

2026 MCAS Sample Student Work and Scoring Guide

Grade 8 Civics

Question 4: Constructed-Response

Reporting Category: Government Structures

Practice Category: Explanations and Reasoning

Standard: [8.T3.2](#) - Examine the interrelationship of the three branches (the checks and balance system).

- Congress: enumerated powers, general powers, limits on power, checks on other two branches; roles of political parties in the organization of Congress; roles within the legislative branch, such as the Speaker of the House, the President of the Senate, minority party leaders; the system for accomplishing legislation, including committees, hearings and legislative procedures
- the Presidency: roles, powers and limits, checks on other two branches, role of the Cabinet, such as the Vice President, Attorney General and Secretaries of State, Defense, Health and Human Services, Homeland Security; executive departments and agencies (such as the Department of Education, the Federal Bureau of Investigation, or the Food and Drug Administration), and branches of the military
- the Supreme Court: role and powers, checks on other two branches, lower courts

Item Description: Use evidence from a source to describe how one branch of government can check the power of another branch of government.

This item can be found in the released item sets on the [MCAS Resource Center](#).

Question

Based on the source, describe one way the legislative branch can check the power of the executive branch. Be sure to include information from the source in your response.

Continue to the following page to see the source. Continue to page 3 to see the sample student responses for this question.

Source

The following text describes the U.S. Department of the Interior.

The Department of the Interior is a federal agency responsible for managing and protecting the nation's natural resources. The agency was established by an act of Congress in 1849 to preserve lands for the public to enjoy.

In 2021, the U.S. Senate voted 51 to 40 to confirm Deb Haaland as Secretary of the Interior. She became the first Native American to serve in that position. The photograph shows Secretary Haaland speaking at Yellowstone National Park.



Courtesy of the National Park Service

Part of the Secretary of the Interior's role is to ensure that rules and regulations related to public lands are being enforced. During her visit to Yellowstone National Park, Secretary Haaland stated, "Nature is essential to the health, well-being, and prosperity of every family and community in America. . . . [N]ow is the time to make the investments in our lands and waters that are long overdue." The Department of the Interior's budget for 2021 was \$12.8 billion dollars. Secretary Haaland used a portion of this budget to maintain national parks.

Score Point 1A*

One way the legislative branch can check the power of the executive branch is by confirming government officials. The source is one example of how the legislative branch checks the executive branch because it shows how Deb Haaland had to be confirmed by vote from the senate to get her position of Secretary of the Interior. This is a check to the executive branch because congress has to confirm every official the president nominates.

Score Point 1B*

One way the Legislative branch can check the power of the executive branch is that they can lower the budget for the Department of Interior's.

Score Point 0

One way the legislative branch can check the power of the executive branch is by rejecting a law passed by the executive branch. For example, if the law passed by the Secretary of Interior did not "ensure that rules and regulations to public lands are being enforced", the Congress could make sure that it isn't passed.

*Letters are used to distinguish between sample student responses that earned the same score (e.g., 1A and 1B).