

# What exactly does a president do anyway?

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During a presidential campaign candidates make promises, take stands on issues and make pledges to get elected. They talk about changes they will create, ideas they will implement and decisions they will make. During election year the public is bombarded with advertisements, debates, forums and rallies to persuade one to vote a certain way. Is all of this attention warranted? How important is the President of the United States? How much power does he or she really have?

"The President of the United States is considered an important position," said senior Joel Carter, who is an avid follower of this year's presidential campaign. "While Congress puts most powers in check, this is what a democracy is: a system of checks and balances. We would not want a person in total control."

According to the Constitution, the president has several responsibilities. However, most of these are subject to review by Congress. For example, the president "shall appoint ambassadors, other public ministers and consuls...and all other offices of the United States." This power allows presidents to appoint thousands of public officials during their administration. While this may be a wonderful opportunity for a president, these appointments must be approved by a majority of the Senate. The president also has the power to veto a law. The constitution says that before any law takes effect, the president must approve it. If a president does not agree with a law, he can simply veto it and the law does not go into effect. Congress can override the president's veto only with two-thirds of the Senate and the House of Representatives. According to *The New American Democracy*, this only happens about one out of every ten times a veto is cast.

The president may also make recommendations to Congress. However these are simply recommendations not demands. Congress can ignore or change a president's proposal. For example, Bill Clinton proposed health care and welfare reform. Congress rejected his health-care proposals and modified his welfare reform ideas. The president's suggestions do not have to be followed by Congress. The president does have duties that are not checked by Congress. He "shall receive ambassadors and other public ministers...and shall commission all the officers of the United States." This simply means that he welcomes visitors and can administer oaths of office. However, as Chief of State the president also has the opportunity to represent the United States in a dignified fashion. This can be a positive political asset.

A president also has the power to inform and persuade. He is required to "from time to time give to the Congress information of the state of the union." Though the president speaks publicly many times during office, the best place to use this power is the State of the Union address. Not only does he inform the nation of America's general state, he can take this opportunity to persuade the public. The president can tell of his plans and goals. He may use this time to convince voters of his ideas and opinions. The president can downplay his faults and focus on his achievements. This can be a powerful tool used by the president.

One of the most important duties as a president is to speak for the country as a whole. The U.S. president fills the only position in America elected by a national constituency. According to *The New American Democracy*, this is a great political asset. However, because of this, presidents are often held responsible for things they have no control over. They are expected to conduct foreign policy, manage the economy, promote desired legislation, respond to disasters and address an endless number of social problems. The president has little or no control over every one of these situations.

"The national attention of a presidential election is warranted" Carter said. "Though the president may not be able to do everything expected of him, at the very least he represents our country. That is important."

**Questions:**

1. How does Carter define a democracy? Do you agree with him? Why or why not?
2. How important do you think it is for the President and Congress to get along? Explain.
3. What is the importance of the State of the Union Address?
4. Why is it sometimes unfair to be the President?
5. Do you think the attention to the campaigns and elections of Presidents is worthwhile? Explain.
6. In your opinion, how much power does the President of the United States really have?

<b>Presidential Powers</b>	<b>Presidential Restrictions</b>