Beyond Formal Powers

How presidents seek public support without making law

SS24.USG.5b "Describe how the president of the United States uses informal powers to shape public opinion, including interaction with media and the public, head of party, and symbolic powers of the Oval Office."

NAME _____ DATE _____

1 READ AND MARK

Read it twice

YOUR JOB Underline one action in each paragraph that could shape public opinion. Number the actions 1 for media and public interaction, 2 for party leadership, and 3 for the Oval Office setting.

The Case for Flood Warnings

1. Imagine a president urging Congress to fund a national flood-warning network after severe storms. The president cannot create the funding by giving a speech, but can try to make voters see the plan as urgent. In a televised interview, the president describes a town that received too little warning and explains how faster alerts could help residents evacuate. Reporters ask whether the proposed system would reach rural communities. The president answers publicly and shares the interview through official online channels. These encounters carry the argument beyond Congress, while journalists' questions may also expose weaknesses that audiences consider.

2. The president also acts as head of a political party, an informal role rather than a power listed in the Constitution. At a party gathering, the president asks party members to support the flood-warning proposal and encourages allied lawmakers to explain it at local meetings. The president promises to campaign for candidates who make disaster preparation a priority. Those candidates may repeat the message in their own districts, reaching voters who missed the interview. Party leadership can amplify a message, but it does not compel lawmakers to vote for a bill or require citizens to agree.

3. Days later, the president delivers a short address from the Oval Office. The setting matters: many Americans associate that room with the presidency and moments of national importance. Speaking there may signal that flood warnings deserve serious attention, even if the address offers no new legal authority. The president points to the approaching storm season and invites families to discuss what warnings they need. Viewers might be persuaded by the setting, the argument, both, or neither. Together, media contact, party leadership, and the Oval Office address show how a president can seek public support without controlling public opinion.

2 ANSWER WITH EVIDENCE

Use the passage

1. How could the interview and the reporters' questions affect public opinion in different ways?

2. How might the president's role as party leader spread the message beyond the president's own appearances?

3. What might the Oval Office setting add to the address, and what does it not give the president?

4. Why would these efforts not allow the president to pass the flood-warning funding proposal alone?

3 YOUR TURN

Your own words

Suppose a president wants Congress to fund a national program to replace lead drinking-water pipes. Write four sentences proposing one media or public action, one action as party leader, and one use of the Oval Office to shape public opinion. In your fourth sentence, state a limit on what these actions can accomplish.

ANSWER KEY

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GRADE 12 · SS24.USG.5b

PART 1 · READ AND MARK

Underline one action in each paragraph that could shape public opinion. Number the actions 1 for media and public interaction, 2 for party leadership, and 3 for the Oval Office setting. Accept any marking that follows this job and points at the right text.

PART 2 · ANSWERS

#	QUESTION	ANSWER
1	How could the interview and the reporters' questions affect public opinion in different ways?	**The president's example and explanation could build support, while reporters' questions could draw attention to weaknesses in the plan.**
2	How might the president's role as party leader spread the message beyond the president's own appearances?	**Party members, allied lawmakers, and candidates could repeat the message at local meetings and in their districts.**
3	What might the Oval Office setting add to the address, and what does it not give the president?	**It may signal national importance, but it gives the president no new legal authority.**
4	Why would these efforts not allow the president to pass the flood-warning funding proposal alone?	**A speech cannot create the proposed funding, and party leadership cannot compel lawmakers to vote for the bill.**

PART 3 · YOUR TURN (SAMPLE ANSWER)

The president could take questions in a televised interview and explain how replacing lead pipes would protect children. As party leader, the president could ask allied lawmakers to discuss the proposal with voters in their districts. An Oval Office address could signal that safe drinking water is a national priority. None of these actions would force Congress to approve funding or guarantee that the public agrees.

Accept other passage-supported explanations of how each action could affect opinion. For Your Turn, look for three distinct informal actions and an accurate limit, expressed in four sentences.