Power Under Scrutiny

How impeachment shaped views of the president and Congress

USH.C.8.4.D "Summarize the political impact of President Clinton's impeachment on the perceptions of the presidency and powers of Congress."

NAME _____ DATE _____

1 READ AND MARK

Read it twice

YOUR JOB Underline two details about how people viewed the presidency, circle two details about how they viewed Congress, and number the House and Senate actions in order to trace Congress's power and its limit.

A President on Trial

1 In December 1998, Americans watched the House of Representatives vote on whether President Bill Clinton should face an impeachment trial. The investigation centered on Clinton's statements under oath about his relationship with White House intern Monica Lewinsky and on allegations that he tried to obstruct the investigation. The House approved two articles of impeachment, one for perjury and one for obstruction of justice. Impeachment meant formal charges, not removal from office. The vote sent the case to the Senate for a trial. Because the president was now formally accused by Congress, a private scandal became a public test of presidential accountability.

2 In February 1999, the Senate acquitted Clinton on both articles. Conviction and removal required a two-thirds Senate vote, and neither article reached that threshold. Clinton remained president, even as the trial kept questions about his honesty in public view. Many Americans disapproved of his conduct but still approved of his work as president. For them, personal misconduct and performance in office were different judgments. Others believed a president who lied under oath had damaged the office itself. The split showed that an impeachment could weaken trust in a president without ending a presidency.

3 The episode also affected how people viewed Congress. Supporters of the House vote saw impeachment as proof that lawmakers could investigate and charge even the nation's highest official. Critics saw the largely party-line House vote as a sign that impeachment could become a partisan weapon. The Senate's acquittal showed that the House could bring charges but could not remove a president on its own. Congress demonstrated a powerful check on the presidency and a limit on that power. Public debate continued over whether Congress had protected the rule of law or pushed a political fight too far.

2 ANSWER WITH EVIDENCE

Use the passage

1. How could Americans disapprove of Clinton's conduct but still support him as president? What did this split mean for perceptions of the presidency?

2. How did supporters and critics of the House vote differ in their views of Congress's use of impeachment?

3. What did the House and Senate actions show about Congress's power to challenge a president and the limit on that power?

4. Why did the Senate's acquittal not end the debate over whether Congress had acted appropriately?

3 YOUR TURN

Your own words

Write a 75 to 100 word newspaper editorial set just after the Senate trial. Take a position on Congress's response, acknowledge an opposing view, explain one effect on perceptions of the presidency, and use two details from the passage to show Congress's power and its limit.

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PART 1 · READ AND MARK

Underline two details about how people viewed the presidency, circle two details about how they viewed Congress, and number the House and Senate actions in order to trace Congress's power and its limit. Accept any marking that follows this job and points at the right text.

PART 2 · ANSWERS

#	QUESTION	ANSWER
1	How could Americans disapprove of Clinton's conduct but still support him as president? What did this split mean for perceptions of the presidency?	**Some separated Clinton's personal conduct from his performance in office. Others thought lying under oath damaged the presidency, so impeachment raised questions about trust even though Clinton stayed in office.**
2	How did supporters and critics of the House vote differ in their views of Congress's use of impeachment?	**Supporters saw Congress holding the president accountable. Critics saw the largely party-line vote as evidence that impeachment could be used as a partisan weapon.**
3	What did the House and Senate actions show about Congress's power to challenge a president and the limit on that power?	**The House could formally charge the president, but it could not remove him by itself. Removal required a two-thirds Senate vote, which neither article received.**
4	Why did the Senate's acquittal not end the debate over whether Congress had acted appropriately?	**Acquittal settled whether Clinton would be removed, not whether impeachment was justified. People continued to disagree about whether Congress had defended the rule of law or pursued a partisan fight.**

PART 3 · YOUR TURN (SAMPLE ANSWER)

Congress was right to investigate Clinton because a president's statements under oath should face scrutiny. The House's two impeachment articles showed that even a president could be formally charged. Still, the Senate's acquittal showed a limit: the House could not remove him by itself. Some Americans saw this process as a defense of the rule of law, while others saw the largely party-line House vote as a partisan attack. Clinton stayed in office, but the debate over his honesty could still damage trust in the presidency.

Accept positions for or against Congress's response if the editorial acknowledges the opposing view and accurately explains the House's charging power, the limit on removal, and an effect on perceptions of the presidency.