew up poor like he had.

Elliott authored the National Defense Education Act (NDEA). This law, which passed in 1958, gave financial aid to needy students. He also pushed through Congress the Library



**Above:** Elliott ran for governor in 1966, but lost.

Services Act. It provided more books for rural libraries and funding for bookmobiles. These “libraries on wheels” carried books to rural youths who lived far from public libraries. Carl Elliott was the number one “education congressman” for Alabama and the nation.

One of his greatest pleasures came from certain letters he received. They were from people who were able to complete college because of an NDEA grant. More than 20 million students have received the grants.

In 1990, Carl Elliott was the first person chosen to receive the John F. Kennedy Profile in Courage Award. The seven-term congressman died in 1999.





**Above:** Robert Bentley, a Republican, was elected governor in 2010. **Below:** Alabama's governor lives in the governor's mansion in Montgomery.

federal government, has three branches: executive, legislative, and judicial.

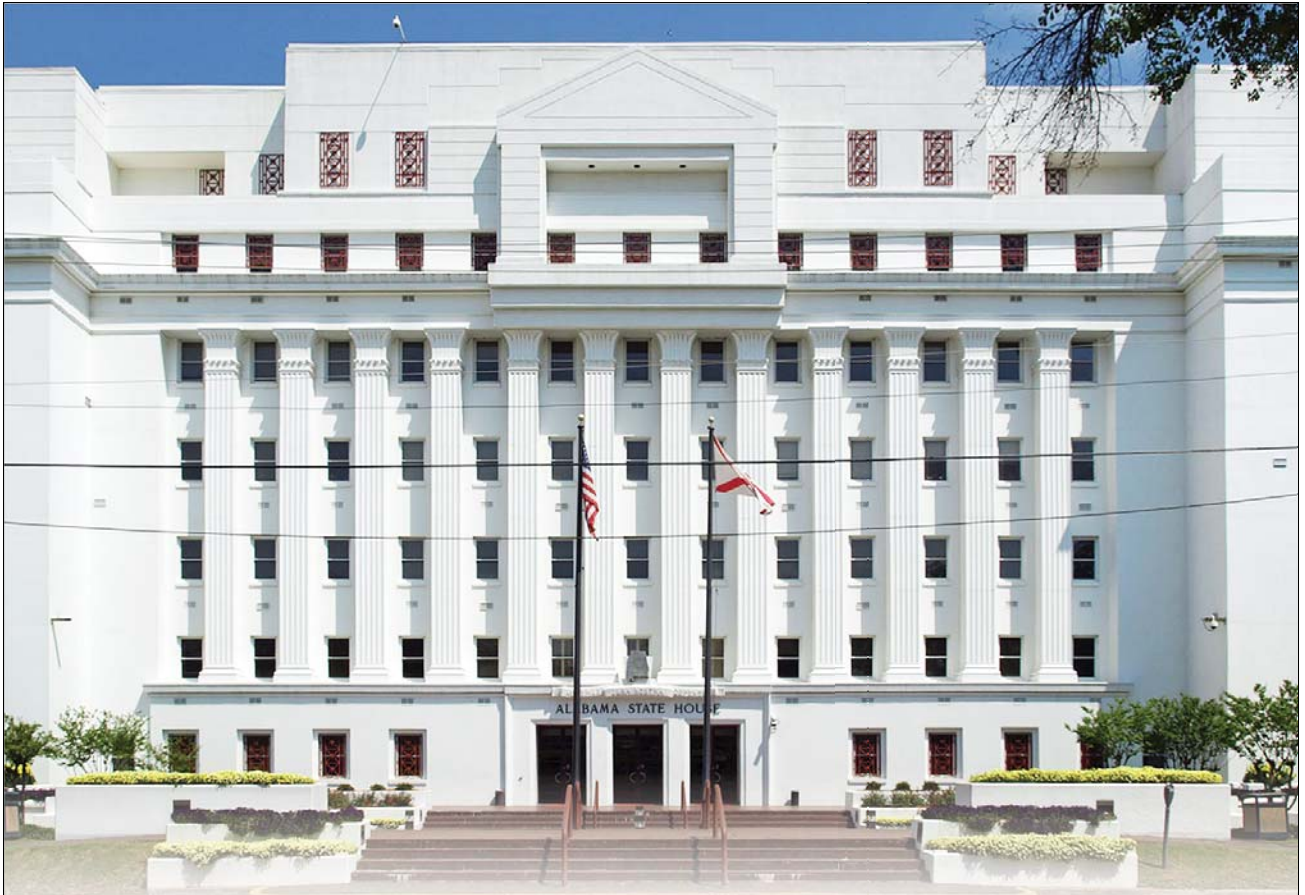
Alabama state government offices are in the state's capital, Montgomery. The governor works in the state Capitol. Our state senators and representatives work in the State House. The Alabama Supreme Court also works in Montgomery in the Heflin-Torbert Judicial Building. These places of work are public buildings and they belong to all citizens.

### **Executive Branch**

The governor is the elected head of the *executive* branch. The governor signs bills into law after the legislature passes them. If the governor dies while in office, the lieutenant governor replaces him or her. The governor and the lieutenant governor are elected at the same time to four-year terms. According to the constitution, a governor can only serve two terms in a row. Then the governor can be reelected if he or she waits at least four years.

