



Name _____

The President's Role in Passing Laws

By Sharon Fabian

The president doesn't pass laws. Congress passes the laws, but the president is involved in the lawmaking process, too. That is why he can make all of those campaign promises while he is running for office. If elected, he will have the opportunity to influence the passage of many new laws.



How does the president affect what laws are passed? There are several things that he can do.

When a new president comes in to office, he usually has an agenda in mind - new laws that he hopes to get passed in order to do the things that he has promised during his campaign. To get them introduced, the president may make speeches to Congress and also speeches to the public. In this way he gets people interested in passing his ideas into law. Because of his status as leader of the country, the president is in a unique position to get people to listen to his ideas and to act on them.

Once a bill is introduced into either house of Congress, there is still more that the president can do. He often meets individually with senators or representatives who are undecided or who might be persuaded to change their vote. Maybe he calls them up on the phone. Maybe he invites them to the White House for lunch. Then the president can explain his ideas and talk about why he hopes the senator or representative will vote for them.

A bill must pass both houses of Congress to become a law, but that is not all. Once the bill passes both houses, then it is sent to the president for his signature. The president can sign it, and the bill becomes a law. Or he can veto it, and it returns to Congress where the veto can be overridden by a vote of two-thirds of each house.

The president has assistants in the White House who gather information on a bill's progress. The White House Chief of Staff, the Deputy Chief of Staff, and other staff members play a role in getting information for the president. By the time a bill arrives on the president's desk for his signature, he already knows all about it. He knows the contents of the bill. He also knows whether or not it passed by a large majority. By this time, he has most likely expressed his opinion on whether or not he supports it, too.

President George W. Bush has played a role in the passage of many influential pieces of legislation during his term in office. One of those was the controversial education bill known as No Child Left Behind. It was one of the items on his agenda early in his first term. He signed it into law in 2002, and then in 2006 he urged members of Congress to reauthorize it, which they did.

Another controversial bill influenced by President Bush was the bill to allow more surveillance of communications that might be linked to terrorists. Concerns for citizens' privacy kept many congressmen from supporting the bill, but with much support from the president, the surveillance bill was passed.

In 2008, President Bush and others in the White House lobbied for passage of a bill to bail out failing financial institutions. Many members of his own party as well as many Democrats opposed spending the billions of dollars that the bill called for. President Bush and his staff, however, convinced Congress that the bill was necessary to save our economy from collapsing, and it was passed.

Would each of these bills have passed without the president's efforts? It is difficult to say. Would they have passed under a different president? That is difficult to say, too. One thing we can say is that the president has many ways to influence the passage of laws.



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Questions

1. For a bill to become a law, it must pass _____.
A. the Senate
B. the House of Representatives
C. both houses
D. only one house if the president signs it
2. A bill becomes a law when _____.
A. it receives a majority of the votes in both houses
B. it is signed by the president
C. it receives two-thirds of the votes in both houses
D. either B or C
3. President Bush was in favor of passing _____.
A. the No Child Left Behind bill
B. the bill about surveillance of possible terrorists' communications
C. the financial bailout bill
D. all of the above
4. The president can _____.
A. invite congressmen to lunch to talk about a bill
B. order Congress not to vote on a bill
C. get rid of a law that has already been passed by vetoing it
D. all of the above
5. When a bill comes to the White House for the president's signature, it is usually the first time that the president has heard of the bill.
A. false
B. true

6. A bill can be vetoed only by the president.
A. false
B. true

7. What are some things that a president can do to affect the passage of a bill into law?

8. Of the three bills discussed in this article, which would you sign if you were president?

Do you think that the president changes many congressmen's minds about the way they will vote? Why or why not?

