2.5 Explain how the president’s agenda can create tension and frequent confrontations with Congress and 2.7 Explain how communication technology has changed the president’s relationship with the national constituency and the other branches.

Often presidents see election victories as a mandate from the people. Voters choose candidates in order to fulfill campaign promises and to see certain public policies enacted. Presidential agendas create tensions within in our representative democracy. Successful presidents need to navigate carefully in order to achieve their objectives. This requires presidents to maintain a permanent campaign mode. This requires mastery over the media.

As part of their permanent campaign for public support, presidents constantly speak and hold public events. To reach the public, presidents must lead not only traditional broadcast and print media, but also reach audiences that prefer cable television, Internet blogs, or other online news sources. Presidents must target these media daily, as the 24-hour news cycle has the potential to move rapidly from one news story to another.

More so, however, presidents need to rely upon a close staff of advisers and support personnel. These men and women are typically drawn from the president’s campaign. The American presidency encompasses a vast Executive Branch. It is more than one person.

“The buck may stop” on the president’s desk but it must pass through a large complex bureaucracy known as the Executive Branch. Policies proposed by the president are shaped, molded and initiated by the White House Office. Certain executive departments also assist the president’s policy agenda. Examples would be the Department of State, the Department of Defense and the Department of the Treasury. The heads of these departments are collectively known as the Cabinet. The Cabinet has grown weaker over time as each Secretary spends more time securing the stability [and budget] of their Department rather than giving unfettered advice to the president. Even so, the president’s White House Office and his/her Cabinet play a vital role in setting the national agenda.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>The Presidents Support Staff</th>
<th>Cabinet</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>The Executive Office of The President</strong></td>
<td><strong>The 15 Secretaries and 5 others who hold “Cabinet rank” (OMB Director, CIA Director, White House Counselor, UN Ambassador, US Trade Rep).</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>o White House Office/White House Staff</td>
<td>o Each of these is appointed by the President w/Senate consent.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>o Immediate staff President</td>
<td>o Presidents can, of course, fire the political appointees within a department.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>o Office space in West Wing of White House (\rightarrow) proximity to President.</td>
<td>o In our system:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>o Appointments to the White House Office</td>
<td>o Cabinet officials are constitutionally banned from also being members of Congress.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>o e.g. Chief of Staff, generally do not require Senate consent</td>
<td>o The Cabinet meets irregularly. Only at the call of the President.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>o Officials are less subject to testifying before Congress since they have a greater degree of executive privilege protection.</td>
<td>o Cabinet officials are more interested in defending/enlarging their own departments than they are in meeting together to hammer out public policy. Many newly-elected Presidents speak of enlarging the Cabinet's role, but then think better of it as time goes on.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>o Presidents typically seek people who will be loyal – less divided loyalties are compared to Cabinet positions.</td>
<td>o Factors affecting selection of Cabinet Secretaries include party affiliation, interest group influence, race, gender, geographical diversity, and “confirmability”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>o OMB (Office of Management and Budget)</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
THE VICE PRESIDENT

The founders paid little attention to the office and assigned the position to 1) preside over the Senate, but without a vote except to break a tie and 2) help decide the question of presidential disability, as provided in the 25th Amendment in 1967. To date, the vice president has never had to decide a question of presidential disability.

The most important function of the vice president is to take over the presidency if the president is unable to fill his term. That has only happened nine times in history, but of course, the vice president must be qualified to take over the presidency.

A vice president’s role in any administration is almost entirely up to the president. Although the original constitution designated the runner-up for the presidency as the vice president, the 12th Amendment was passed in 1804, which provided for electors to vote for a president/vice-president slate. Traditionally, a presidential candidate chooses a vice presidential partner, usually based on a "balance" to the ticket (region, age, popular base, party subgroup).

- Only two constitutional duties:
  - Become President or Acting President if the office of President is vacant.
  - Preside over Senate, voting only in case of ties.
- Traditionally, the V.P. is a dull, do-nothing job
- The job of a V.P. is basically what the President says it is:
  - V.P. is often selected not on basis of qualifications, but on basis of balancing the ticket.
  - After he has "done his job (i.e., helped win votes)," the V.P. is often "put out to pasture" for dull work.
- Importance of the office:
  - 9/43 Presidents have not finished their terms of office.
  - V.P. can become Acting President if the President is disabled.

TENSION AND CONFRONTATION WITH THE PRESIDENT’S AGENDA

There are, of course, significant obstacles to a president realizing public policy success. Tensions over a president’s agenda are constant. Public opinion often gets in the way. So too does unexpected foreign policy interruption. More obvious, however, is the public confrontation with Congress. Even when our government is unified, the president and the majority of Congress from the same political party, U.S. presidents and the U.S. Congress fight over policy priorities.

A salient example of this would be the inherent tensions over presidential appointments. The constitutionally required Senate confirmation process has become routinely messy. Political science has studied this tension with great interest. The consequences to our democracy are both real and immediate and in many ways quite new. A recent study has suggested:

The defining characteristic of the current appointment process, and of congressional executive interactions more broadly, is novelty. Established mechanisms for policy setting and compromise are being cast aside, the casualties of increasing polarization in Congress combined with divided government and presidential political imperatives. New norms and governing approaches are emerging, with a heavy emphasis on executive action. Although prior practices may return with a switch to unified government, good reason exists to expect innovation even then.

