

Interpreting Political Cartoons 6

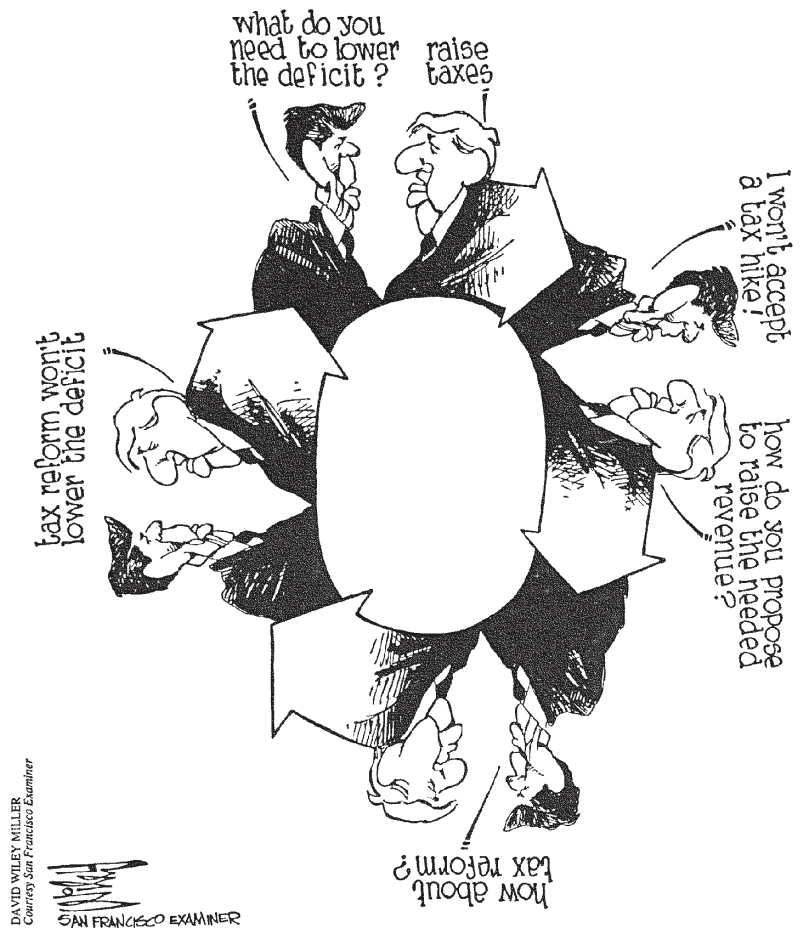


Development of Congressional Powers

Is Congress more powerful than the president? Is the president more powerful than Congress? To maintain a balance between the two, the Constitution defined the powers of each. Congress was given “all legislative powers” of federal government, but its greatest power is the control over government taxing and spending. However, the president has the power to veto any congressional bill. If the president vetoes a bill, Congress may then try to override the veto. Another check on congressional power is the president’s ability to initiate and propose legislation to Congress. Although time-consuming and complex, this system of checks and balances ensures that the laws are thoroughly scrutinized before being approved.

The relationship between the president and Congress is represented in the following cartoon. It examines President Ronald Reagan’s work with Congress, represented by Speaker of the House Tip O’Neill, in the 1980s. During his first term, Reagan worked with Congress to stem inflation by reducing spending for many social programs, increasing defense spending, and freeing business from government intervention. This policy was called *Reaganomics* and had mixed results for the federal budget and for U.S. citizens.

The cartoon on this page gives one view of the relationship between Congress and the president. Study the cartoon and answer the questions that follow:

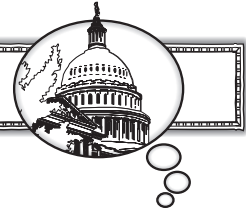


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DAVID WILEY MILLER
Courtesy San Francisco Examiner
SAN FRANCISCO EXAMINER

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Interpreting Political Cartoons 6



Analyzing the Cartoon

1. The powers of the president and of Congress are supposed to be balanced, as if on a scale. Why does the cartoon replace the scale with a circle? _____

2. Does the cartoon portray the relationship between the president and Congress as being effective? Explain your answer based on the drawing. _____

3. What is the main topic of each sentence spoken, and how does this relate to the powers delegated by the Constitution? _____

4. Explain how the cartoon's dialogue aptly demonstrates the system of checks and balances. _____

Critical Thinking

5. Reflecting on this nation's past, which incorporated immigrants from many other countries with diverse political and government systems, why do you think the Framers of the Constitution felt a need to develop a rigid system to check and balance the powers of the presidency and the Congress?

6. What do you think is the cartoonist's opinion of President Reagan and Speaker Tip O'Neill?

Interpreting Political Cartoons 7



Congress at Work

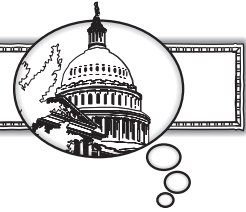
In the U.S. an election winner is frequently the incumbent in that office, which means that the candidate held that position during the previous term. Voting an incumbent from office can prove to be difficult, as the politician has usually amassed great support from his/her constituents. Incumbents and their staff also work dilligently to secure financial backing from special interest organizations and private citizens. Although federal law prohibits contributions from corporations and labor unions, these organizations can raise funds through political action committees (PACs), which accept voluntary contributions from the organization's employees or members. The money allows the politician to mount vigorous re-election campaigns. Inexperienced politicians often find it impossible to raise enough money to run competitive campaigns. Many worthy candidates have failed to win elections because they could not afford to campaign through the media, personal appearances, and direct mail campaigns.

The cartoon on this page gives one view of the relationship between incumbents and special interest groups. Study the cartoon and answer the questions that follow:



Source: Paul Duginski, McClatchy News Service. *Best Editorial Cartoons of the Year*. 1994.

Interpreting Political Cartoons 7



Analyzing the Cartoon

1. Why is the politician hiding behind a sand bag wall? _____

2. What is used to represent sand bags, and why did the cartoonist choose to construct the bunker of these?

3. Why is the politician compared to a soldier in battle? _____

4. How does the cartoon reflect the attitude of the politician toward U.S. voters? _____

Critical Thinking

5. After analyzing the cartoon, why do you think that government prohibits candidates from accepting money from labor unions and corporations? _____

6. How would you describe the cartoonist's opinion of incumbents, based on his portrayal of one in the cartoon? _____

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