Inside the Decision

How Cabinet advice and White House staff shape a presidential choice

SS24.USG.5c "Explain the role of the Cabinet and White House staff in the process of presidential decision-making."

NAME _____ DATE _____

1 READ AND MARK

Read it twice

YOUR JOB Underline one contribution from each Cabinet secretary, circle one action by each White House staff member, and draw an arrow from a circled action to the sentence that identifies the president's role.

A Decision Amid the Smoke

1. After wildfires spread across several states, governors request federal assistance, and smoke reaches cities far from the flames. In this hypothetical situation, the president must decide how to respond. A presidential order cannot make smoke disappear, and federal resources are limited. The decision involves public health, emergency aid, and the cost of each option. To weigh those issues, the president asks Cabinet officials and White House staff for different kinds of help.

2. The secretary of Homeland Security reports which requests FEMA has received from states and what federal emergency resources might be available. The secretary of Health and Human Services explains health risks from smoke and recommends ways federal agencies could help communities protect residents. Each Cabinet official draws on a department's expertise and reports on what its agencies can carry out. Their recommendations may differ: moving aid quickly could strain resources needed for other emergencies.

3. The White House chief of staff arranges a meeting so the president hears both secretaries before setting priorities. A White House policy adviser compares their proposals, notes where the recommendations conflict, and outlines choices for the president. Unlike the secretaries, these staff members work directly for the president rather than run the departments supplying aid. The president may ask for revisions before deciding which federal actions to pursue. Neither Cabinet advice nor staff coordination makes the decision for the president.

2 ANSWER WITH EVIDENCE

Use the passage

1. How would the Homeland Security secretary's report help the president weigh a response?

2. How would the Health and Human Services secretary's advice affect the president's options?

3. How do the chief of staff and the policy adviser help the president in different ways?

4. If the secretaries disagree about moving aid quickly, how can the decision process continue?

3 YOUR TURN

Your own words

A foodborne illness linked to meat has spread across several states. In four sentences, explain how the agriculture secretary, the health and human services secretary, and White House staff could inform a presidential decision about coordinating a federal response, then state who decides.

Inside the Decision

PART 1 · READ AND MARK

Underline one contribution from each Cabinet secretary, circle one action by each White House staff member, and draw an arrow from a circled action to the sentence that identifies the president's role. Accept any marking that follows this job and points at the right text.

PART 2 · ANSWERS

#	QUESTION	ANSWER
1	How would the Homeland Security secretary's report help the president weigh a response?	**It would show which state requests FEMA has received and what federal emergency resources might be available.**
2	How would the Health and Human Services secretary's advice affect the president's options?	**It would identify smoke-related health risks and ways federal agencies could help protect residents.**
3	How do the chief of staff and the policy adviser help the president in different ways?	**The chief of staff arranges for the president to hear both secretaries. The policy adviser compares their proposals and outlines choices.**
4	If the secretaries disagree about moving aid quickly, how can the decision process continue?	**The policy adviser can identify the conflict, and the president can request revisions before deciding which actions to pursue.**

PART 3 · YOUR TURN (SAMPLE ANSWER)

The agriculture secretary could report what federal meat inspectors have found. The health and human services secretary could share CDC findings on illnesses across states. White House staff could bring the reports together, identify disagreements, and present response options. The president would decide whether to coordinate a broader federal response.

Accept equivalent explanations that distinguish department-based expertise from White House staff coordination and leave the presidential decision to the president. For the open task, look for plausible roles for both secretaries and a four-sentence response.