Who Can Stop Whom?

Trace how federal branches limit one another's power

USG.C.3.3.C "Explain how the checks and balances system provides each branch of government with individual powers to affect other branches, preventing any one branch from becoming too powerful."

NAME _____ DATE _____

1 READ AND MARK

Read it twice

YOUR JOB Underline each power one branch uses to affect another branch, then write the name of the affected branch beside it. Use your marks to track why no branch controls the outcome alone.

The River Alert Bill

1. Imagine Congress passes the River Alert Bill, which would require federal agencies to warn towns when dangerous pollution enters a major river. Congress writes and passes bills, but a bill does not always become law just because lawmakers agree. The president may veto it, returning it to Congress with objections. That veto forces lawmakers to reconsider the plan. Congress can still make the bill law by voting to override the veto with a two-thirds vote in both the House and the Senate. Neither branch controls the outcome alone: the president can block a bill, but Congress can answer with a large enough majority.

2. Suppose the bill becomes law and a riverfront company challenges it in federal court. A judge cannot reject a law simply because it seems unwise. In a case properly before the court, federal judges may decide that a law conflicts with the Constitution and refuse to enforce it. This power, called judicial review, checks Congress. Courts can also review actions by federal officials and block actions that violate the law or the Constitution, checking the executive branch. Yet judges do not choose their own successors: the president nominates federal judges, and the Senate must confirm them before they take office.

3. Now imagine the law survives review, but the president's agency requests money for a new warning system. Congress decides whether to provide that funding through spending laws, limiting what the executive branch can do with federal money. The president directs federal agencies as they carry out laws, but cannot simply spend money Congress has not appropriated. If officials ignore a valid court order about the warning system, a court can require them to comply. These checks do not guarantee agreement or quick action. They require each branch to work within limits set by the others and the Constitution.

2 ANSWER WITH EVIDENCE

Use the passage

1. How would a presidential veto affect Congress's River Alert Bill?

2. How could Congress respond to that veto, and what vote would it need?

3. How could a federal court check Congress if the River Alert Bill became law?

4. How does Congress's control of funding limit the president's plan for a warning system?

3 YOUR TURN

Your own words

Invent a federal dispute about a public issue other than river pollution. In 4 to 5 sentences, show two branches checking each other with two different powers from the passage, and explain why neither branch has complete control.

ANSWER KEY

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HIGH SCHOOL · USG.C.3.3.C

PART 1 · READ AND MARK

Underline each power one branch uses to affect another branch, then write the name of the affected branch beside it. Use your marks to track why no branch controls the outcome alone. Accept any marking that follows this job and points at the right text.

PART 2 · ANSWERS

#	QUESTION	ANSWER
1	How would a presidential veto affect Congress's River Alert Bill?	**The veto would return the bill to Congress with the president's objections, forcing lawmakers to reconsider it.**
2	How could Congress respond to that veto, and what vote would it need?	**Congress could override the veto and make the bill law with a two-thirds vote in both the House and the Senate.**
3	How could a federal court check Congress if the River Alert Bill became law?	**In a case before it, the court could find that the law conflicts with the Constitution and refuse to enforce it.**
4	How does Congress's control of funding limit the president's plan for a warning system?	**Congress decides whether to provide the money through a spending law. The president cannot spend money Congress has not appropriated.**

PART 3 · YOUR TURN (SAMPLE ANSWER)

Congress passes a bill funding a federal satellite to track wildfires. The president vetoes it, arguing that the plan costs too much. Congress overrides the veto with two-thirds votes in both chambers, so the bill becomes law. The president can force lawmakers to reconsider, but a large enough congressional majority can still enact the plan.

Accept accurate explanations that name the branch using a power, the branch affected, and the resulting limit. For Your Turn, look for a new federal situation, two distinct checks, and an explanation of shared limits.