

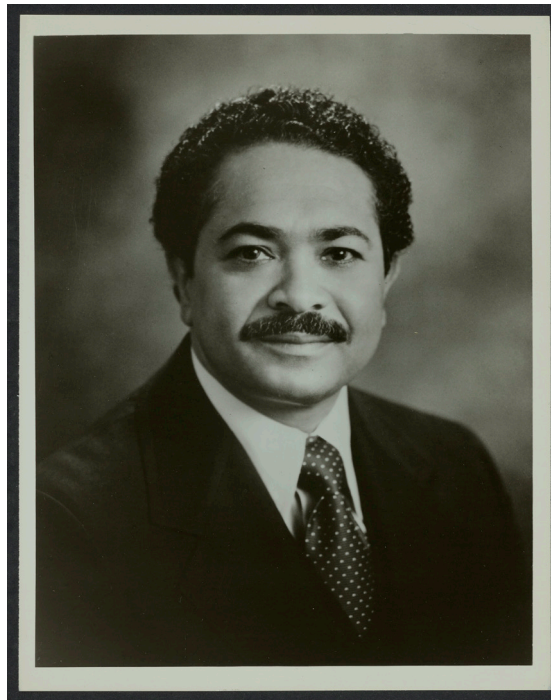
# *Elected Officials: Mervyn M. Dymally & Today*

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## **INTRODUCTION** – Mervyn M. Dymally

Mervyn M. Dymally (Die muh lee) was born in a country called Trinidad and Tobago in 1926. When Mervyn was 19 years old, he **immigrated** to the United States. After **graduating** from **Cal State LA**, Mervyn taught children in Los Angeles, California. He thought it was unfair that the school's textbooks did not include the history of some **communities**. Mervyn wanted to change this because he believed that all people should be represented accurately and treated **equally**.

After teaching children, Mervyn became a politician. A politician is someone who is **elected** to work in **government**. As a politician, Mervyn worked hard to make sure that the history of Black people was included in California's textbooks. He also fought for the **rights** of people of color, people with **disabilities**, people in jail or prison, and women. Mervyn was a change-maker because he helped people from many different communities throughout his life. Mervyn lived to be 86 years old.



## ***Glossary***

**Cal State LA:** a college in East Los Angeles

**Communities:** groups of people who have something in common such as culture, ethnicity, interests, location, race, or religion

**Disabilities:** a physical or mental condition that stops someone from being able to do things or makes it more difficult

**Elected:** to choose someone to do something through voting

**Equally:** the same

**Government:** the group of people who control and make decisions for a city, state, country, etc.

**Graduating:** finishing a level of school

**Immigrated:** moved from one country to another

**Rights:** benefits and privileges a person is given by the government or because all humans deserve it

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## **PART 1** - Communities

After learning about the many communities that Mervyn helped, think about the different communities that you are a part of. Communities come in all shapes and sizes. Family members form a family community. People who live in the same neighborhood are part of a neighborhood community. Teachers, students, and other school staff members belong to a school community. Children on a baseball team form a baseball team community. People who go to the same church are part of a church community. Because there are so many different types of communities, many people can be a member of more than one community. Think about the different communities that you are a part of.

Which communities are you a part of? Write the names of the communities that you are a member of in the space provided or on a separate document.

The communities that I am a member of are \_\_\_\_\_

Some community members are also decision-makers. In a school community, your teacher makes decisions about what you will learn in class. In a city community, elected **officials** make decisions about how money is spent.

Who makes decisions in the communities you belong to? Write the names of the decision-makers in your communities in the space provided or on a separate document.

The people who make decisions in my communities are \_\_\_\_\_

## **PART 2** - Representatives in Government

A community based on location is made up of people who live, work, and/or go to school near each other. A community may be small enough for everyone to know each other, like the people who live on your street. Or, a community may be bigger like your city, state, or even your country. Communities share space and **resources** and have to make decisions about their shared resources. They also make **laws** and/or rules that everyone is supposed to follow to keep the community happy and safe.

