

The Fifteen Executive Departments

| DEPARTMENT (YEAR ESTABLISHED) | PRINCIPAL FUNCTIONS | IMPORTANT AGENCIES |
|---------------------------------------|---|--|
| State (1789) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Advises President on foreign policy • Negotiates agreements with foreign countries • Represents the United States abroad and in international organizations | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li style="width: 50%;">• Foreign Service <li style="width: 50%;">• Bureau of Diplomatic Security <li style="width: 50%;">• Regional Bureaus <li style="width: 50%;">• Bureau of International Organization Affairs <li style="width: 50%;">• Bureau of Consular Affairs (Office of Passport Services) |
| Treasury (1789) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Produces coins and bills • Collects taxes • Borrows money and manages public debt • Enforces alcohol, tobacco, and firearms laws | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li style="width: 50%;">• Internal Revenue Service <li style="width: 50%;">• United States Mint <li style="width: 50%;">• Bureau of the Public Debt <li style="width: 50%;">• Bureau of Engraving and Printing <li style="width: 50%;">• Office of the Comptroller of the Currency |
| Defense^a (1789) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provides military forces to deter war and protect the nation's security | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Joint Chiefs of Staff • Departments of the Army, the Navy, and the Air Force |
| Justice^b (1870) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Prosecutes those accused of violating federal law • Enforces federal laws • Provides legal advice to President • Operates federal prisons • Represents United States in court | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li style="width: 50%;">• Federal Bureau of Investigation <li style="width: 50%;">• Criminal Division <li style="width: 50%;">• Drug Enforcement Administration <li style="width: 50%;">• Civil Rights Division <li style="width: 50%;">• U.S. Marshals Service <li style="width: 50%;">• Bureau of Prisons <li style="width: 50%;">• Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms, and Explosives |
| Interior (1849) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Manages public lands, wildlife refuges, and national parks • Operates hydroelectric power plants • Helps Native Americans manage their affairs | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li style="width: 50%;">• U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service <li style="width: 50%;">• National Park Service <li style="width: 50%;">• Bureau of Land Management <li style="width: 50%;">• U.S. Geological Survey <li style="width: 50%;">• Bureau of Indian Affairs <li style="width: 50%;">• Bureau of Reclamation |
| Agriculture (1889) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Manages national forests • Inspects food • Assists farmers and ranchers • Administers food stamp and school lunch programs | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li style="width: 50%;">• Agricultural Research Service <li style="width: 50%;">• Farm Service Agency <li style="width: 50%;">• Food and Nutrition Service <li style="width: 50%;">• Forest Service <li style="width: 50%;">• Food Safety and Inspection Service <li style="width: 50%;">• Rural Utilities Service |
| Commerce^c (1903) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Conducts census • Grants patents and registers trademarks • Promotes international trade, economic growth, and technological development | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li style="width: 50%;">• Bureau of the Census <li style="width: 50%;">• National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration <li style="width: 50%;">• Patent and Trademark Office <li style="width: 50%;">• Minority Business Development Agency <li style="width: 50%;">• International Trade Administration <li style="width: 50%;">• Economic Development Administration |
| Labor (1913) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Enforces federal laws on minimum wages, maximum hours, and safe working conditions • Operates job training programs • Administers unemployment insurance and workers' compensation programs | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li style="width: 50%;">• Employment Standards Administration <li style="width: 50%;">• Pension and Welfare Benefits Administration <li style="width: 50%;">• Occupational Safety and Health Administration <li style="width: 50%;">• Women's Bureau <li style="width: 50%;">• Employment and Training Administration <li style="width: 50%;">• Bureau of Labor Statistics |

Interpreting Tables Over the years, Congress created the 15 executive departments to handle the responsibilities of the Federal Government. **Which three Cabinet departments are the most important? Why?**

The 15 departments are profiled in the table on these two pages. The principal functions they perform and the titles of their major agencies provide a useful description of each of them.

The Cabinet

The Cabinet is an informal advisory body brought together by the President to serve his needs. The Constitution makes no mention of it, nor did Congress create it.⁶ Instead, the Cabinet is the product of custom and usage.

At its first session in 1789, Congress established four top-level executive posts: secretary of state, secretary of the treasury, secretary of war,

and attorney general. By his second term, President George Washington was regularly seeking the advice of the four outstanding people he had named to those offices: Thomas Jefferson in the Department of State, Alexander Hamilton at the Treasury, Henry Knox in the War Department, and Edmund Randolph, the attorney general. So the Cabinet was born.