A noticeable change in the appointment and confirmation process today is the time it takes to complete. Holds, delays and the vetting process now move at a snails pace. Sometimes this cannot be avoided. All too often, however, it is all about political gamesmanship. Delays in the appointment process affect government work and responsiveness.

This can be seen most clearly in judicial appointments. Presidents are required by the U.S. Constitution to fill vacated seats on the Supreme Court. The Senate has the responsibility to confirm those appointments. This advice and consent responsibility has grown increasingly political. Going back at least as far as the Robert Bork nomination in 1987, the Senate has routinely chosen to make the confirmation process of judges more difficult.

Another area of dramatic tension between the president and Congress can be found in the area of foreign policy. Presidents have distinctly different agendas when it comes to foreign policy. They also possess substantial power advantages over Congress in the area of foreign policy. The Founding Fathers seemed to have intended this. Nevertheless,
Congress through their power of the purse and access to the 24/7 media machine can pose serious threats to a president’s foreign policy goals.

Presidents can circumvent Congressional obstructions by using their vast arsenal of informal powers. Presidents as of late have issued more waivers, recess appointments, executive orders and agreements to fulfill campaign promises and agendas. Although these tactics can fuel greater animus and mistrust between the institutions, they also reflect how presidential power has increased in recent years without too much push back by the American people.

Policy initiatives promoted by the president often lead to conflict. In our lifetime these conflicts have tended to weaken the other branches while making the presidency even stronger. Back in 1788 Alexander Hamilton called for “an energetic president.” Today there can be little doubt that Hamilton’s hopes have been realized.

TECHNOLOGY AND COMMUNICATION

Even Abraham Lincoln understood the power of his brand. “Perception is everything,” he said. “One of the most conspicuous trends in the development of the modern presidency,” according to political science, “is the emergence and growth of the plebiscitary presidency...Contemporary presidents engage in a permanent public campaign to promote legislative priorities.” Teddy Roosevelt called it his bully pulpit. Whatever you call it, today’s presidents rely upon public speeches, polls, extensive travel around the country and social media to set the national agenda. The ever present need for rhetorical appeals along with communication technology have changed the president’s relationship with the national constituency and the other branches of government.

Edward Corwin, noted political scientist, rooted presidential authority in the rather limited formal powers as found in the text of the U.S. Constitution In contrast, Richard Neustadt, another noteworthy scholar, posited presidential power and authority in the ability to master certain informal powers. This meant presidents could successfully dictate policy priorities through the art of persuasion. Presidents, therefore, greatly influence government outcomes through strategic bargaining with policy makers and gaining public approval through high profile events. Recent presidents have traveled more, given more speeches, made appearances on highly rated television programs and utilized a variety of social media platforms. Public approval, it has been argued, gives presidents leverage but not control. Such leverage, however, has made the modern president more powerful. It has dramatically changed the relationship with both national constituents and players in the other branches.

The Constitution requires presidents to give an annual State of the Union address. Traditionally this was an important agenda setting moment. It still is. Yet today a 24/7 media cycle has allowed presidents to promote a different agenda each and every day. All types of media cover presidential travels. Speeches are televised and posted on social media. Other modern technologies like Facebook and Twitter make presidential movement and statements ubiquitous. All of these communication outlets allow the president to become a first responder. They also let the president mold and make stories. These pseudo-events go a long way in explaining how presidents today build public approval and therefore advance their political agendas.

Examples are plentiful of presidents practicing this type of agenda setting. Woodrow Wilson, even before he entered the White House, considered that if a president could “rightly interpret national thought and boldly insist upon it, he (would be) irresistible.” Ronald Reagan’s ability to master these skills earned him the title, “The Great Communicator.” Few presidents, however, were as intentional about employing public opinion as an empowering agent as Bill Clinton. During his campaign in 1992, a “war room” was created to coordinate activity. A similar “war room” was set up in the White House to coordinate agendas, legislative priorities, political battles and administrative rule making. In Clinton’s “war room” the rules of engagement were designed to fight critical budget battles as well as fights for NAFTA, Health Care and the Reinvention of Government. The Clinton Administration did not win all of these battles but they were able to call upon high public approval to ward off Republican inquisitors seeking to remove him over a sex scandal. Demonstrably presidents use communication technologies to influence critical constituencies.

Michael Novak has written, “If we are to reform the presidency, the heart of the matter is the president’s power over reality, his symbolic power. The social reality of the U.S. cannot be left to definition by one man alone.” Teddy Roosevelt had his bully pulpit. Obama had Snapchat. Trump Twitter. Presidents are uniquely positioned to move political agendas by drawing attention to national priorities and therefore pressuring policy makers to act accordingly. The Founding Fathers may have envisioned an energetic chief executive but they never would have imagined a plebiscitary presidency.
Nor would they have understood what a recent Google executive stated, “If you want to liberate a government, give them the Internet.” Communication technologies along with social media have changed the relationship between “we the people” and their government. Not sure who has the upper hand. Google it.