People in a community sometimes choose someone to speak or act for the group. These people are called **representatives**. Government representatives listen to people in their community to understand their needs, issues, and problems. Sometimes things happen where people in the government must step in to solve problems. The United States government is called a representative **democracy** because each **citizen** has a say in who is chosen to represent (speak or act for) them. Let's take a look at how the United States government works on the next page.

### ***Glossary***

**Citizen:** a person who is a full member of a community (e.g., town, city, state, country) either because they were born there or given citizenship at a later time

**Democracy:** a type of government run by the people

**Laws:** rules that a community such as a neighborhood, city, state, or country creates for members to follow

**Officials:** people who hold an office like a Governor or the President of the United States

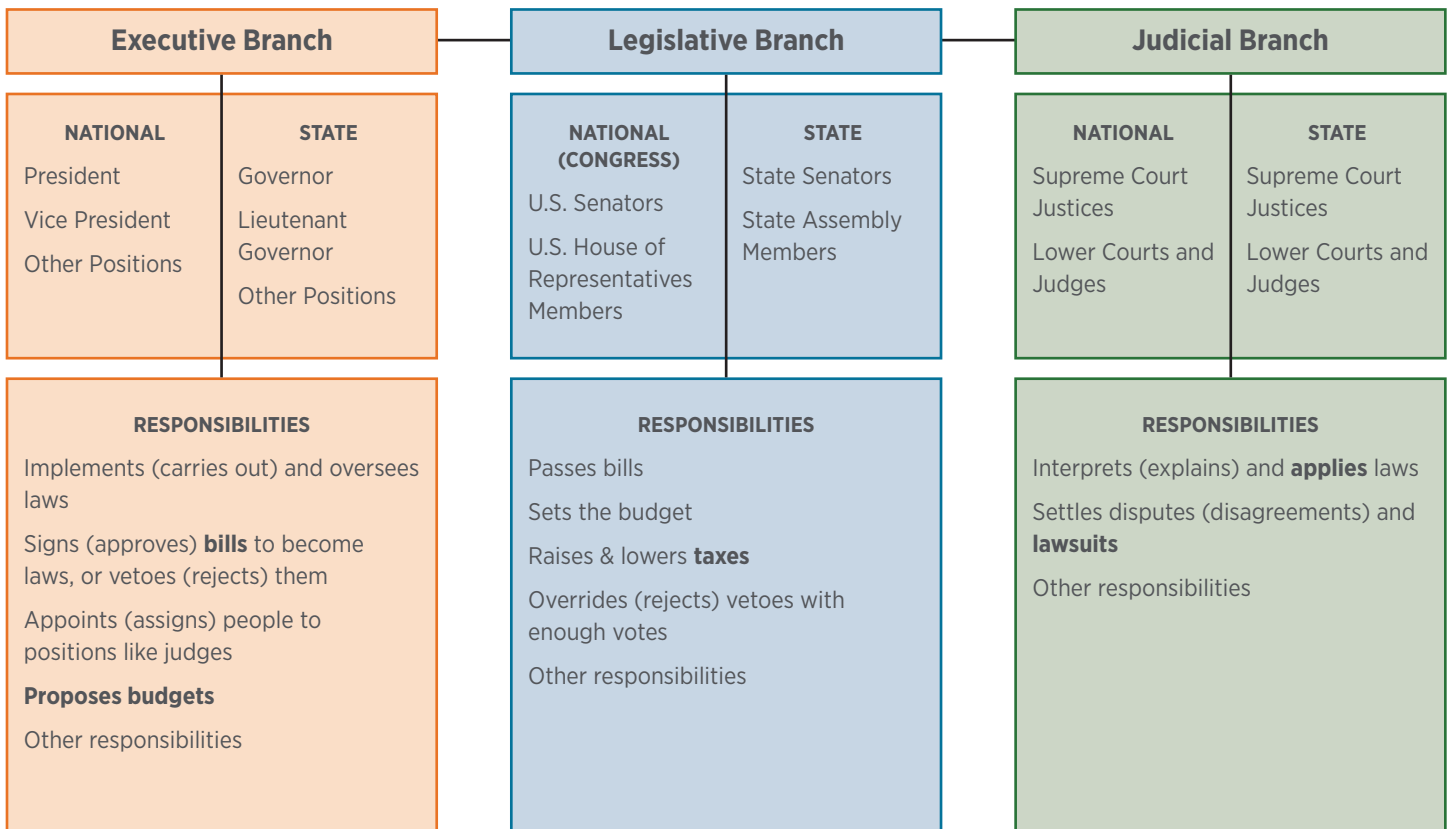
**Representatives:** people who act or speak for someone or for a group of people