⁶The closest approach to it is in Article II, Section 2, Clause 1, where the President is given the power to "require the Opinion, in writing, of the principal Officer in each of the executive Departments, upon any Subject relating to the duties of their respective Offices." The Cabinet was first mentioned in an act of Congress in 1907, well over a century after its birth.

| DEPARTMENT (YEAR ESTABLISHED) | PRINCIPAL FUNCTIONS | IMPORTANT AGENCIES |
|--|--|---|
| Health and Human Services^d (1953) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Funds health care research programs • Conducts programs to prevent and control disease • Enforces pure food and drug laws • Administers Medicare and Medicaid | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Administration for Children and Families • Food and Drug Administration • National Institutes of Health • Centers for Disease Control and Prevention • Health Care Financing Administration |
| Housing and Urban Development (1965) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Operates home-financing and public housing programs • Enforces fair housing laws | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Office of Housing • Office of Fair Housing and Equal Opportunity • Government National Mortgage Association |
| Transportation (1967) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Administers programs to promote and regulate highways, mass transit, railroads, waterways, air travel, and oil and gas pipelines | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Federal Highway Administration • Federal Aviation Administration • Maritime Administration • Federal Railroad Administration |
| Energy (1977) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Promotes production of renewable energy, fossil fuels, and nuclear energy • Transmits and sells hydroelectric power • Conducts nuclear weapons research and production | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Office of Energy Efficiency and Renewable Energy • Office of Nuclear Energy, Science and Technology • Regional Power Administration • Office of Civilian Radioactive Waste Management |
| Education (1979) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Administers federal aid to schools • Conducts educational research | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Office of Elementary and Secondary Education • Office of Educational Research and Improvement |
| Veterans Affairs (1988) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Administers benefits, pensions, and medical programs for veterans of the armed forces • Oversees military cemeteries | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Veterans Benefits Administration • Veterans Health Administration • National Cemetery Administration |
| Homeland Security (2002) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Border and transportation security • Emergency preparedness and response • Chemical, biological, radiological, nuclear defense • Information analysis and infrastructure protection | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Coast Guard • Bureau of Citizenship and Immigration Services • Bureau of Immigration and Customs Enforcement • Transportation Security Administration • Secret Service |

^a Congress created the National Military Establishment as an executive department, headed by the Secretary of Defense, in 1947. It was renamed the Department of Defense, in 1949. Since 1947 the department has included the former cabinet-level Departments of War (1789) and the Navy (1798), and the Department of the Air Force.

^b Congress created the office of Attorney General in 1789 but did not establish the Department of Justice until 1870.

^c Congress created the Department of Commerce and Labor in 1903; it was replaced by the separate Departments of Commerce and of Labor in 1913.

^d Congress created the Department of Health, Education, and Welfare in 1953. HEW's education functions were transferred to a new Department of Education in 1979, and HEW was renamed at that time.

By tradition, the heads of the now 15 executive departments form the Cabinet. Each of the last several Presidents has regularly added a number of other top officials to the group, including the director of the Office of Management and Budget and the President's chief domestic policy advisor. The Vice President is a regular participant, and several other major figures regularly attend Cabinet meetings in the Bush Administration—in particular the White House chief of staff, the United States trade representative, and the administrator of the Environmental Protection Agency.

Choosing Cabinet Members

The President appoints the head of each of the 15 executive departments. Each of these appointments is subject to confirmation by the Senate, but rejections have been exceedingly rare. Of the more than 600 appointments made since 1789, only 12 have been rejected. The most recent rejection occurred in 1989, when the Senate refused to confirm President George H.W. Bush's selection of John Tower as secretary of defense.

President George W. Bush's nomination of John Ashcroft as Attorney General generated significant opposition in 2001; the Senate



▲ **Bush Cabinet Members** The Bush Cabinet includes Secretary of Labor Elaine Chao, the first Chinese American to hold a Cabinet office, and Hispanic Mel Martinez, Secretary of Housing and Urban Development.

confirmed the President's choice by a narrow vote, however.

Many factors influence the President's Cabinet choices. Party is almost always important. Republican Presidents do not often pick Democrats, and vice versa. One or more of a new President's appointees usually come from among those who played a major role in the recent presidential campaign.

Of course, professional qualifications and practical experience are also taken into account in the selection of Cabinet secretaries. Geography also plays a part. In broad terms, each President tries to give some regional balance to the Cabinet. Thus, the secretary of the interior regularly comes from the West, where most of the department's work is carried out.

Many interest groups care about Cabinet appointments, and they influence some of the choices. Thus, the secretary of agriculture usually has a background in agriculture. The secretary of the treasury often comes from the financial community, the secretary of commerce from the ranks of business, and so on.

Other considerations also guide the President's choices. Gender and race, management abilities and experience, and other personal characteristics—these and a host of other factors play a part in selecting Cabinet members.

Women and Minorities

Women and minorities have only gradually become represented in the Cabinet. Franklin Roosevelt appointed the first woman, Frances T. Perkins, secretary of labor from 1933 to 1945. Lyndon Johnson named the first African American, Robert C. Weaver, as the first secretary of housing and urban development (HUD) in 1966.

