

# ROLES OF THE PRESIDENT



## INTRODUCTION

What exactly does the president do in the White House? Most citizens understand that the President of the United States is the leader of the country, but they may not be able to explain all the duties and powers that come with that position. The Constitution specifically lists several presidential responsibilities. Other presidential roles have developed as our country has grown and changed. Learn about the requirements to become president and how the president carries out some of the major duties of this important position, as well as some historic examples.

## CONTEXTUAL ESSAY

The Constitution is the document that contains the foundational laws for the United States. Article II of the Constitution details the executive branch and president. It lists only three requirements to become president: the person must be at least thirty-five years old, a natural-born citizen, and have lived in the United States for at least fourteen years.

Once elected and sworn into office, the President of the United States moves into the White House for the next four years. Current presidents can serve a maximum of two four-year terms. The 22<sup>nd</sup> Amendment created this limit after Franklin Roosevelt served as president for twelve years. He was elected to four terms but died shortly after his fourth inauguration in 1945. While living and working in the White House, the president performs many roles. These include the following eight: Chief of State, Chief Executive, Chief Administrator, Chief Diplomat, Commander-in-Chief, Chief Legislator, Chief of Party, and Chief Citizen.

The Constitution specifically gives the president direct power over all branches of the military as **Commander-in-Chief**. The authority to declare war lies with the legislative branch, but the president can request and then sign declarations of war drafted by Congress (**Image 1**). During



*Image 1*

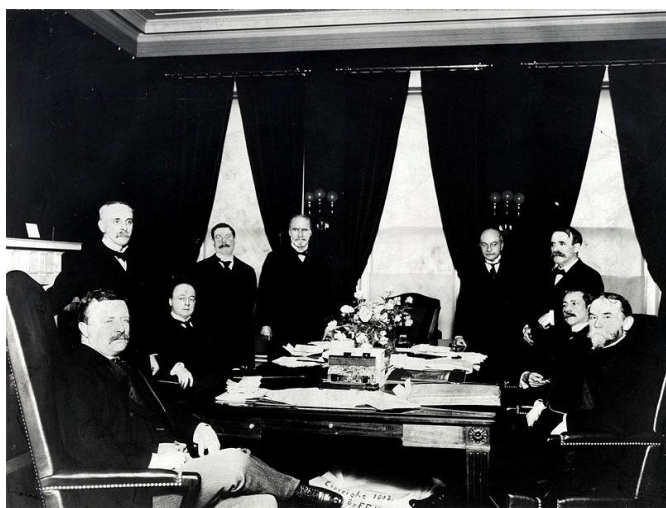
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the Civil War, Abraham Lincoln met with generals and visited troops in camp (**Image 2**). Other presidents exercised their authority as Commander-in-Chief even when the nation was not engaged in a conflict. In 1957, President Dwight D. Eisenhower sent soldiers to Little Rock, Arkansas, providing protection for the first African American children who attended the newly desegregated Central High School.

Along with managing the armed forces, the president heads the entire executive branch of the federal government as **Chief Administrator**. The executive branch is more than just the White House. This branch is made up of many different departments and agencies, such as the Department of Energy and the Department of Agriculture.

Also a part of leading the executive branch, the president is **Chief Executive**, enforcing the laws of the nation. To help with this enormous task, the president has the power to appoint a Cabinet, the group of people who advise the president and run the various government agencies (**Images 3 & 4**). George Washington had only four official cabinet members. Today there are twenty-four Cabinet-



*Image 3*

level positions, and they meet in the White House's Cabinet Room in the West Wing (**Image 5**). The first woman appointed to a Cabinet-level position was Frances Perkins, Secretary of Labor, under President Franklin D. Roosevelt in 1933. She was instrumental in helping Roosevelt carry out the New Deal, which put millions of people back to work during the Great Depression (**Image 6**).

In the role of **Chief Legislator**, the president does not write the laws of the nation; that is the job of Congress. However, the president has the authority to either sign a bill or veto a bill, which will

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prevent it from becoming a law. Presidents also advise Congress on their legislative goals, usually in a speech called the State of the Union (**Image 7**). Some of the many examples of bill signings include William Howard Taft's signing New Mexico into statehood in 1912 (**Image 8**) and Ronald Reagan's proclaiming the birthday of Martin Luther King, Jr., a national holiday in 1983 (**Image 9**).

