Three Presidential Tools

How formal powers can advance a policy goal

SS24.USG.5a "Describe how the president of the United States utilizes formal powers to achieve policy goals, including veto power, addressing the nation in the State of the Union Address, and the authority to pardon."

NAME _____ DATE _____

1 READ AND MARK

Read it twice

YOUR JOB Underline the president's policy goal, circle one use of each formal power, and put a star beside one limit on each power so you can distinguish what each tool can and cannot accomplish.

A Policy of Second Chances

1. Imagine a president who wants people leaving federal prison to find work rather than return to crime. In the State of the Union Address, the president tells Congress that job training and employer partnerships could make communities safer. The Constitution requires the president to give Congress information on the state of the union from time to time and recommend measures the president considers necessary. A televised address can also build public support for a proposal. Yet speaking does not create a program or supply its funding. Congress must pass legislation and appropriate money for the proposed training grants.

2. Months later, Congress passes a spending bill that would end an existing federal job-training program for people leaving prison. The president opposes that cut and returns the bill to Congress with objections, using the veto to block it from becoming law unless Congress overrides the veto. The president hopes lawmakers will negotiate a new bill that keeps the program. A veto can defend a policy priority, but it cannot insert the president's preferred funding into a bill. Congress can still enact the original bill if two-thirds of each chamber votes to override the veto.

3. The president also considers the case of a person convicted of a federal nonviolent drug offense who has completed treatment and helped others find jobs. Using the pardon power, the president can forgive that federal offense, making one individual case an example of the administration's belief in second chances. A pardon does not create a training program or rewrite sentencing law. It also cannot pardon a state offense or be used in cases of impeachment. These limits matter: an address seeks support, a veto rejects a bill, and a pardon grants clemency for a federal offense.

2 ANSWER WITH EVIDENCE

Use the passage

1. How could the State of the Union Address advance the president's goal, and what must Congress do before the proposed training grants can operate?

2. Why does the president veto the spending bill, and how could Congress still make that bill law?

3. How could the pardon support the president's second-chances policy, and why must the offense be federal?

4. Why could the president not create the proposed training grants by combining an address, a veto, and a pardon?

3 YOUR TURN

Your own words

Invent a different policy goal related to federal criminal justice. In one paragraph, explain how a president could use the State of the Union Address, a veto of a specific bill, and a pardon in a specific federal case to pursue it, and identify one limit on any of these powers.

ANSWER KEY

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GRADE 12 · SS24.USG.5a

PART 1 · READ AND MARK

Underline the president's policy goal, circle one use of each formal power, and put a star beside one limit on each power so you can distinguish what each tool can and cannot accomplish. Accept any marking that follows this job and points at the right text.

PART 2 · ANSWERS

#	QUESTION	ANSWER
1	How could the State of the Union Address advance the president's goal, and what must Congress do before the proposed training grants can operate?	**The address can urge Congress to support the grants and build public support. Congress must pass legislation and appropriate money.**
2	Why does the president veto the spending bill, and how could Congress still make that bill law?	**The president vetoes it to oppose the cut to job training. Congress can override the veto with a two-thirds vote in each chamber.**
3	How could the pardon support the president's second-chances policy, and why must the offense be federal?	**Forgiving the person's offense provides an example of the policy. The president's pardon power does not extend to state offenses.**
4	Why could the president not create the proposed training grants by combining an address, a veto, and a pardon?	**An address recommends a policy, a veto blocks a bill, and a pardon forgives a federal offense. None passes legislation or appropriates the money needed for the grants.**

PART 3 · YOUR TURN (SAMPLE ANSWER)

My goal is to reduce overly harsh penalties for nonviolent federal drug offenses. In the State of the Union Address, I would ask Congress to revise federal sentencing laws and explain why shorter sentences could still protect public safety. If Congress sent me a bill increasing mandatory minimum sentences for those offenses, I would veto it and urge lawmakers to reconsider. I would also pardon a person convicted of a federal nonviolent drug offense whose record shows rehabilitation, while explaining that a pardon helps that person but does not change sentencing law.

Accept varied federal criminal justice goals if each proposed use fits the power's legal scope and advances the stated goal. The response must identify a specific bill to veto, a specific type of federal case for a pardon, and an accurate limit.