Who Steers Congress?

Read, mark, and compare congressional leadership roles

SS24.USG.4a "Compare and contrast the leadership roles within Congress, including the Speaker of the House, the Senate President Pro Tempore, majority and minority leaders, and party whips."

NAME _____ DATE _____

1 READ AND MARK

Read it twice

YOUR JOB Underline the duties of the House Speaker and Senate majority leader that steer floor business. Circle one duty of the Senate president pro tempore and one duty of party whips, then number the sentence that names a duty shared by both minority leaders.

A Housing Bill Moves Through Congress

1. When a housing bill reaches the House floor, leadership affects which choices lawmakers face and when. The House elects its Speaker, usually from the majority party, to preside over debate and exercise substantial influence over the chamber's agenda. The House majority leader works with the Speaker to plan floor strategy and help advance the party's bills. The House minority leader organizes the other party's response and proposes alternatives. Both House and Senate minority leaders coordinate their parties' opposition and negotiate with majority leaders. Thus, House leadership combines a chamberwide presiding officer with party leaders who pursue competing priorities.

2. In the Senate, the vice president is the president of the Senate but is not a senator. Senators elect a president pro tempore, traditionally the longest-serving senator in the majority party, to preside when the vice president is absent; the duty is often delegated to other senators. Unlike the House Speaker, this officer does not ordinarily direct the chamber's daily floor agenda. The Senate majority leader instead guides floor business, seeking agreements on debate and scheduling measures for consideration. The Senate minority leader negotiates with that leader and organizes the minority party's response, including proposed changes to bills.

3. As the housing bill approaches a vote in either chamber, party whips contact members, count likely votes, and urge support for their party's position. Each party has whips in both the House and Senate, so this vote-counting task differs from presiding over a chamber or leading floor strategy. A whip might warn that several members want changes before supporting the bill. The majority leader could then revise a plan for bringing it forward, while the minority leader could seek concessions. A presiding officer manages proceedings, but a party leader tries to build the votes needed to prevail.

2 ANSWER WITH EVIDENCE

Use the passage

1. How do the House Speaker and Senate president pro tempore have similar duties but different influence over the floor agenda?

2. Compare how the House majority leader and Senate majority leader move their parties' work forward.

3. What do the two minority leaders have in common, and how does each respond to the majority in the housing bill example?

4. How would a party whip's work on the housing bill differ from the Senate majority leader's and the president pro tempore's work?

3 YOUR TURN

Your own words

The majority party supports a clean-water bill, but close votes loom in both chambers. Write a 75 to 105-word briefing that identifies which leaders supporters should consult in each chamber, compares their roles with the two presiding officers and party whips, and explains one way minority leaders could influence the bill.

ANSWER KEY

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GRADE 12 · SS24.USG.4a

PART 1 · READ AND MARK

Underline the duties of the House Speaker and Senate majority leader that steer floor business. Circle one duty of the Senate president pro tempore and one duty of party whips, then number the sentence that names a duty shared by both minority leaders. Accept any marking that follows this job and points at the right text.

PART 2 · ANSWERS

#	QUESTION	ANSWER
1	How do the House Speaker and Senate president pro tempore have similar duties but different influence over the floor agenda?	**Both can preside over proceedings. The Speaker substantially influences the House agenda, while the president pro tempore does not ordinarily direct the Senate's daily floor agenda.**
2	Compare how the House majority leader and Senate majority leader move their parties' work forward.	**The House majority leader plans floor strategy with the Speaker and helps advance party bills. The Senate majority leader guides floor business by seeking debate agreements and scheduling measures.**
3	What do the two minority leaders have in common, and how does each respond to the majority in the housing bill example?	**Both coordinate opposition and negotiate with majority leaders. The House minority leader proposes alternatives; the Senate minority leader organizes its party's response, including proposed changes.**
4	How would a party whip's work on the housing bill differ from the Senate majority leader's and the president pro tempore's work?	**A whip contacts members, counts likely votes, and urges support. The Senate majority leader guides debate and scheduling, while the president pro tempore may preside over proceedings.**

PART 3 · YOUR TURN (SAMPLE ANSWER)

Supporters should consult the House majority leader about floor strategy and the Senate majority leader about when the bill can be considered and how to arrange debate. The Speaker can influence the House agenda and preside over debate, while the Senate president pro tempore may preside but does not usually direct the Senate's daily agenda. Whips in both chambers can count votes and learn which members want changes. Minority leaders can organize opposition, propose alternatives, and negotiate with majority leaders. If the vote is close, supporters should consider changes that could win additional votes.

Accept accurate distinctions between presiding, guiding floor business, organizing a party's response, and counting votes. The open response should apply those distinctions to the new bill rather than merely list job titles.