There are other elected officials in the executive branch. They include the secretary of state, the attorney general, the treasurer, the auditor, and the commissioner of agriculture and industries. These officials do not make the laws. Their jobs are to make sure that the laws are carried out. They also work to make sure that the business of the state runs smoothly.





### **Legislative Branch**

The *legislative* branch is also made up of elected people, called legislators. These men and women are the senators and representatives of the legislature. Each senator and representative is elected from a district. There are 35 senate districts and 105 representative districts in Alabama.

The legislature creates new laws and makes changes to existing laws. A member of either “house” (the senate or the house of representatives) may suggest a new law. The legislators study the suggested law, which is called a **bill**. They find out how the people of their districts feel about the bill. Then after discussing it, both houses of the legislature vote separately on the bill. This is called *representative government*.

If both houses pass a bill, it still needs the governor’s signature to make it law. If the governor signs the bill, it then becomes a law. The governor may **veto** (say no to) the bill. The legislature may vote again on the vetoed bill. If the bill passes again, it becomes a law. That process is called *overriding the veto* of the governor. Then everyone in the state must obey the new law. If the legislature does not override the veto, the bill fails.

**Above:** *The Alabama legislature met at the State Capitol until 1985 when it moved to the Alabama State House. The 1901 Constitution said the legislature had to meet in the Capitol, so a constitutional amendment had to be passed to make the move legal.*



Senators and representatives serve four-year terms. There is no limit to the number of terms they may serve.

The legislature holds regular work sessions each year in Montgomery in the State House. If needed, the governor may call special sessions.

### **Judicial Branch**

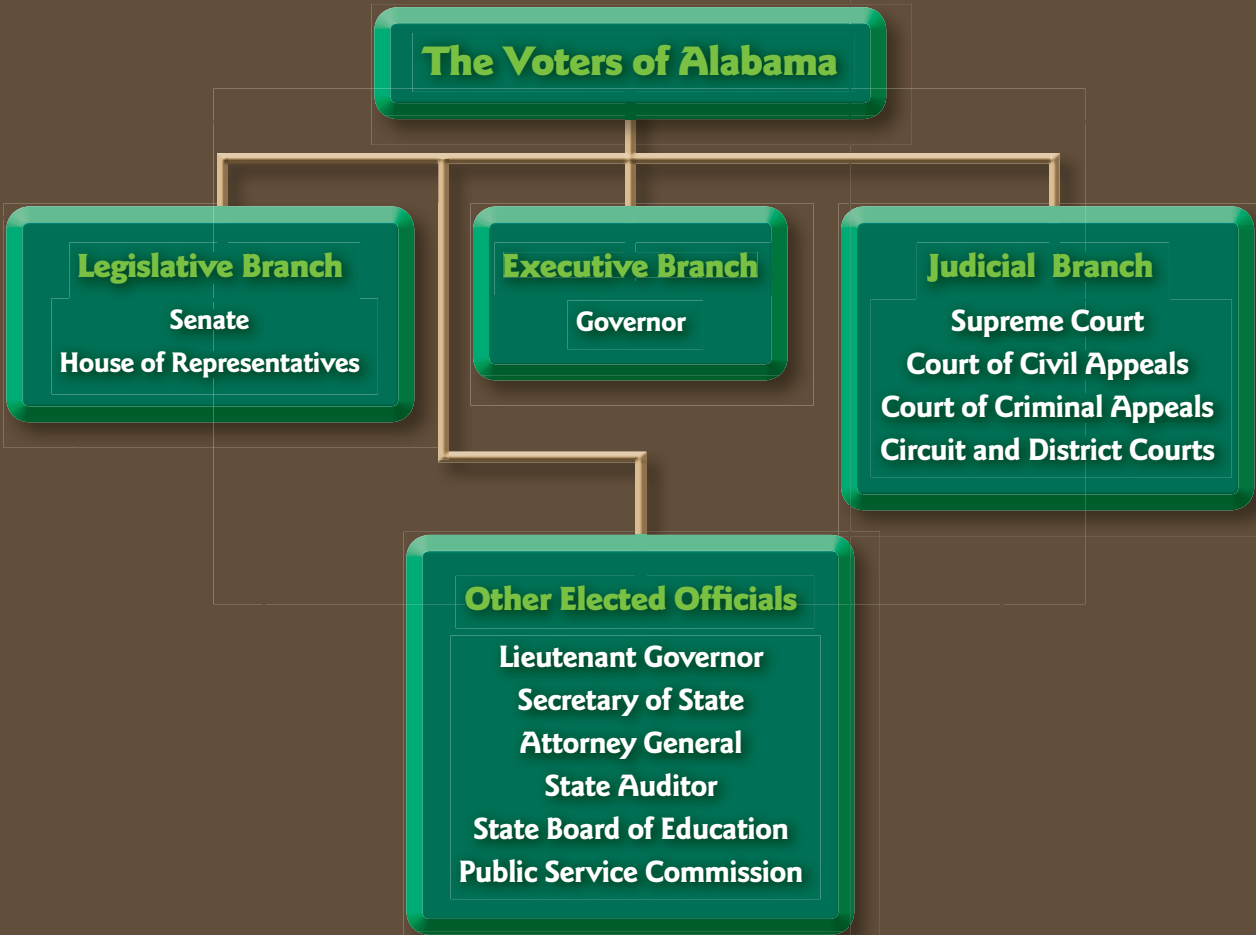
The *judicial* branch is made up of the state courts. There are criminal and civil courts. If a person is charged with a crime, that person will go to a **criminal court**. There, judges, attorneys, and others try to find out if a person has broken the law. If the answer is “possibly,” then the person goes to trial. (A **trial** is a legal process where the facts are studied.) At the trial, attorneys on both sides interview the witnesses. A **jury** is a group of citizens chosen to attend the trial. They listen carefully to all of the witnesses. The jury then decides if the person is guilty or innocent. People on a jury promise to make fair rulings on legal cases. It is a citizen’s responsibility to serve on a jury if called. When you are an adult, you may be called to serve on a jury.

