Across State Lines

How national authority helps states manage shared problems

SS24.USG.13b "Describe the role of the national government in regulating and facilitating relations among states in the United States."

NAME _____ DATE _____

1 READ AND MARK

Read it twice

YOUR JOB Underline four distinct roles of the national government in the passage. Circle the interstate problem or need that each role addresses.

One River, Two States

1 Imagine two fictional states, Northbank and Southbank, separated by a river. Northbank farms draw water upstream, while Southbank towns and growers rely on the same flow downstream. In a dry year, each state could claim that its own needs should come first. Yet neither can settle the dispute simply by passing a law that binds the other. The Constitution gives the national government tools to manage conflicts that spill across state borders. If one state favored its own merchants in cross-border trade, Congress could establish common rules under its power to regulate interstate commerce.

2 Suppose a factory in Northbank releases pollutants into the river before it reaches Southbank. Federal law, including the Clean Water Act, establishes requirements for discharges into waters of the United States. States often issue discharge permits under federally approved programs, while the Environmental Protection Agency oversees those programs and can enforce federal requirements. This arrangement leaves room for state administration but does not let an upstream state ignore harm beyond its border. Southbank officials can press for compliance with standards that apply on both sides of the river. Here the national government regulates a shared resource rather than choosing one state's economy over the other's.

3 Pollution limits will not answer every question about how much water each state may use. Northbank and Southbank could negotiate an interstate compact setting rules for withdrawals during droughts. Congress can give its consent to such an agreement, allowing states to coordinate within a national constitutional framework. If negotiations fail and one state sues the other over their competing claims, the Supreme Court has original jurisdiction over disputes between states. The Court can hear the case and issue a binding decision about their legal rights. Thus federal authority can support a joint solution or provide a forum when cooperation breaks down.

2 ANSWER WITH EVIDENCE

Use the passage

1. If Northbank favors its own merchants in cross-border trade, what power could Congress use to address the problem?

2. How does the national government help address pollution that flows from Northbank into Southbank?

3. How could Congress help the states cooperate over water withdrawals during droughts?

4. If the states cannot settle their competing water claims, what role could the Supreme Court play?

3 YOUR TURN

Your own words

Two states share a highway bridge. One state charges out-of-state delivery trucks twice the toll charged to its own trucks. In 70 to 90 words, propose one possible national response and one way the states could cooperate to manage the bridge. Explain how each would affect relations between the states.

ANSWER KEY

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GRADE 12 · SS24.USG.13b

PART 1 · READ AND MARK

Underline four distinct roles of the national government in the passage. Circle the interstate problem or need that each role addresses. Accept any marking that follows this job and points at the right text.

PART 2 · ANSWERS

#	QUESTION	ANSWER
1	If Northbank favors its own merchants in cross-border trade, what power could Congress use to address the problem?	**Congress could use its power to regulate interstate commerce to establish common rules for trade across state lines.**
2	How does the national government help address pollution that flows from Northbank into Southbank?	**Federal law sets discharge requirements. The Environmental Protection Agency oversees state permit programs and can enforce federal requirements.**
3	How could Congress help the states cooperate over water withdrawals during droughts?	**Congress could consent to an interstate compact in which the states agree on rules for water withdrawals.**
4	If the states cannot settle their competing water claims, what role could the Supreme Court play?	**The Supreme Court could hear a case between the states under its original jurisdiction and issue a binding decision about their legal rights.**

PART 3 · YOUR TURN (SAMPLE ANSWER)

Congress could use its interstate commerce power to set rules against tolls that unfairly favor in-state delivery trucks. A national rule would keep one state's bridge policy from placing a special burden on trade from its neighbor. The two states could also negotiate a shared toll schedule and divide maintenance costs based on bridge use. That agreement would help them maintain the crossing together while treating drivers from both states fairly. If they cannot agree, federal regulation could still protect interstate travel and trade.

Accept other accurate descriptions of federal oversight, congressional consent, or the Supreme Court's role that connect national action to a problem between states. For the open task, look for a plausible national response and a distinct cooperative approach.