

Roles and typical day in life of U.S. leader President must wear many hats

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The president fulfills a number of roles for the country. Historians generally agree that there are seven roles essential to the president's job:

Commander in chief: The president is the chief military officer of the United States and sets the country's general military policy. Although the president cannot declare war (Congress does that), the president may commit U.S. troops to action in emergency situations.

Chief of the Executive Branch: The president is in charge of seeing that laws and programs are carried out by supervising the government, including federal law enforcement, and appointing justices to the Supreme Court, judges to other federal courts, and other federal officials. (Appointments are subject to Senate approval.)

Head of state: The president stands as the symbol of the United States, entertaining foreign dignitaries, presenting awards and issuing proclamations.

Foreign-policy head: The president sets out the country's policies and practices in regard to other nations. The president, or the president's representative, makes treaties with foreign nations with the approval of the Senate. The president also proposes foreign aid and names ambassadors to foreign nations.

Political-party leader: The president belongs to a political party and speaks for that party, often helping raise money for congressional candidates and the party and presenting the party's ideas to the American people.

Guardian of the economy: The president is often held responsible for the fate of the U.S. economy and so is in frequent consultation with

economic advisers as basic economic policy is set. The president may recommend tax changes, propose a budget each year for the nation and try to set trade policy.

Legislative leader: The president signs bills into law or vetoes them and may also meet with individual representatives and senators to urge support for, or opposition to, a particular bill.

A day in the life of the president

The president plays many roles. Sometimes they overlap. What follows is a shortened description of a president's typical day. Pick any two activities of the president from this list and talk with your parents, teachers, friends or classmates about which of the seven roles the president is playing in each activity.

6:30 a.m.: The president wakes up, showers, dresses, watches TV news and scans the morning newspapers.

7:30 a.m.: Assistant brings preceding day's Congressional Record, with pages marked for attention. Appointments secretary gives briefing on day's schedule.

7:50 a.m.: Breakfast.

8:15 a.m.: Arrives at office, telephones the budget director about press reports that the proposed budget soon to be unveiled publicly does not provide enough tax relief to married couples with children in school.

8:35 a.m.: Signs documents and reads selected letters brought by personal secretary. Dictates answers to letters.

8:55 a.m.: Meets with four congressional leaders of own party to discuss strategy for passing a particular bill.

9:20 a.m.: Receives award from National Audubon Society for efforts to preserve nesting grounds for wild birds.

9:35 a.m.: Phones 1) a senator recovering from illness to wish her a rapid recovery; 2) a labor leader, whose union is on strike, to express hope for a quick settlement to lessen the economic impact; and 3) the director of the Office of Management and Budget with a specific question about the budget.

10 a.m.: Two defeated representatives of the president's party come to ask whether there are any jobs for them.

10:20 a.m.: The new American ambassador to Sweden stops in to say goodbye and to ask for any special instructions.

10:45 a.m.: Presents the Purple Heart award to the families of five soldiers killed in a military action.

11:15 a.m.: Special assistant for national security summarizes the status of four international crises.

11:50 a.m.: Lunch, personal time, brief nap.

2 p.m.: Signs a new anti-crime law.

2:40 p.m.: Meets with the Council of Economic Advisers in the Cabinet room to discuss plans to boost the economy.

3:15 p.m.: Greet a group touring the White House.

3:25 p.m.: Meets with White House reporters and answers questions for 15 minutes.

3:45 p.m.: Aide rushes in with top-secret CIA report on a foreign-policy crisis area. After reading it, president phones CIA director to ask for more data.

4:15 p.m.: Receives the foreign minister of an Asian country.

4:45 p.m.: A representative comes to request the reopening of an army base in her district. The president agrees to give it careful thought.

5 p.m.: Prepares for a Lincoln Day dinner at a Washington hotel. Goes over speech.

6:30 p.m.: Arrives at hotel, eats dinner and presents speech.

10 p.m.: Returns to White House. Exercises for 45 minutes.

10:45 p.m.: Retires to bedroom with folder of memoranda and short reports to read.

11:45 p.m.: Goes to sleep.

(Updated and adapted from "American Political Behavior" by Howard D. Mehlinger (Ginn, 1980).

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