As **Chief Diplomat**, the president determines how the United States and its diplomats interact with other countries. The president hosts State Visits, where foreign leaders visit the president at the White House (**Image 10**). In 1860, James Buchanan welcomed the first delegation of officials from Japan and ratified a Treaty of Amity and Commerce (**Image 11**). People were so eager to see these visitors in the East Room that some even stood on pieces of furniture.

Sometimes presidential decisions are influenced by their political party affiliation. These political parties help the presidential candidates campaign and win supporters around the country. Once elected, the president then helps others campaign through the role known as **Chief of Party**. In this unofficial position, the president acts as the leader of their political party and supports other governmental candidates who support the same policies.

Probably the most visible presidential role is **Chief of State**. In this position, the president serves as the public face and figure head of the country. An example of this is when the president hosts the ceremonial events such as the Presidential Medal of Freedom reception. This award is the highest civilian honor, presented to individuals who have made especially significant contributions to the nation and world (**Image 12**).



Image 12

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Finally, it is important to remember that the president is also a citizen. Acting as **Chief Citizen**, the president represents all citizens and sets an example for civic behavior in times of peace and crisis. During World War I, President Woodrow Wilson kept sheep on the White House lawn, benefiting the Red Cross through the donation of their wool and serving as a highly visible symbol of home front support. He hoped to encourage all Americans to give to the war effort in whatever way they could (**Image 13**).





Presidents have many roles and responsibilities, and they must perform all of these simultaneously during their term in office. Despite challenges, history shows how presidents can use their position to create great and lasting changes for our nation. This opportunity to be a part of history is what drives many to seek the office of the President of the United States.

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## IMAGES







*Click on web link to access online and for larger viewing*

Source	Title	Date	Created By	Courtesy Of	Thumbnail	Web Link
1	Franklin Roosevelt Signs the Declaration of War Against Japan	1941	Unknown	Franklin D. Roosevelt Presidential Library and Museum/ NARA		<a href="https://library.whitehousehistory.org/fotoweb/archives/5017-Digital%20Library/Main%20Index/Presidents/Franklin%20D%20Roosevelt/2238.tif.info">https://library.whitehousehistory.org/fotoweb/archives/5017-Digital%20Library/Main%20Index/Presidents/Franklin%20D%20Roosevelt/2238.tif.info</a>
2	President Lincoln with Gen. George B. McClellan with Officers in Antietam	1862	Alexander Gardner	Library of Congress		<a href="https://library.whitehousehistory.org/fotoweb/archives/5017-Digital%20Library/Main%20Index/Presidents/Abraham%20Lincoln/1126.tif.info">https://library.whitehousehistory.org/fotoweb/archives/5017-Digital%20Library/Main%20Index/Presidents/Abraham%20Lincoln/1126.tif.info</a>
3	Theodore Roosevelt's First Cabinet Meeting in the New Executive Offices	1902	Unknown	Library of Congress		<a href="https://library.whitehousehistory.org/fotoweb/archives/5017-Digital%20Library/Main%20Index/Presidents/Theodore%20Roosevelt/3013.tif.info">https://library.whitehousehistory.org/fotoweb/archives/5017-Digital%20Library/Main%20Index/Presidents/Theodore%20Roosevelt/3013.tif.info</a>
4	Carter and Others Meet in the Cabinet Room During the Iranian Hostage Crisis	1980	Unknown	Jimmy Carter Presidential Library and Museum/ NARA		<a href="https://library.whitehousehistory.org/fotoweb/archives/5017-Digital%20Library/Main%20Index/Presidents/Jimmy%20Carter/2952.tif.info">https://library.whitehousehistory.org/fotoweb/archives/5017-Digital%20Library/Main%20Index/Presidents/Jimmy%20Carter/2952.tif.info</a>
5	Cabinet Room, George H.W. Bush Administration	1991	Erik Kvalsvik	White House Historical Association		<a href="https://library.whitehousehistory.org/fotoweb/archives/5017-Digital%20Library/Main%20Index/Rooms/1018.tif.info">https://library.whitehousehistory.org/fotoweb/archives/5017-Digital%20Library/Main%20Index/Rooms/1018.tif.info</a>