**Resources:** stocks of materials, money, staff, and other items

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## PART 3 - How the United States Government Works

At the **national** level and at the state level, the government is split into three branches, or areas, including the executive, legislative, and judicial branches. Dividing up the work of the government creates **checks and balances** to make sure that no one branch has too much power or control over the government. Look at the chart below to learn more about the different jobs in each branch and their responsibilities. (Some of the information in the chart may vary by state.)



*As you learn about the different government jobs that Mervyn had on the next page, circle the names of the jobs that Mervyn had on the chart above.*

### Glossary

**Applies:** puts to use

**Bills:** suggested laws

**Budgets:** the amount of money to be spent on specific things

**Checks and balances:** a system that allows the different branches of government to check the actions of the other branches so that their power is balanced

**Lawsuits:** when a person, group of people, or organization takes another person, group of people, or organization to court to have a disagreement decided by a judge or by a jury

**National:** having to do with a nation

**Proposes:** puts forward an idea

**Taxes:** money that people and businesses give to the government

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## **PART 4** - Mervyn and His Jobs

Mervyn is an example of someone who worked as a government representative. He was elected to several different jobs in government during his life. First, Mervyn was elected by his local community to represent them in the California state government as a State Assembly Member (1963-1966) and then a State Senator (1967-1975). Next, he was elected by people all across California to be the Lieutenant (loo-ten-ant) Governor (1975-1979). Later in his life, Mervyn was again elected by his local community, but this time to represent them to the whole country as a United States House of Representatives Member (1981-1993). For Mervyn's last elected job, he returned to California again as a State Assembly Member (2002-2008).

Find the names of the jobs that Mervyn had by looking at the underlined words in the paragraph above. Then circle the names of the jobs that Mervyn had on the chart in PART 3. After circling the names of Mervyn's jobs on the chart, answer the question below. Write your answer to the question in the space provided or on a separate document.

Which two branches of government did Mervyn work in? Did he work in the executive branch, legislative branch, and/or judicial branch? (Hint: Look at the chart in PART 3 to help you answer this question.)

The two branches of government that Mervyn worked in were \_\_\_\_\_

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Learn more about the different government roles that Mervyn had as an elected government representative by reading the descriptions below. (Some of the information in the descriptions may vary by state.)

United States House of Representatives Member - The United States House of Representatives includes people elected from districts (areas) in every state to make laws for the country that people in that community want and need. They work with United States Senators to do things like pass bills, make budgets, and change taxes. The number of United States House of Representatives members is based on the population (number of people living in an area) of the state. California has a large population and has about 52 members. Hawai'i has a small population and has about two members. The members are elected for two years at a time and are a part of the legislative branch.

State Assembly Member - The State Assembly is like the United States House of Representatives, but it makes decisions that affect only the state. California has about 80 State Assembly Members who are elected for two years at a time. They are also a part of the legislative branch.

State Senator - A State Senator is like a United States Senator. Each state has two United States Senators who are elected for six years at a time, and they work with the United States House of Representatives to do things like pass bills, make budgets, and change taxes. Instead of making decisions that affect the whole country like a United States Senator does, a State Senator makes decisions that affect only the state. California has about 40 State Senators who are elected for four years at a time. They are also a part of the legislative branch.

Lieutenant Governor - A Lieutenant Governor is the second highest position in the state after the Governor and takes the Governor's place as the head of the state government in case of disability, death, or for other reasons. Lieutenant Governors are elected for four years at a time and are a part of the executive branch.



