# Who Gets Heard?

Weigh public access against the right to protest

**USG.1.7** "Evaluate how the United States Constitution establishes majority rule while protecting minority rights and balances the common good with individual liberties."

NAME _____ DATE _____

## 1 READ AND MARK

Read it twice

**YOUR JOB** Underline one detail showing how a majority can make a federal law, circle one constitutional protection for protesters, and number the two proposed courthouse rules 1 and 2.

### A Protest at the Courthouse

1. On a Monday morning, a crowd gathers outside a federal courthouse. Some people carry signs opposing a new federal policy, while others want to enter the building for hearings. After a blocked doorway delays several visitors, members of Congress propose a law banning all demonstrations within 500 feet of every federal courthouse. In Congress, a bill normally needs a majority vote in both the House of Representatives and the Senate before it goes to the president. The lawmakers who favor the ban say it would protect access to the courts. Their opponents worry that it reaches beyond blocked doorways.

2. The Constitution gives Congress the power to make laws, but a winning vote does not erase the Bill of Rights. The First Amendment protects speech and peaceful assembly, including protests by people whose views are unpopular. A blanket ban would keep a small group from holding signs on a nearby public sidewalk even when the entrance is clear. A federal court could review a challenge to the law and decide whether the restriction violates the Constitution. Judges do not replace every policy choice made by elected officials, but they can refuse to enforce a law that crosses a constitutional limit.

3. Another proposal would require people at courthouses to keep entrances and walkways open while allowing peaceful demonstrations on nearby public sidewalks. Supporters argue that visitors could reach hearings and protesters could still make their views heard. Critics might ask whether officials would apply the rule equally to protesters they agree with and those they oppose. If officials cleared only one side's signs, a rule written in neutral words could still be used unfairly. Congress can weigh public access when it votes, and courts can examine a challenged law, but neither step guarantees that every dispute will be simple.

## 2 ANSWER WITH EVIDENCE

Use the passage

1. How could the concern about courthouse access become a federal law through majority rule, and why would that law still face a constitutional limit?

2. Which proposed rule better protects a small group's right to protest while keeping the courthouse accessible? Explain your choice using details from the passage.

3. Suppose officials allow signs supporting the federal policy but clear signs opposing it under the walkway rule. How would that change your evaluation of the rule?

4. A lawmaker says protecting courthouse access requires banning every protest within 500 feet. Which details in the passage challenge that claim?

## 3 YOUR TURN

Your own words

Imagine Congress considers banning all gatherings in a federal park after 9 p.m. because loudspeakers disturb nearby residents. In four sentences, propose a narrower rule and explain how majority rule, the need for quiet, and a small group's First Amendment rights would each matter.

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## PART 1 · READ AND MARK

Underline one detail showing how a majority can make a federal law, circle one constitutional protection for protesters, and number the two proposed courthouse rules 1 and 2. Accept any marking that follows this job and points at the right text.

## PART 2 · ANSWERS

| # | QUESTION | ANSWER |
|---|---|---|
| 1 | How could the concern about courthouse access become a federal law through majority rule, and why would that law still face a constitutional limit? | **A bill would normally need majority votes in both chambers before going to the president. Even if enacted, it could not violate First Amendment protections for speech and peaceful assembly.** |
| 2 | Which proposed rule better protects a small group's right to protest while keeping the courthouse accessible? Explain your choice using details from the passage. | **The rule keeping entrances and walkways open better balances the two aims. It lets visitors reach hearings while allowing peaceful demonstrations on nearby public sidewalks.** |
| 3 | Suppose officials allow signs supporting the federal policy but clear signs opposing it under the walkway rule. How would that change your evaluation of the rule? | **The rule would be applied unfairly based on the protesters' views, despite its neutral wording. It would fail to protect dissenters equally.** |
| 4 | A lawmaker says protecting courthouse access requires banning every protest within 500 feet. Which details in the passage challenge that claim? | **The second proposal would keep entrances and walkways open while still allowing peaceful protests on nearby public sidewalks.** |

## PART 3 · YOUR TURN (SAMPLE ANSWER)

Congress could vote to prohibit amplified sound in the federal park after 9 p.m. instead of banning all gatherings. This would reduce noise for nearby residents while allowing a small group to gather quietly and display signs. A majority vote in both chambers and the president's approval could make the rule federal law. Even then, a court could review whether the rule or its enforcement violates First Amendment protections for speech and peaceful assembly.

Accept other well-supported comparisons that address both courthouse access and protesters' rights. For the open task, accept a different narrow rule if the response explains all three requested considerations in four sentences.