**The Executive Branch:**

**The Cabinet**

**and Executive Office of the President**

**[Adapted and expanded from**

**“The Executive Branch” and “The Cabinet” at Whitehouse.gov][[1]](#footnote-1)**

The Cabinet is an advisory body made up of the heads of the 15 executive departments. Appointed by the President and confirmed by the Senate, these members of the Cabinet are often the President’s closest confidants and meet regularly with him or her. (The Vice President is also included as a member of the Cabinet and has an office in the West Wing of the White House, as well as in the nearby Eisenhower Executive Office Building.)

All the heads of these federal departments take the title Secretary, except the head of the Justice Department, who is titled as “Attorney General.”

In addition to running major federal agencies, the cabinet secretaries play an important role in the Presidential line of succession -- after the Vice President, Speaker of the House, and Senate President pro tempore, the line of succession continues with the Cabinet offices in the order in which the departments were created. (The initial four departments were the departments of state, treasury, justice, and war, now called defense.)

In addition, there are other important, Senate-confirmed officials who do not head a department but are sometimes given cabinet level rank, such as the directors of the Environmental Protective Agency and Office of Management and Budget. Finally, the president’s chief of staff, who heads the Executive Office of the President, is often included in Cabinet meetings.

## Department of Agriculture

The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) develops and executes policy on farming, agriculture, and food. Its aims include meeting the needs of farmers and ranchers, promoting agricultural trade and production, assuring food safety, protecting natural resources, fostering rural communities, and ending hunger in America and abroad.

The United States Secretary of Agriculture heads the USDA.

## Department of Commerce

The Department of Commerce is the government agency tasked with promoting economic development and technological innovation.

The department supports U.S. business and industry through a number of services, including gathering economic and demographic data, issuing patents and trademarks, improving understanding of the environment and oceanic life, and ensuring the effective use of scientific and technical resources. The agency also formulates telecommunications and technology policy and promotes U.S. exports by assisting and enforcing international trade agreements.

## Department of Defense

The mission of the Department of Defense (DOD) is to provide the military forces needed to deter war and to protect the security of our country. The DOD consists of the Army, Navy, and Air Force, as well as many agencies, offices, and commands, including the Joint Chiefs of Staff, the Pentagon Force Protection Agency, the National Security Agency, and the Defense Intelligence Agency.

## Department of Education

The mission of the Department of Education is to promote student achievement and preparation for competition in a global economy by fostering educational excellence and ensuring equal access to educational opportunity.

## Department of Energy

The mission of the Department of Energy (DOE) is to advance the national, economic, and energy security of the United States.

## Department of Health and Human Services

The Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) is the United States government’s principal agency for protecting the health of all Americans and providing essential human services, especially for those who are least able to help themselves. Agencies of HHS conduct health and social science research, work to prevent disease outbreaks, assure food and drug safety, and provide health insurance.

## Department of Homeland Security

The missions of the Department of Homeland Security are to prevent and disrupt terrorist attacks; protect the American people, critical infrastructure, and key resources; and respond to and recover from incidents that do occur. The third-largest Cabinet department, DHS was established by the Homeland Security Act of 2002, largely in response to the terrorist attacks on September 11, 2001.

## Department of Housing and Urban Development

The Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) is the federal agency responsible for national policies and programs that address America’s housing needs, that improve and develop the nation’s communities, and that enforce fair housing laws.

The Department plays a major role in supporting homeownership for lower- and moderate-income families through its mortgage insurance and rent subsidy programs.

## Department of the Interior

The Department of the Interior (DOI) manages federal lands and America’s natural resources. Its mission is to ensure federal lands are used for their particular purpose, whether for conservation, recreation, or commerce (such as leasing lands for grazing, mining, timber, or minerals). It also conducts scientific research, conserves and protects fish and wildlife, and honors our trust responsibilities to American Indians, Alaskan Natives, and our responsibilities to island communities.

## Department of Justice

The mission of the Department of Justice (DOJ) is to enforce federal law and defend the interests of the United States according to the law; to ensure public safety against threats foreign and domestic; to provide federal leadership in preventing and controlling crime; to seek just punishment for those guilty of violating federal law, and to protect the constitutional rights of all Americans.

The Attorney General is the head of the DOJ and chief law enforcement officer of the federal government. The Attorney General represents the United States in legal matters, advises the President and the heads of the executive departments of the government, and occasionally appears in person before the Supreme Court.

## Department of Labor

The Department of Labor oversees federal programs for ensuring a strong American workforce. These programs address job training, safe working conditions, minimum hourly wage and overtime pay, employment discrimination, and unemployment insurance.

The Department of Labor’s mission is to foster and promote the welfare of the job seekers, wage earners, and retirees of the United States by improving their working conditions, advancing their opportunities for profitable employment, protecting their retirement and health care benefits, helping employers find workers, strengthening free collective bargaining, and tracking changes in employment, prices, and other national economic measurements.

## Department of State

The Department of State plays the lead role in developing and implementing the President’s foreign policy. Major responsibilities include United States representation abroad, foreign assistance, foreign military training programs, countering international crime, and a wide assortment of services to U.S. citizens and foreign nationals seeking entrance to the U.S.

## Department of Transportation

The mission of the Department of Transportation (DOT) is to ensure a fast, safe, efficient, accessible, and convenient transportation system that meets our vital national interests and enhances the quality of life of the American people.

Organizations within the DOT include the Federal Highway Administration, the Federal

Aviation Administration, the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration, the Federal Transit Administration, the Federal Railroad Administration, and the Maritime Administration.

## Department of the Treasury

The Department of the Treasury is responsible for promoting economic prosperity and ensuring the soundness and security of the U.S. and international financial systems.

The Department operates and maintains systems that are critical to the nation’s financial infrastructure, such as the production of coin and currency, the disbursement of payments to the American public, the collection of taxes, and the borrowing of funds necessary to run the federal government.

## Department of Veterans Affairs

The Department of Veterans Affairs is responsible for administering benefit programs for veterans, their families, and their survivors. These benefits include pension, education, disability compensation, home loans, life insurance, vocational rehabilitation, survivor support, medical care, and burial benefits. Veterans Affairs became a cabinet-level department in 1989.

**The Executive Office of the President**

Every day, the President of the United States is faced with scores of decisions, each with important consequences for America’s future. To provide the President with the support that he or she needs to govern effectively, the Executive Office of the President (EOP) was created in 1939 by President Franklin D. Roosevelt. The EOP has responsibility for tasks ranging from communicating the President’s message to the American people to promoting our trade interests abroad.

The EOP, overseen by the White House Chief of Staff, has traditionally been home to many of the President’s closest advisers. While Senate confirmation is required for some advisers, such as the Director of the Office of Management and Budget, most are appointed with full Presidential discretion.

Perhaps the most visible parts of the EOP are the White House Communications Office and Press Secretary’s Office. The Press Secretary provides daily briefings for the media on the President’s activities and agenda.

1. <https://www.whitehouse.gov/about-the-white-house/the-executive-branch/>

   <https://www.whitehouse.gov/the-trump-administration/the-cabinet/> [↑](#footnote-ref-1)