

What does the president's Cabinet do?

By Whitehouse.gov and usembassy.gov, adapted by Newsela staff on 11.20.16

Word Count 498

Level 790L



President Barack Obama holds a Cabinet meeting in the Cabinet Room of the White House in Washington, D.C., November 23, 2009.
Photo: Whitehouse.gov.

The president makes important decisions every day. Advisers help. They are called the president's Cabinet. The Cabinet members are in charge of 15 different departments. One is the Department of Education. This adviser helps the president make decisions about education and schools.

A new president is elected in November every four years and takes office on January 20. The president has about 10 weeks to choose 22 cabinet members. Thousands more who work to advise the president must be chosen, too.

How Is The President's Cabinet Chosen?

The Cabinet usually meets with the president every week. They meet in the Cabinet Room next to the president's Oval Office in the White House. The Secret Service has an important job to protect the president and the Cabinet. These meetings are one of the few times the Secret Service allows them to be in the same place at the same time.

Cabinet members from the former president usually leave. However, sometimes new presidents ask certain Cabinet members to stay.

Members of Congress, governors and members of the president's family cannot be in the Cabinet. The Senate must vote to approve the Cabinet. Sometimes this does not happen quickly.

What Happens To Political Appointees (Incoming And Leaving)?

Thousands of "career" leaders work for the government. Civil service people work in departments like Education, Defense or the Postal Service. Foreign service people represent the United States in countries like England or China. Military service people are in the Army, Navy or some other part of the Department of Defense.

Almost 9,000 of those government workers are hired by the new president or the cabinet. About 800 must be approved by the Senate. Many of these workers do not work for a long time for the government. One study shows these workers only stay for about 2.5 years on average.

History Of The Cabinet

The tradition of the Cabinet dates back to the beginnings of the presidency itself. The Constitution mentions "consuls," people who could advise the president on any subject.

George Washington had four people in the first Cabinet. They were Secretary of State Thomas Jefferson, Secretary of Treasury Alexander Hamilton, Secretary of War Henry Knox, and Attorney General Edmund Randolph.

Today there are 15 heads of departments in the president's Cabinet and the vice president. Then there are other people equal in power to cabinet members.

The Cabinet includes the heads of 15 executive departments — the secretaries of Agriculture, Commerce, Defense, Education, Energy, Health and Human Services, Homeland Security, Housing and Urban Development, Interior, Labor, State, Transportation, Treasury, and Veterans Affairs, and the attorney general. The vice president is also a Cabinet member.

Cabinet-level rank also has been granted to the White House chief of staff and the heads of the Environmental Protection Agency, Office of Management and Budget, Council of Economic Advisers, Small Business Administration, U.S. Mission to the United Nations and the U.S. trade representative.

The members of the Cabinet work closely with the president.

Quiz

- 1 Read the section "History Of The Cabinet."
Select the paragraph that gives examples of how the president's Cabinet has grown in size and responsibility since the time of George Washington.
- 2 Read the section "How Is The President's Cabinet Chosen?"
Based on information in this section, which of these statements is TRUE?
- (A) Cabinet members often protect the president in the White House.
 - (B) Many Cabinet members work for more than one president.
 - (C) The Senate has the ability to deny Cabinet members.
 - (D) The president meets with members of his Cabinet more than anyone else.
- 3 Which sentence from the introduction [paragraphs 1-2] is MOST important to include in a summary of the article?
- (A) The president makes important decisions every day.
 - (B) The Cabinet members are in charge of 15 different departments.
 - (C) A new president is elected in November every four years and takes office on January 20.
 - (D) Thousands more who work to advise the president must be chosen, too.
- 4 Which option BEST reflects the MAIN goal of the president's Cabinet?
- (A) to approve people who are hired by the president
 - (B) to help a potential president get elected
 - (C) to make sure the president is able to pass new laws
 - (D) to advise the president on important decisions