The court system also rules on disputes between people. This court is called **civil court**. A person may feel wronged by another

**Below: The Alabama Supreme Court hears cases in this courtroom in the Heflin-Torbert Judicial Building, which was built in 1994.**



## Figure 33 Alabama State Government



person. For instance, one person may believe that another person owes him or her money. The person owed the money can take the case to court. The court decides which person is right. If money is owed, the court orders it to be paid.

The highest court in Alabama is the state supreme court. Its eight associate justices and one chief justice are elected to six-year terms.

Below the supreme court are the court of civil appeals and the court of criminal appeals. Judges in these courts are also elected to six-year terms.

Circuit courts, district courts, probate courts, and city courts are the third level of state courts. Whether judges are elected or appointed depends on the court.



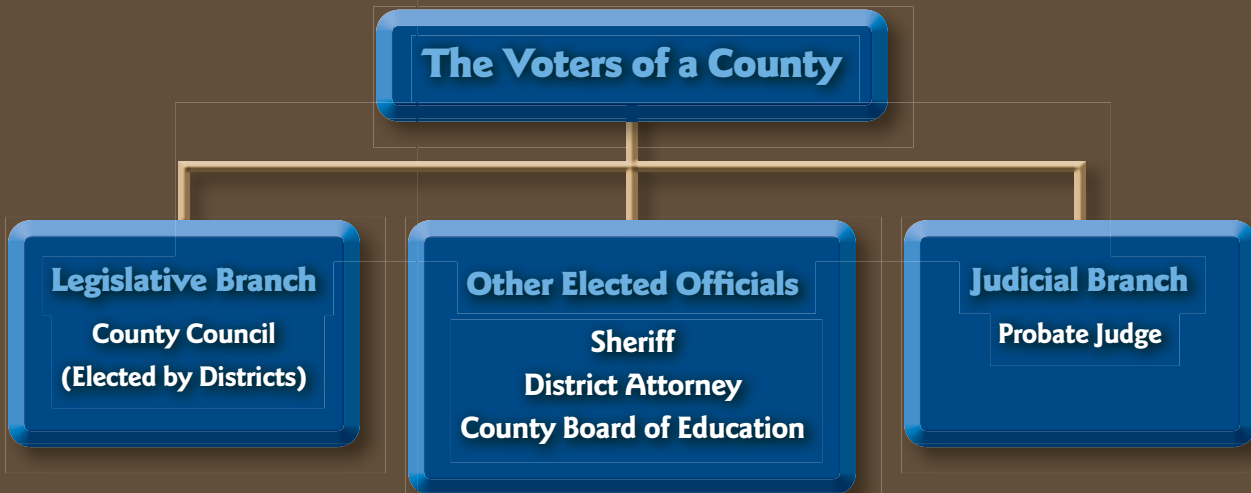


**Above:** *The Colbert County Courthouse is in Tuscumbia, the county seat. Tuscumbia was the birthplace of Helen Keller.*

