

LEGISLATIVE AND JUDICIAL POWERS

TEXT SUMMARY

By his legislative powers, the President may tell Congress what laws the nation needs. The President proposes some laws in an annual State of the Union address and others in an annual budget plan and economic report.

Once Congress passes a bill, the President has ten days to act on it. The President can sign the bill to make it law, allow it to become law without a signature, veto it, or use the pocket veto to let it die by not signing it before Congress adjourns. Also, from 1996 to 1998 the President had the power to use a **line-item**

veto on spending and tax bills. This allowed the President to approve most of a bill while vetoing certain parts, called line items.

The Constitution also grants the President certain judicial powers. It authorizes him to grant “reprieves and pardons for offenses against the United States, except in cases of impeachment.” A **reprieve** is the postponement of the execution of a sentence. A **pardon** is legal forgiveness for a crime. The pardoning power includes the powers of commutation and amnesty. **Commutation** is the power to reduce the length of a sentence or the amount of a fine imposed by a court. **Amnesty** is a general pardon offered to a group of law violators. These powers of **clemency**, that is, leniency or mercy, may only be used in cases involving federal offenses.

THE BIG IDEA

As part of the system of checks and balances, the Constitution gives the President important legislative and judicial powers.

GRAPHIC SUMMARY: *The President’s Major Legislative and Judicial Powers*

Legislative Powers	Judicial Powers
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • May recommend legislation • May veto legislation with a regular veto or with a pocket veto • May allow a bill to become a law either with or without a signature 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • May grant a reprieve on a sentence • May grant a pardon for a crime • May commute the length of a sentence or the amount of a fine • May grant amnesty to a group of law violators

The President’s legislative and judicial powers are part of the system of checks and balances.

REVIEW QUESTIONS

1. What is clemency?

2. **Chart Skills** How may the President veto legislation today?