

The Executive Departments and their responsibilities

or

“How one person is able to run an entire nation.”

The President’s executive “cabinet” helps to carry out and enforce the laws throughout the nation and also advise the President on key decisions. Article II, section 2 of the Constitution refers to the President receiving advice from “officers and executive departments”, but provides no further specific information. The first executive cabinet was created by President George Washington to meet the various demands placed upon the new government. The departments he created set a precedent that has been followed by every subsequent Chief Executive. As the demands on the government have grown, so to has the size of the President’s “cabinet”.\

The following is a list of each department, the year it was created, and a brief description of its responsibilities and the agencies that carry out the laws that fall under its area of responsibility.

JUSTICE (1789)

- ❖ “Establishes justice” by provides lawyers for the government and its citizens
- ❖ Administers the prison system and protects citizen’s civil rights.
- ❖ Includes the F.B.I., the national police force.

STATE (1789)

- ❖ Implements America’s foreign policy and diplomatic efforts
- ❖ Operates embassies around the world and oversees economic aid
- ❖ Monitors treaties and trade with foreign nations.

TREASURY (1789)

- ❖ Implements monetary, tax and economic policy
- ❖ Tax code managed by the I.R.S. Money printed or coined by the national mints.
- ❖ Customs control imports. Management of alcohol, tobacco and firearms (ATF).
- ❖ Secret Service – the President’s body guards

DEFENSE (originally named WAR when it was created in 1789. It was renamed Defense in 1947)

- ❖ “Provides for the common defense” my managing all military matters.
- ❖ All branches of the military. Joint Chiefs of Staff. The Pentagon.
- ❖ Weapons development and maintaining military supplies.

INTERIOR (1849)

- ❖ In charge of America’s natural resources and public lands
- ❖ National Parks system. Bureau of Indian Affair (BIA) – the reservation system.
- ❖ Bureau of Land Management (BLM) manages mining, forest, fish and game.

AGRICULTURE (1889)

- ❖ Promotes and manages American agriculture
- ❖ Food inspection programs (USDA select). Water and land conservation.
- ❖ Farm and ranching policies.

COMMERCE (1903)

- ❖ Promotes industry, manufacturing and business interests.
- ❖ Manages trade. Responsible for national census. Compiles monthly statistics on business sales.
- ❖ National Weather Bureau.

LABOR (1913)

- ❖ Promotes the safety and welfare of American workers. Minimum wage and job site safety.
- ❖ Provides job training and enforcement of labor laws. Compiles monthly job related statistics.
- ❖ Responsible for administering unemployment services and payments.

HOUSING and URBAN DEVELOPMENT – “HUD” (1965)

- ❖ Provides for housing and community development.
- ❖ Disaster relief and loans for buying homes. Urban planning.

TRANSPORTATION (1966)

- ❖ Implements the federal transportation policies.
- ❖ Highway safety, car standards, air traffic control.
- ❖ Coast Guard and airport security.

ENERGY (1977)

- ❖ Directs the nation’s energy policies.
- ❖ Fuel conservation, renewable energy and recycling programs.

EDUCATION (1979)

- ❖ Oversees the nation’s education programs.
- ❖ Student loans for higher education, aid to schools, testing standards and overseas schools.

HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES (1979)

- ❖ “Promotes the general welfare” of American citizens.
- ❖ Programs for the elderly, welfare, medical aid, handicapped and poor.
- ❖ Health care programs and prescription drug testing. Epidemic preparedness.

VETERANS AFFAIRS (1989)

- ❖ Responsible for administering benefits to military veterans and their dependants.
- ❖ Health care, financial aid, pensions, burial aid and military cemeteries.

HOMELAND SECURITY (2002)

- ❖ “Secures domestic tranquility” by coordinating America’s anti-terrorism policies.
- ❖ Monitors immigration, domestic surveillance and tracking threats. Warning system.
- ❖ Coordinates emergency responses. Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA)

How do these executive agencies work together to enforce laws and carry out the responsibilities of running the government? Review the examples that Mr. Kyle will share with you and then think about which departments might be responsible for reporting information to the President and carrying out the orders necessary to deal with these problems. Write your answer and reasons on separate sheet of paper.

Scenario #1 – Batten Down the Hatches!

Hurricane Melvin is approaching the Gulf Coast. High winds and rain will cause intense flooding in the region. Tens of thousands of homes will be damaged and many will be completely destroyed, leaving countless citizens homeless. Basic services and utilities – water, electricity, sewer, gas, healthcare, etc. - will be overwhelmed and fail. Bridges will be damaged and impassible. List and explain how specific executive departments will work to deal with the disastrous consequences of this storm.

Scenario #2 – Time is Running Out!

The federal government receives intelligence information from a European ally (friendly country) that people who are considered a “dangerous threat” to the United States plan to illegally enter the country with hazardous materials through various air and seaports around the United States. These dangerous individuals then plan on releasing “dirty bombs” containing biological agents in three major western cities. List and explain how specific executive departments will work to head off the deadly consequences of this terrorist threat.

Scenario #3 – The Sky is Falling!

A chicken farmer in North Carolina reports that 12,000 of his birds have recently died from a mysterious disease. He sells his chicken to a company that produces chicken nuggets for a national fast food restaurant chain and public schools throughout the southern United States. No human illnesses have been reported yet, but the farmer claims that his wife and two daughters have been “sick in bed with a high fever” for the past week. List and explain how specific executive departments will work to avoid the disastrous consequences of this potential health and public safety crisis.

Scenario #4 – Your Imagination is Running Wild!

Create a scenario of your own that will require the Executive Departments to come to the aid of American citizens. Write a detailed description of the crisis. Include some details in your description and make the problems as realistic as possible. Try to create a situation that will include at least two (2) Executive Departments that have not been involved in any of the previous solutions (we want everyone to feel like they’re involved!). Finally, list and explain how specific executive departments will work to avoid the disastrous consequences of your safety crisis.

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