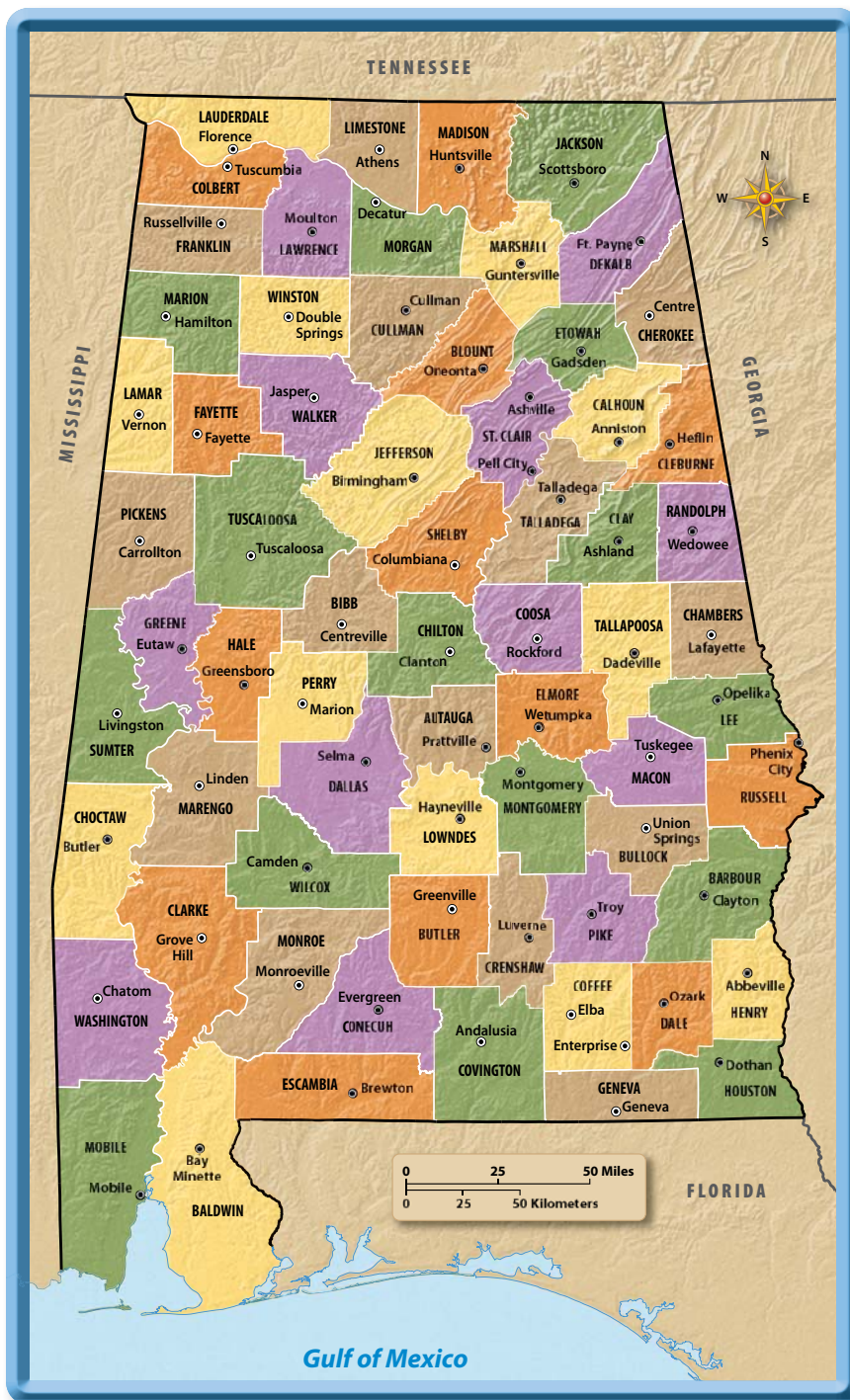
### **County Government—County Seat**

Our 67 counties also have governments. County offices are usually in the county courthouse. The **county seat** is the town or city where the courthouse is located. Some courthouses are old and historic, while others are more modern. But in all

## **Figure 34 County Government**







## Map 30 Alabama County Seats

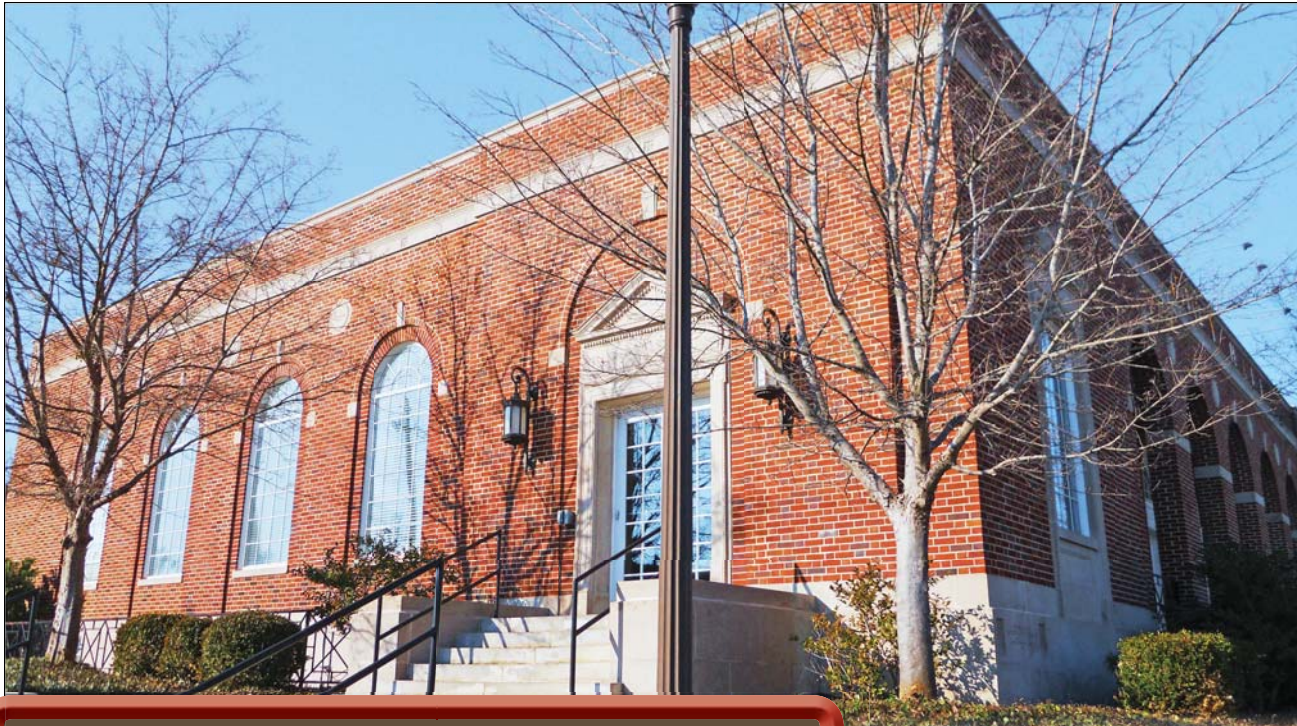
**Map Skills:** Locate the county seat of your county. Notice the locations *within the county* of the state's county seats. Why do you think that most county seats are located in the central part of the county?



