

## 7. Congress moves too slowly

Critics throughout history have complained that Congress moves too slowly. These critics say that Congress can't get things done:

- Congress is prone to conflict.
- Legislators are always bickering.
- And the institution is mired in gridlock.

There is a kernel of truth to this criticism. The framers of the Constitution certainly were careful to design the Congress to prevent rash action.

And political compromise does take a long time to reach, especially given the diversity of our nation's economic, ethnic, and racial interests; and given that the House, Senate, and president all have to agree to legislation for it to be enacted. So we shouldn't expect or even want Congress to march swiftly and quietly behind party leaders or behind the president.

But the criticism that Congress can't get things done is also a misperception.

Congress does routinely rise to the occasion to address pressing issues on the nation's agenda. Consider these examples from Congress's history:

- Congress paved the way to the west in the nation's formative years. It funded the building of roads, canals, ports and railroads.
- Congress provided for the defense of the nation in both world wars of the 20th century.
- And Congress tackled the inequities of race and protected civil rights, ensuring the right to vote for all Americans in the 1960s.
- Congress has legislated on almost every facet of our lives as Americans:
- Congress passed landmark acts to clean nation's airs and waters.
- Congress funded construction of the nation's interstate highway system.
- Congress passed landmark laws to provide the elderly with retirement security and health care.
- And Congress acted swiftly and decisively in the days after September 11th to provide for the recovery of New York and Washington and to bolster our nation's defenses against terrorism.

I have no doubt that other political systems may move more swiftly than does the U.S. Congress. And at times we might wish that our own Congress would move faster.

But solving public problems -- in an effective and democratic way is not an easy task. Yet Congress has proven able over its history to respond to the challenges of the nation.