Power and Limits

Presidential choices during a power crisis

SS24.USG.5 "Analyze how the functions and authority of the executive branch evolve through changes in the scope of presidential powers, executive orders, executive agreements, and the role of the president in foreign and domestic policy..."

NAME _____ DATE _____

1 READ AND MARK

Read it twice

YOUR JOB Underline formal presidential actions, circle informal ways to build support, and number the four federal bodies described in the passage. Use your marks to compare what each action or body can do.

When the Grid Goes Dark

1 After a cyberattack disrupts regional power lines, a president faces demands to act quickly. The Energy secretary, who leads a Cabinet department, offers technical advice; White House staff sort options and assess political risks. The president signs an executive order directing federal agencies to share threat reports and coordinate help under existing law. The order cannot create new spending or erase legal limits. Such orders can expand a president's practical influence, but Congress controls funding and courts can review their legality.

2 Federal bodies differ in their jobs and independence. The Department of Energy, led by a Cabinet secretary, coordinates federal energy programs. The Federal Trade Commission, an independent regulatory commission, can investigate deceptive sales of emergency generators. Its commissioners make decisions under laws that limit presidential control. The Tennessee Valley Authority, a government corporation, operates power facilities in its region. The Environmental Protection Agency, an independent executive agency, enforces environmental laws. None can take over every private power line simply because a president requests it.

3 To explain the response, the president speaks from the Oval Office, gives media interviews, and asks party leaders to back legislation. These are informal ways to build support. In a State of the Union address, the president proposes stronger grid protections to Congress; a veto could reject a bill the president opposes. A pardon could forgive a federal offense, not repair the grid. An executive agreement with another country could coordinate information about cyberthreats without the Senate's treaty vote, within legal limits.

2 ANSWER WITH EVIDENCE

Use the passage

1. How could the executive order speed the response, and what limit would still apply?

2. Compare the Department of Energy and the Federal Trade Commission in both structure and role during the crisis.

3. How do the Energy secretary and White House staff contribute differently to the president's decision?

4. Compare a veto with an Oval Office speech as ways to influence grid legislation.

3 YOUR TURN

Your own words

A drought threatens water supplies across several states. Write four sentences proposing one formal presidential action and its legal limit, one informal way to build support, and distinct roles for two differently structured federal bodies.

ANSWER KEY

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GRADE 12 · SS24.USG.5

PART 1 · READ AND MARK

Underline formal presidential actions, circle informal ways to build support, and number the four federal bodies described in the passage. Use your marks to compare what each action or body can do. Accept any marking that follows this job and points at the right text.

PART 2 · ANSWERS

#	QUESTION	ANSWER
1	How could the executive order speed the response, and what limit would still apply?	**It could direct federal agencies to share threat reports and coordinate help, but it could not create new spending or override existing law.**
2	Compare the Department of Energy and the Federal Trade Commission in both structure and role during the crisis.	**Energy is a Cabinet department that coordinates federal energy programs. The FTC is an independent regulatory commission that can investigate deceptive generator sales; laws limit presidential control of its commissioners.**
3	How do the Energy secretary and White House staff contribute differently to the president's decision?	**The Energy secretary offers technical advice. White House staff sort options and assess political risks.**
4	Compare a veto with an Oval Office speech as ways to influence grid legislation.	**A veto is a formal power that can reject a bill. An Oval Office speech uses the president's public visibility to build support but does not change a bill by itself.**

PART 3 · YOUR TURN (SAMPLE ANSWER)

The president could issue an executive order directing the Interior Department to report on federal reservoirs, but the order could not seize state water rights. Interior, a Cabinet department, would compile the reports. The Environmental Protection Agency, an independent executive agency, would help states check drinking water safety. In a televised address, the president could urge households to conserve water and build support for a funding bill.

Accept other legally plausible actions and agency roles if the response distinguishes a formal power from informal influence and states a real limit on presidential authority.