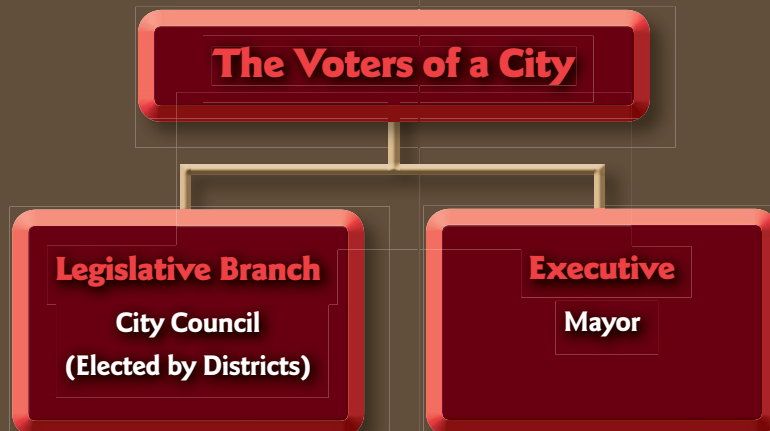
**Above:** The Macon County Courthouse is in Tuskegee, the county seat.

courthouses, the business of the people of the county is handled. This means it is where the county's citizens buy a car tag and register to vote. Citizens may get a building permit or pay their taxes at the courthouse. It is also where the county lawmakers meet. The county sheriff's office is sometimes in the courthouse. If the sheriff catches someone breaking the law, that person may pay a fine or go to court. The courthouse also has courtrooms where trials are held.





## Figure 35 Municipal Government



**Top:** *The Auburn City Hall, which was built in the 1930s, used to be the post office.*

### **Municipal Government**

Cities and towns have governments too. These are called **municipal** governments. You may live in a city or town with a mayor (executive) and city council (legislative). These officers of the local government usually work in the city hall. The police chief may have an office in the city hall. The city courts (judicial) may have a courtroom there as well.

### **Think It Through!**

1. List each level of government and its location.
2. What are the three branches of government?
3. Which level of government has the mayor as the head of the executive branch?

# Spotlight on Citizenship

## Election Day

### **What Are a Citizen's Rights and Responsibilities?**

- Good citizens learn about their government.
- Good citizens study the issues.
- Good citizens vote on Election Day. They choose the candidates they think will best represent them.

### **What Are the Requirements for Voting?**

- Be a U.S. citizen.
- Be at least 18 years old.
- Be a resident of Alabama.
- Be registered to vote in the county in which he or she lives.

### **Who Is a Citizen?**

- A person who is born in the United States.
- A person who comes to the United States from another country and becomes a *naturalized* citizen. (To become a naturalized

citizen, a person must live in the United States for five years and pass a test.)

### **How Does a Citizen Vote?**

- He or she goes to the polling place (voting place), and marks a paper ballot. Then it is scanned into a computer that counts the votes.
- The citizen can also vote by absentee ballot (if the voter cannot go to the polling place on Election Day).

### **What or Who Do I Vote For or Against?**

- You vote *for* the political candidate(s) of your choice. You may vote for many offices such as these: a mayor in a local election, a governor in a state election, or a president in a national election.
- You vote *for or against* important questions such as whether to raise taxes.





## Section 2

# Making It Work

### As you read, look for

- services provided by the government;
- how the government pays for services;
- terms: **revenue, assessment.**

**Below:** *The Muscle Shoals Board of Education Building used to be Howell Graves Junior High School. The building is on the Alabama Register of Landmarks and Heritage.*

### All levels of government depend on people to provide services.

It takes money to pay people who work for the government. The services also cost money. To pay for these workers and services, the various governments collect money from citizens.

### People and Services

In our form of government, we elect people to serve as our representatives. They decide for us what services their departments



will provide. At the state level, the legislature decides these things. Locally, agencies such as the county commission plan the services to be provided. The county commission is a group of citizens elected to manage your county. They decide things such as which roads to repair or if a new water treatment plant is needed. There are also school boards to manage the whole system of schools. The school board members make policies and rules for students and teachers. But our representatives do not usually do the work themselves. For example, county commissioners do not install water meters. The employees of the different departments and agencies carry out the work.

At the federal, state, and local levels, there are departments that provide a wide variety of services. For example, the Alabama Department of Conservation and Natural Resources runs the state parks. The department's employees watch the forests for fires and pests that kill trees. They protect endangered plants and animals.

Almost every part of our lives depends on an agency and its employees. Imagine your life without a government employee to help you and your parents. Your parents need a record of your immunizations. Your school needs to find a qualified teacher. You travel on a highway. Your parents buy food at the market. Your cousin needs job training. Government employees help with all of these needs. They keep records of all types such as births, deaths, marriages, and immunizations. They watch for our food safety. They teach at schools and colleges. Governments hire people to run airports, guard our prisons, and much more.

Your local government also has workers who do many things to make our daily lives run smoothly. These people maintain roads, repair broken traffic lights, and operate health clinics. The police officers and firefighters who protect you work for



**Above: DeSoto Falls is on the Little River in DeSoto State Park near Mentone. Alabama's state parks are run by the Alabama Department of Conservation and Natural Resources.**





**Above:** *Municipalities and counties raise revenue through property taxes. The property can be a building or land. Tax assessors decide on the value of the property.*

local governments. And there are your area's recreational programs and libraries—more services from government employees. Of course, you know that a local government runs public schools. The public schools provide buses and meals for students. They also offer sports and other programs for the whole community to enjoy.