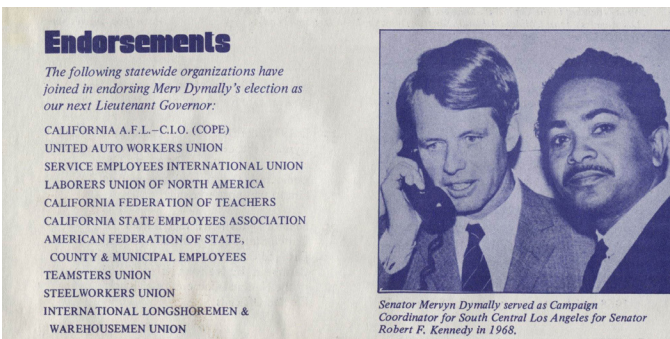
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## PART 4 CONTINUED - Mervyn and His Jobs

We can learn even more about Mervyn and his jobs by looking closely at some objects that belonged to him. The objects below are connected to the different government jobs that Mervyn was elected to. Look closely at each of the objects. Then read the descriptions underneath each object.



1) This object is a photograph of California State Assembly Members. Mervyn is pictured third from the right in the front row of this photograph. Mervyn was a California State Assembly Member from 1963-1966 and 2002-2008.



3) This object is a newspaper article. It mentions the organizations that endorsed (approved of) Mervyn's election as Lieutenant Governor. Mervyn is pictured on the right in the photograph. He was the Lieutenant Governor of California from 1975-1979.



2) This object is also a photograph. In this photograph, Mervyn is pictured (on the right) as a California State Senator with Martin Luther King, Jr. (in the center). Mervyn was a California State Senator from 1967-1975.



4) This object is a certificate that was given to Mervyn for becoming a United States House of Representatives Member. He was a United States House of Representatives Member from 1981-1993.

After looking at the objects and reading their descriptions, answer the question below. Write your answer to the question in the space provided or on a separate document.

What is something new that you learned about Mervyn by looking at the objects and reading their descriptions?

I learned that \_\_\_\_\_

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## PART 4 CONTINUED - Mervyn and His Jobs

Now look at some of the things Mervyn did in these different government jobs by completing a matching activity. The job of Lieutenant Governor has already been matched with the correct duties and responsibilities. Match the remaining three jobs in the right-hand column to the correct duties and responsibilities in the left-hand column by drawing a line to connect them. (Hint: The letters in the parentheses in the right-hand column will help you match each job to the correct duties and responsibilities in the left-hand column.)

### DUTIES & RESPONSIBILITIES

- A) **Cast** a tie-breaking vote when the members of the State Senate were evenly split voting on a bill.
- B) Voted on the national budget to pay for things like education, the army, roads, and **healthcare**.
- C) Wrote bills in the early 1970s that helped women get equal **property rights** in California.
- D) Wrote bills in 1965 and 1967 to make elementary school textbooks in California include the history of Black people, Native Americans, and Latinos.

### JOBS

- United States House of Representatives Member (B)
- State Senator (C)
- State Assembly Member (D)
- Lieutenant Governor (A)

### ***Glossary***

**Cast:** register a vote

**Healthcare:** having to do with the medical care provided to people to keep them healthy

**Property rights:** rights of property ownership

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## **PART 5** - Who Represents the Community You Live in?

After learning about the different government jobs that Mervyn had, you will learn about one of your government representatives. Your teacher will give you a **biography** of one of your government representatives to read. After reading the biography, answer the questions below. Write your answers to the questions in the space provided or on a separate document.

What is the name of the government representative that you learned about?

Their name is \_\_\_\_\_

What is the name of this government representative's job?

The name of their job is \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Where did the government representative grow up?

They grew up in \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

How long has the government representative been doing this job?

They have been doing this job for \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

What are some of the things the government representative cares about?

They care about \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

What is something that the government representative has done in this job?

Something that they have done in this job is \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

### ***Glossary***

**Biography:** a true story about someone's life that is written by someone else

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## **PART 6** - Letters to Mervyn

Similar to how the government representative that you learned about in PART 5 represents people like you, Mervyn was a government representative of the people. Mervyn worked with many different kinds of people by listening to their needs and to their **concerns** about different issues or problems so that he could try to help them. Mervyn kept many objects over the years that were important to him, including letters from the people he represented. Below is an actual letter a community member sent to Mervyn. Some of the community member's personal information has been blacked out on the letter to protect their privacy. Read the letter and think about why this letter was written.