The Ford Cabinet was the first to include both a woman (Carla Hills, secretary of HUD) and an African American (William T. Coleman, secretary of transportation); both were appointed in 1975. Jimmy Carter appointed the first African American woman to the Cabinet when he named Patricia Roberts Harris secretary of HUD in 1977 and then secretary of health and human services (HHS) in 1979. Ronald Reagan appointed the first Hispanic Cabinet member; Lauro F. Cavazos became secretary of education in 1988.

President Clinton picked more women, more African Americans, and more Hispanics than any of his predecessors. Over his eight years in office (1993–2001), the Cabinet included five women, six African Americans, four Hispanics, and its first Asian American, Norman Mineta, the Secretary of Commerce in the last year of the Clinton administration. Janet Reno became the first woman to serve as Attorney General and Madeleine Albright the first to be Secretary of State.

President George W. Bush's first Cabinet appointments included two African Americans: Secretary of State Colin Powell and Secretary of Education Rod Paige; three women: Secretary of Labor Elaine Chao, Secretary of the Interior Gale Norton, and Secretary of Agriculture Ann Veneman; and one Hispanic, Secretary of Housing and Urban Development Mel Martinez. Secretary Chao was born in China and is the first Chinese American to hold a Cabinet office. Norman Mineta, a Democrat, named Secretary of Transportation, also served in the Clinton Cabinet.

The Cabinet's Role

Cabinet members have two major jobs. Individually, each is the administrative head of one of

the executive departments. Together, they are advisors to the President.

A number of Presidents have given great weight to the Cabinet and to its advice; others have given it only a secondary role. George H. W. Bush's Cabinet (1989–1993) had more influence with the President than any Cabinet since the Eisenhower presidency in the 1950s. The Cabinet also played a prominent role in the Clinton administration (1993–2001). On the other hand, John Kennedy described his Cabinet meetings as “a waste of time.”

Kennedy's view notwithstanding, most Presidents have held regular Cabinet meetings—where reports are made and discussed, and advice is offered to the chief executive. That advice need not be taken, of course. Abraham Lincoln once laid a proposition he favored before his seven-member Cabinet. Each member opposed it, whereupon Lincoln declared: “Seven nays, one aye: the ayes have it.”

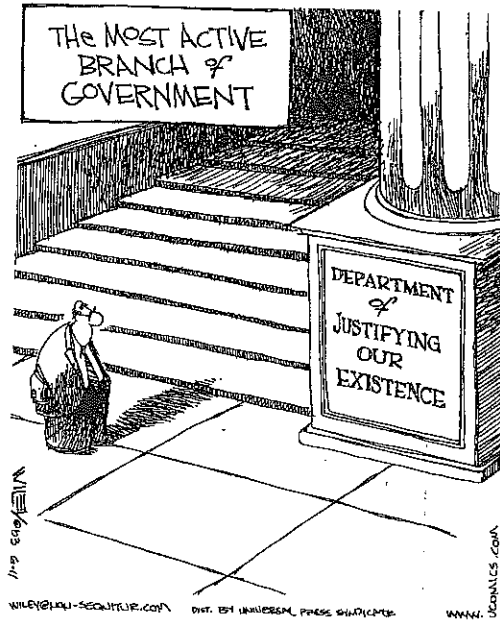
William Howard Taft put the role of the Cabinet in its proper light years ago:

**PRIMARY
Sources**

“The Constitution . . . contains no suggestion of a meeting of all the department heads, in consultation over general governmental matters. The Cabinet is a mere creation of the President's will. . . . It exists only by custom. If the President desired to dispense with it, he could do so.”

—Our Chief Magistrate and His Powers

No President has ever suggested eliminating the Cabinet. However, several Presidents have



Interpreting Political Cartoons Many people have criticized the federal bureaucracy as too large and inefficient. *Does the cartoon share this criticism? Do you agree?*

leaned on other, unofficial advisory groups, and sometimes more heavily than on the Cabinet. Andrew Jackson began the practice when he became President in 1829. Several of his close friends often met with him in the kitchen at the White House and, inevitably, came to be known as the Kitchen Cabinet. Franklin Roosevelt's Brain Trust of the 1930s and Harry Truman's Cronies in the late 1940s were in the same mold.

Section 3 Assessment

Key Terms and Main Ideas

1. How were the **executive departments** created?
2. What is the role of the **secretary** of an executive department?
3. Which department does the **attorney general** lead?
4. Who decides how often the **Cabinet** meets?

Critical Thinking

5. **Drawing Inferences** What are the two most important jobs of the head of an executive department?
6. **Drawing Conclusions** What can the President do to determine who serves in the Cabinet? How does a President shape the importance of the Cabinet?

7. **Determining Cause and Effect** How has the Cabinet changed over time? What factors have driven these changes?

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