## Revenue

Money, or **revenue**, needed to run the state and local governments comes from various sources. Governments get most of their money from taxes. The government uses the money to pay for the services it provides.

The state of Alabama collects revenue. When you buy most items, you pay a sales tax. People who live and work in Alabama pay a state income tax. The state also collects fees for services such as campsites and drivers' licenses.

Counties and cities also collect fees, sales taxes, and property taxes. A property tax is a tax charged on property owned, such as a house or land. The **assessment** is the amount the property is valued at for taxation. School districts get a part of property taxes.

Alabamians also pay federal taxes. Some of that comes back to the state and local governments. It pays for the interstate highway system and other federal roads. The federal government pays for all of the costs of the military. Schools receive federal money for many programs such as vocational (job skills) training. Assistance for students with special needs is another example of this type of program.

### Think It Through!

1. What types of taxes do you and your parents pay?
2. Why do governments need revenue?

# Symbols of Alabama

## As you read, look for

- kinds of spoken things that are symbols;
- kinds of visual things that are symbols;
- kinds of living things that are symbols;
- terms: **motto**, **maritime**.

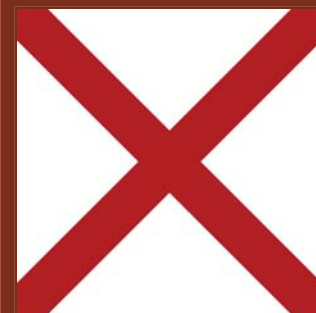
**Do you have a nickname? Maybe your nickname tells something special about you.** States have nicknames too. The nicknames often tell people something about the state. Alabama has several nicknames: “The Yellowhammer State,” “The Heart of Dixie,” “The Cotton State,” and “Alabama, the Beautiful.” What do these names tell you? When the nickname makes you think of Alabama, it is a symbol of the state.

## Spoken Symbols

The state’s nicknames are *spoken* symbols. Another spoken symbol is the state motto. (A **motto** says what we believe or stand for.) The Alabama motto is “*Audemus jura nostra defendere*,” which is Latin for “We dare defend our rights.”

Each morning at school, do you pledge to the flag and then sing a song? Maybe you sing “Alabama,” the official state song. It is another spoken symbol of Alabama. The words are a poem written by Julia Tutwiler from Livingston. She became homesick for Alabama when she was studying in Germany. She wrote the poem to remind the people of Alabama what a great state we have. Each verse has a different main idea. The last verse is about love:

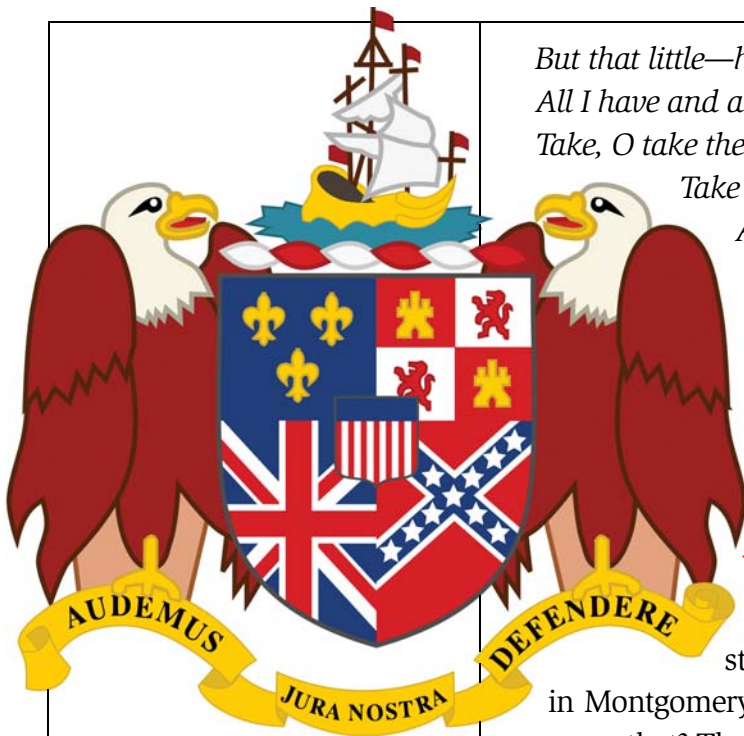
*Little, little, can I give thee,  
Alabama, mother mine;*



## About Alabama

**The state flag is the only one in the United States that may be shown as a square.**





*But that little—hand, brain, spirit,  
All I have and am are thine,  
Take, O take the gift and giver,  
Take and serve thyself with me,  
Alabama, Alabama, I will aye be true to thee.*

You can see all the lyrics of the song in this book’s appendix. Mrs. Edna Gockel-Gussen of Birmingham wrote the music. Alabama also has two unofficial state songs: “Sweet Home Alabama” and “Stars Fell on Alabama.”

### Visual Symbols

A symbol that you can see (visual) is the state flag. It flies over the dome of the Capitol in Montgomery. It was adopted in 1895. How many years ago was that? The design is the red cross of Saint Andrew on a white field. It can be seen from a long distance and is easily recognized. The state flag flies below the U.S. flag, a national symbol.

