

# Presidential Cabinet

The Constitution mentions a Cabinet indirectly when it says that the President can ask for the opinion, in writing, "of the principal officer in each of the executive departments." During George Washington's administrations, these executive departments developed into a group of advisors called the Cabinet. At first there were three department heads: the Secretaries of State, War, and the Treasury. As the national government grew, the number of Cabinet departments increased to 15. Below is a list of the departments in the order that they were created with a brief description of their responsibilities.

## Department of State (1789)

The Secretary of State helps the President to decide on foreign policy and to negotiate treaties. He or she oversees the Foreign Service's ambassadors, ministers and consuls and helps tourists in foreign countries.

## Department of War (1789)

The Secretary of Defense helps the President in his or her role as commander in chief of the military. He or she coordinates all branches of the military and advises the President in time of war. This cabinet post was combined with the Department of the Navy to become the Department of Defense in 1947.

## Department of the Treasury (1789)

The Secretary of the Treasury supervises all means the U.S. has of raising money including the Internal Revenue Service and the Customs Service. It also sells bonds to borrow money. The U.S. mint prints and coins money. The Secretary is also involved in the development of the nation's budget.

## Department of the Interior (1849)

Part of the duty of the Secretary of Interior is to supervise the use of natural resources such as oil and mineral deposits that belong to the nation. Agencies in this department include the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, the National Park Service and the U.S. Geological Survey. The Bureau of Indian Affairs handles issues concerning Native Americans.

## Department of Agriculture (1862)

The overall purpose of this department is to help farmers. Examples of this are the Rural Electrification Administration and the Soil Conservation Service. The Secretary of Agriculture also oversees the school lunch program through the Food and Nutrition Service and the purity of the nation's food supply through the Animal and Plant Inspection Service.

## Department of Justice (1870)

The Attorney General advises the President on legal matters. He or she aids the President in his or her role as chief executive, who carries out the laws and arrests those who break the laws. The Federal Bureau of Investigation, the U.S. Marshalls Service and the Federal Bureau of Prisons are examples of agencies that are part of the Department of Justice.

## Department of Commerce (1903)

The Department of Commerce and Labor was split into two departments in 1913. The secretary of this department helps American businesses through such agencies as the Economic Development Administration and the International Trade Administration. The Patent and Trademark Office and National Weather Service are also part of the Commerce Department.

## **Department of Labor (1903)**

The Secretary of Labor helps American workers, often with safety regulations such as those administered by the Occupational Safety and Health Administration and the Mine Safety and Health Administration. The Bureau of Labor Management Relations supervises relations between workers and their bosses. Other agencies in this department include the Bureau of Labor Statistics and the Employment and Training Administration.

## **Department of Housing and Urban Development (1965)**

Federal loans for mortgages, housing for the poor and equal rights in acquiring adequate housing are among the issues that concern this department. Assistant secretaries include those for Fair Housing and Equal Opportunity, Community Planning and Development, and Public and Indian Housing. This department also helps cities improve traffic control and plan for mass transportation services.

## **Department of Transportation (1966)**

Some of the agencies in this department such as the Federal Aviation Administration, the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration and the Federal Railroad Administration regulate different methods of transportation. Another purpose of the department is to develop solutions to transportation problems. The Urban Mass Transportation Administration is an example of this function.

## **Department of Energy (1977)**

The use and conservation of energy resources and the development of new types of energy are the responsibilities of this department. Different agencies handle fossil energy (coal, oil and natural gas), nuclear energy (nuclear power plants) and renewable energy sources (sun, wind and water). Civilian Radioactive Waste Management sets standards for things like the disposal of radioactive materials used in nuclear medicine.

## **Department of Health and Human Services (1979)**

This department began as Health, Education and Welfare in 1953, but was split in 1979. Its agencies fight the spread of infectious diseases such as AIDS and Swine Flu, try to find cures for illnesses such as cancer and diabetes, oversee the testing and approval of new drugs and work to help people with mental health problems. Among the agencies that do this work are the Centers for Disease Control, the Food and Drug Administration and the National Institute of Health.

## **Department of Education (1979)**

While decisions about education are made on the local level by school boards and the voters who live in a school district, the federal government does provide money to public schools, conducts research on educational issues and makes recommendations to local school districts. Bilingual, vocational and adult education are among the concerns of this department.

## **Department of Veteran Affairs (1989)**

This department replaced the Veterans Administration. Veteran Affairs (the VA) provides services to current and former members of the U.S. military and their families. The National Cemetery Administration, Veterans Benefits Administration and Veterans Health Administration are among the agencies under this department.

## **Department of Homeland Security (2002)**

The protection of our country and its citizens against terrorism and other hazards is the mission of this department. Agencies within Homeland Security include, U.S. Customs and Border Protection, Federal Emergency Management Agency, the U.S. Coast Guard and the Secret Service.