

THE OFFICE OF THE PRESIDENT

"... I will faithfully execute the Office of the President of the United States,..."

When the President recites these words on inauguration day, he takes on the responsibility of the executive branch of our government. Although many voters might argue that the government has grown into a vast bureaucracy, the Constitution confers sole executive authority on the President. He alone can ask Congress to declare war; his signature signs bills into law. As you'll see in the following clips, President Bartlet is dependent on his staff for their advice and research - but at the end of the day, he is the solitary decision-making authority in the executive branch.

Part 1 Commander in Chief

Article II, Section Two of the Constitution bestows on the President one of his most important duties: Commander in Chief of the Armed Forces. In these scenes, President Bartlet is faced with a hostage situation in Colombia - five Drug Enforcement Agency officers are being held by a powerful drug cartel, which is demanding the release of their leader from a Colombian jail. President Bartlet faces a terrible decision: he could order military action against the cartel, or he could negotiate and meet their demands. Both courses of action could cost American lives. Watch to see the outcome of his decision.

- * If you were Commander in Chief and were faced with this conflict, how would you handle the situation? What are the arguments for and against each of the potential actions?

Part 2 Chief Executive

The President rules the third most-populated country in the world - there are over 295 million people living in the United States. So it should be no surprise that it costs the government almost 800 billion dollars to run the country - and that Congress and the President rarely agree on how much money should be spent where. In these scenes, the White House faces off with Congressional leaders as the clock ticks toward the budget's deadline. Should the President cut federal spending on important programs, as the Speaker of the House suggests? Should he agree to a continuing resolution that allows the government to have temporary spending authority after the deadline passes? Or should he risk everything, and shut the government down until Congress relents? Watch the video to find out how Bartlet handles this situation, then answer the question below. Share your answers in a class discussion.

- * Discuss the power the President and the Congress hold in this situation. What are the consequences of Bartlet's decision? If you were Chief Executive, what would you do?

Part 3 Political Leader

Behind every presidential decision is a human being who must make hard choices, weigh political ideology, and lead a nation. The following clips show Bartlet and his staff in some truly agonizing situations - comforting tornado victims, talking with a submarine commander whose ship is going down, speaking to supporters on the day when a tragic fire takes the lives of 44 college students. After viewing this section, talk about what kind of person it takes to care so much about his citizens and the entire world. Why is that important for a leader?