The Alabama coat of arms has a shield showing the five governments that have ruled Alabama: France, Spain, Great Britain, the United States of America, and the Confederate States of America. Two eagles, which symbolize courage, support the shield. On the crest (top) is a French ship, because the first colony in Alabama was French. The ship also stands for ocean travel because Alabama is a **maritime** state (one next to the sea). The state motto is part of the Alabama coat of arms.

The official state seal of Alabama was created in 1817. The seal has the shape of Alabama and its rivers to show the importance of our state’s waterways.

### Living Things as Symbols

Just as words and flags can symbolize a state, living things can remind us of our home. The Alabama legislature has chosen several of our state’s creatures and plants as symbols. Below are just a few of the living symbols of our state.

#### The State Bird

The state bird is a woodpecker called the yellowhammer, or yellow-shafted flicker. The yellowhammer was chosen because



**Top:** The Alabama coat of arms includes the state motto.

**Above:** The Alabama state seal shows all of Alabama’s major rivers.

of something that happened in the Civil War. The uniforms of the Huntsville troops had bright yellow trim. Some soldiers made fun of the Huntsville soldiers because of the yellow trim and called them “yellowhammers.” The Huntsville men were proud of their uniforms and proud of their nickname.

### **The State Tree**

What kind of tree do you see most in Alabama? You are right if you said the pine tree. The Alabama state tree is the southern longleaf pine. Pine trees are just about everywhere in Alabama. They are evergreen trees with leaves that are like long, thin needles.

### **The State Flower**

Another symbol of the state is the state flower. It is the beautiful common camellia, an evergreen flowering shrub (bush) from Japan. The color of the state camellia is not stated. Because Alabama’s official colors are red and white, most people choose red. What do you think?

### **The State Fossil**

To remind citizens of the state’s long history, Alabama has a state fossil. It is the fossil of an ancient whale. Since *Basilosaurus cetoides* was a whale, we know it was a mammal. That is true



**Above:** The yellow-shafted flicker, or yellowhammer, is Alabama’s state bird.



**Above:** The camellia comes in many colors and patterns.



**Above:** The southern longleaf pine is our state tree.





although *Basilosaurus* means “king of the lizards.” A fossil is not a *currently* living symbol, of course. It lived on this part of Earth about 50 million years ago and was 50 to 70 feet long. You can see part of “Basil” on display at the Alabama Museum of Natural History in Tuscaloosa.

### **The State Fish**

People love to fish in Alabama. The state saltwater fish is the fighting tarpon. The state freshwater fish is the largemouth bass. They represent or symbolize the many fish found in Alabama for recreation, food, and tourism.

## **Other State Symbols**

**There are other creatures and events that just seem to say “Alabama.”** Below are more official symbols of our state.

Amphibian — Red Hills salamander

Folk Dance — Square dance

Fruit — Blackberry

Game bird — Wild turkey

Gemstone — Star blue quartz

Horse — Racking horse

Horse Show — AOHA Alabama State

Championship Horse Show

Insect — Monarch butterfly

Mammal — Black bear

Mascot & Butterfly — Eastern tiger swallowtail

Mineral — Red iron ore (hematite)

Nut — Pecan

Outdoor Drama — *The Miracle Worker* (at the Helen Keller Festival in Tuscumbia)

Renaissance Faire — Florence Renaissance Faire in Florence

Reptile — Alabama red-bellied turtle

Rock — Marble

Shell — Johnstone’s junonia

Soil — Bama soil series

Tree Fruit — Peach

Wildflower — Oak leaf hydrangea

**Top:** Fishing for largemouth bass has become a popular sport. Prize money in fishing tournaments can be thousands of dollars.

### **Think It Through!**

1. Why do you think the state flag flies below the U.S. flag?
2. Do you think the camellia was a good choice for the state flower? If not, what flower would you have chosen?