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6	Francis Perkins at White House	1935	Harris & Ewing	Library of Congress		<a href="https://www.loc.gov/item/hec2013008456/">https://www.loc.gov/item/hec2013008456/</a>
7	President Roosevelt Delivering the 1939 State of the Union Address	1939	Unknown	Franklin D. Roosevelt Presidential Library/ NARA		<a href="https://library.whitehousehistory.org/fotoweb/archives/5017-Digital%20Library/Main%20Index/Presidents/Franklin%20D%20Roosevelt/1112171.tif.info">https://library.whitehousehistory.org/fotoweb/archives/5017-Digital%20Library/Main%20Index/Presidents/Franklin%20D%20Roosevelt/1112171.tif.info</a>
8	William H. Taft Signs New Mexico into Statehood	1912	Unknown	Library of Congress		<a href="https://library.whitehousehistory.org/fotoweb/archives/5017-Digital%20Library/Main%20Index/Presidents/William%20H%20Taft/9468.tif.info">https://library.whitehousehistory.org/fotoweb/archives/5017-Digital%20Library/Main%20Index/Presidents/William%20H%20Taft/9468.tif.info</a>
9	Ronald Reagan Signs Bill Proclaiming Martin Luther King Jr.'s Birthday a Holiday	1983	Unknown	Ronald Reagan Presidential Library and Museum/ NARA		<a href="https://library.whitehousehistory.org/fotoweb/archives/5017-Digital%20Library/Main%20Index/Events/111113.tif.info">https://library.whitehousehistory.org/fotoweb/archives/5017-Digital%20Library/Main%20Index/Events/111113.tif.info</a>
10	The Eisenhowers with Prince Phillip and Queen Elizabeth II	1957	Kathleen Revis	White House Historical Association		<a href="https://library.whitehousehistory.org/fotoweb/archives/5017-Digital%20Library/Main%20Index/Presidents/Dwight%20D%20Eisenhower/575.tif.info">https://library.whitehousehistory.org/fotoweb/archives/5017-Digital%20Library/Main%20Index/Presidents/Dwight%20D%20Eisenhower/575.tif.info</a>
11	Reception of the Japanese Envoy by President Buchanan in the East Room	1860	The Illustrated London News	Library of Congress		<a href="https://library.whitehousehistory.org/fotoweb/archives/5017-Digital%20Library/Main%20Index/Events/1304.tif.info">https://library.whitehousehistory.org/fotoweb/archives/5017-Digital%20Library/Main%20Index/Events/1304.tif.info</a>



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12	Tom Hanks Receives the Presidential Medal of Freedom	2016	Matthew D'Agostino	White House Historical Association		<a href="https://library.whitehousehistory.org/fotoweb/archives/5017-Digital-Library/Main%20Index/Events/113846.dng.info">https://library.whitehousehistory.org/fotoweb/archives/5017-Digital-Library/Main%20Index/Events/113846.dng.info</a>
13	White House Sheep on the South Lawn	1919	Harris & Ewing	Library of Congress		<a href="https://library.whitehousehistory.org/fotoweb/archives/5017-Digital%20Library/Main%20Index/Presidents/Woodrow%20Wilson/1159.tif.info">https://library.whitehousehistory.org/fotoweb/archives/5017-Digital%20Library/Main%20Index/Presidents/Woodrow%20Wilson/1159.tif.info</a>

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## SUGGESTIONS FOR TEACHERS

- The job of President of the United States is difficult and requires the person elected to perform many roles simultaneously. Discuss whether your students would want this job.
  - Continue the discussion by looking at portraits of presidents. For one modern president, choose an image from when they were first elected and another from when they left office. Guide your students as they think about why presidents' appearances may change in their four or eight years in office.
- Have students make a "Help Wanted" poster advertising the job of President of the United States. Ask them to imagine that they belong to a citizens' group concerned about getting the most capable candidates to run for president and they've decided to write an ad to put in the newspapers, billboards, and on the internet as a way of publicizing their effort. Their "help wanted" ad should list and explain the president's key roles and responsibilities.
- Using the essay, make a list of all the presidential roles discussed. Then, take a current news article about the president and ask students to address what role the president is fulfilling. Encourage them to support their answers with historical evidence.
- Sometimes American students born in other countries feel left out of the conversation about who can be president when they realize that they will not be eligible to run for that particular office. Create a discussion about the opportunities for naturalized citizens – people born in other nations who become American citizens. Naturalized citizens can still run for high offices such as congressional seats or become a member of the president's cabinet.
  - Examples: Madeline Albright, born in Czechoslovakia, and Henry Kissinger, born in Germany, were both Secretaries of State. Salud Carbajal, who was born in Mexico, was elected to the U.S. House of Representatives in 2016 for California's 24<sup>th</sup> District.