SAC

[Redacted]  
[Redacted]  
Los Angeles, Calif.  
May 5, 1970

Sen. Mervyn Dymally  
217 W. First St.  
Los Angeles, Calif.

Dear Senator:

I just want to express my profound thanks to you for your introduction of the bills to end discrimination against women in higher education. They are quite forward-thinking and perceptive.

I especially hope that you may be able to emphasize to your colleagues that the two bills on child care centers will help men as much as women. Many men would like to go back to school, but would have no place to take the children if their wives supported the family.

Congratulations on your sensitivity to a much-overlooked problem.

Sincerely,  
[Redacted]

### ***Glossary***

**Colleagues:** people with whom one works in a profession or business

**Concerns:** matters of interest or importance to someone

**Discrimination:** when a person or group of people are treated differently, in an unfair way, than another person or group of people are treated

**Emphasize:** point out or highlight

**Express:** communicate

**Much-overlooked:** pass over without giving due attention

**Perceptive:** having or showing sensitive insight

**Profound:** very great or intense

**Supported:** provided money for by working or other means



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## **PART 6 CONTINUED** - Letters to Mervyn

After reading the letter written by a community member to Mervyn on the previous page, answer the questions below. Write your answers to the questions in the space provided or on a separate document.

When was the letter written?

The date the letter was written was \_\_\_\_\_

Why do you think the letter was written? What do you think the purpose of the letter was?

The purpose of the letter was \_\_\_\_\_

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What needs, issues, and/or problems were mentioned in the letter?

The needs, issues, and/or problems mentioned in this letter were \_\_\_\_\_

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Which communities were affected by the needs, issues, and/or problems mentioned in the letter?

The communities affected by the needs, issues, and/or problems mentioned in the letter were \_\_\_\_\_

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What did Senator Dymally do to address the needs, issues, and/or problems mentioned in the letter?

Senator Dymally addressed the needs, issues, and/or problems mentioned in the letter by \_\_\_\_\_

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# Elected Officials: Mervyn M. Dymally & Today

## PART 7 - Your Community's Needs, Issues, or Problems

After reading a letter from a community member thanking Mervyn for helping to improve a community problem, think about some of the needs, issues, and/or problems in your own community. What are some things in your community (neighborhood, city, state, or country) that you think your government representative could help improve? Circle three things in the chart below that you think your government representative could help improve in your community.



Trash & Pollution



Schools & Libraries



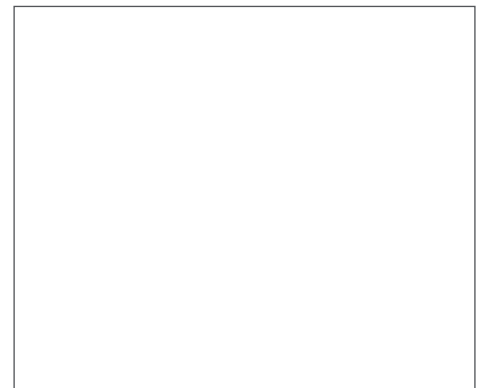
Healthcare/Access to Doctors



Homelessness



Parks & Green Spaces



What is another need, issue, and/or problem in your community? Draw it and describe it in the space above or on a separate document.

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## **PART 8** - Write a Letter

You must be 18 years old to vote, but anyone can write letters to their government representatives and have their voice heard. What would you like to tell your government representative about your community? Think about your community's needs, issues, and/or problems from PART 7. Use the template below or a separate document to write a letter to the government representative you learned about in PART 5. Then send your letter to your government representative.

Date \_\_\_\_\_

Dear \_\_\_\_\_,

My name is \_\_\_\_\_. I am in the \_\_\_\_\_ grade at  
\_\_\_\_\_ School. I live in \_\_\_\_\_.

I wanted to write you this letter to talk to you about \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

I feel \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

I think that you can help by \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Sincerely,

\_\_\_\_\_