# Focus on Pledging Allegiance

## *Pledge of allegiance to the United States flag*

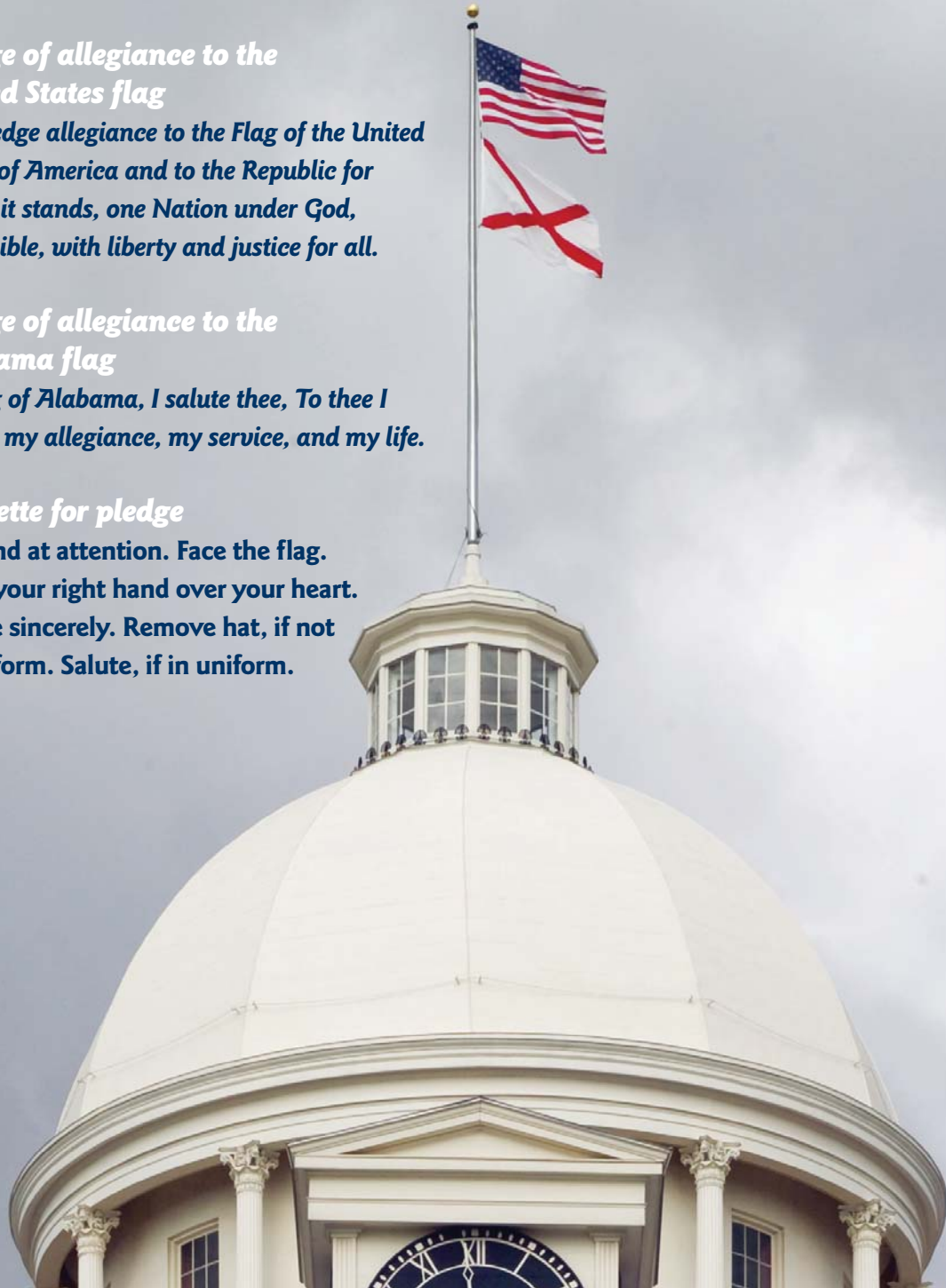
*I pledge allegiance to the Flag of the United States of America and to the Republic for which it stands, one Nation under God, indivisible, with liberty and justice for all.*

## *Pledge of allegiance to the Alabama flag*

*Flag of Alabama, I salute thee, To thee I pledge my allegiance, my service, and my life.*

## *Etiquette for pledge*

**Stand at attention. Face the flag.  
Place your right hand over your heart.  
Pledge sincerely. Remove hat, if not in uniform. Salute, if in uniform.**





# Chapter Review

## Chapter Summary

Government in Alabama works on both the state and local levels. There are three branches of state government: executive, legislative, and judicial.

The government that people have the most contact with is the city (municipal) or county government. Each level of government provides services to make people's lives safer and more pleasant.

Citizens of the state have rights and receive services. They also have responsibilities to make our state better for everyone.



## Remember

On a separate sheet of paper, write each word and give one example or definition. Example: Maritime—ships

1. Motto
2. Civil court (give an example of a case)
3. Criminal court (give an example of a case)
4. County seat
5. Municipality
6. Jury
7. Bill

When everyone is finished, the class should make a list of all the examples named.



## Reviewing the Facts

1. What is the highest court in Alabama?
2. Give an example of an elected official in the legislative branch.
3. Name two levels of government in Alabama.
4. How long is the term for governor?



## Using Critical Thinking Skills

1. Why do we need both a state and local government?
2. Why must citizens pay state and local taxes?
3. Why is it good to have most government officials elected?



## Making Decisions

1. Would you sign a bill for a needed law if the state did not have the money to pay for it? Why or why not?
2. If you could be a government official, which one would you choose? Why? How would you prepare yourself for the job?



## Projects

1. You are running for public office. List all the steps you need to take to get elected. Your list should include making signs and speeches.
2. Design and create a campaign poster for a candidate for governor of Alabama. It might be you.



## Writing

Write and give a campaign speech for yourself.



## Preparing for Tests

*Multiple Choice*—These questions are like those you may see in tests. Write your answers on a separate sheet of paper.

1. Which of the following services is paired with the correct provider? (Remember, public services are paid for with taxpayer money.)
  - A. City fire protection—private
  - B. County health worker—public
  - C. Local fast food service—public
  - D. Police service—private
2. Consider the levels of government. At which level would a sheriff serve?
  - A. Federal
  - B. State
  - C. County
  - D. City



## Using Technology

You are going to explore the state's websites and find out more about the levels of government.

1. Go to [Alabama.gov](http://Alabama.gov)

Look under the heading Government. Click a level of government from the list. Read the material and tell your class what you learned.

2. Go to [Alabamavotes.gov](http://Alabamavotes.gov)

Go to Register to Vote, then download the Alabama Mail-In Voter Registration Form. Print the form. Of course, you are not 18 years old yet, but this is good practice. You may vote when you are 18, but you must have registered before Election Day. Complete as many of the blanks on the form as possible. Then check your form. Did you fill in the blanks correctly?