All the President's Men and Women

Inquire: The President’s Staff and their Roles in Facilitating the President

Overview
A company with over two million employees serving a customer base of over 350 million requires a large administration! The president is at the top of the pyramid, but he/she must have a significant amount of help. So, who are these people, and what roles do they play in facilitating the president’s work?

What about the first lady (or first spouse)? What role does she play in this massive effort of leadership? What about the president’s children? Where do they fit in? What does a president’s personal life look like? Or do he and his family even have a personal life?

Big Question: What is the first lady’s (or first spouse’s) role in the presidency?

Watch: Children of POTUS
What would life be like if your dad or mom moved you into the White House?

Ask Amy Carter, daughter of President Jimmy Carter; Chelsea Clinton, daughter of President Bill Clinton; Jenna and Barbara Bush, daughters of President George W. Bush; Malia and Sasha Obama, daughters of President Barack Obama; and lastly, Barron Trump, son of President Donald Trump — all children who moved into the White House. While the White House does have significant perks — you can invite your best friends over for first-run movies in your private, plush theater — the trade-off is a massive increase in security and decrease in privacy.

In an episode of the long running TV series, The West Wing, the fictional president, Jeb Bartlet (Martin Sheen), has a conversation with his high school daughter Zoe (Elisabeth Moss) about security. Zoe is frustrated that her father wants to increase her security detail telling him, “The Secret Service should be worried about you getting shot!”*

Bartlet responds, “They are worried about me getting shot! My getting killed would be bad enough, but that is not the nightmare scenario. The nightmare scenario, sweetheart, is *you* getting kidnapped!” He then goes into a long hypothetical that ends with, “So now we got a new problem because this country no longer has a commander-in-chief, it has a father who’s out of his mind because his little girl is in a shack somewhere in Uganda with a gun to her head. Do you get it?”**
In this nightmare scenario, what would the president do?

The president's children have Secret Service with them at all times, their schedules have to be regimented, their friends — and friends’ families — have to clear the most stringent of background checks. It is a life lived in a public bubble, where everyone knows your every mistake. Even with a blanket of steel protection, there is no place to get away.

The lifestyle is lavish, no doubt, and the experience is beyond unique — but the trade-off is severe. Is it worth it? You’d have to ask someone who has experienced it. But, it is certainly no decision to be made lightly. The decision to be president impacts the whole family, not just the president.

*Sorkin, Aaron; "Mr. Willis of Ohio" - The West Wing Season 1, Episode 6 (1999); Warner Brothers. Television, November 6, 1999; https://www.imdb.com/title/tt0745659/quotes; Date of Access: Tuesday, June 12, 2018

Read: All the President's Men

Overview

Just as the power of the presidency has grown tremendously in recent years, so has the number of people involved in the executive branch. George Washington began his first term with only one aide — his nephew — who he paid out of his own pocket.

Today, many advisors in the White House office, the Cabinet, and the Executive Office assist the president. The vice president and the first lady also have large staffs that complement all the president's aides.

The Cabinet

Among the president-elect's more important tasks is the selection of a Cabinet. George Washington’s Cabinet was made up of only four people, the attorney general and the Secretaries of the Departments of War, State, and Treasury. Currently however, there are 15 members of the Cabinet, including the Secretaries of Labor, Agriculture, Education, and others. The most important members — the heads of the Departments of Defense, Justice, State, and Treasury (echoing Washington’s original Cabinet) — receive the most attention from the president, the Congress, and the media. These four departments have been referred to as the inner Cabinet, while the others are called the outer Cabinet. When selecting a Cabinet, presidents consider ability, expertise, influence, and reputation. More recently, presidents have also tried to balance political and demographic representation (gender, race, religion, and other considerations) to produce a Cabinet that is capable as well as descriptively representative, meaning that those in the Cabinet look like the U.S. population. A recent president who explicitly stated this as his goal was Bill Clinton, who talked about an “E.G.G. strategy” for senior-level appointments, where the E stands for ethnicity, G for gender, and the second G for geography.

By custom, each member of this advisory group heads a major department so their loyalties are almost always split.

Cabinet members must provide good advice to the president. But, they also must promote the well-being of their departments, sometimes at the expense of other Cabinet departments. Cabinet members are appointed by the president and confirmed by the Senate. They may be dismissed at any time.
The size of the president's Cabinet has increased over the years as presidents have recognized demands for services and governmental action. As the size of the Cabinet and their respective departments have grown, presidents have also come to rely more heavily on members of the Executive Office and the White House Staff.

### THE U.S. CABINET

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>POSITION</th>
<th>YEAR CREATED</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Secretary of State</td>
<td>1789</td>
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<td>Secretary of Treasury</td>
<td>1789</td>
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<tr>
<td>Secretary of War (Defense)</td>
<td>1789; 1947 (name changed in 1947)</td>
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<td>Attorney General</td>
<td>1789</td>
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<td>Secretary of the Interior</td>
<td>1849</td>
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<td>Secretary of Agriculture</td>
<td>1862 (elevated to Cabinet in 1889)</td>
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<td>Secretary of Commerce</td>
<td>1903</td>
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<td>Secretary of Labor</td>
<td>1913</td>
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<td>Secretary of Health and Human Services</td>
<td>1953</td>
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<td>Secretary of Housing and Urban Development</td>
<td>1965</td>
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<td>Secretary of Transportation</td>
<td>1966</td>
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<td>Secretary of Energy</td>
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<td>Secretary of Education</td>
<td>1979</td>
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<td>Secretary of Veterans’ Affairs</td>
<td>1989</td>
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<td>Secretary of Homeland Security</td>
<td>2002</td>
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The Executive Office

Franklin Roosevelt created the Executive Office of the President in 1939 to administer his New Deal programs. Today it consists of several advisory agencies that have worked closely with presidents, particularly in recent years. The advisers in the Executive Office play key roles in advancing the president's agenda. Three of the most important agencies include the following:

- The National Security Council advises the president on American military affairs and foreign policy. The NSC consists of the president, the vice president, and the secretaries of state and defense. The president's National Security Adviser runs the staff of the NSC and also advises the president.
- The Office of Management and Budget (OMB) is the largest office in the EOP, and it has the job of preparing the national budget that the president proposes to Congress every year.
- The National Economic Council helps the president with economic planning. The council consists of three leading economists and is assisted by about 60 other economists, attorneys, and political...
scientists. The NEC is the president's major source of advice and information about the nation's economy.

**The White House Office**

White House Office staff members are not subject to Senate confirmation, nor do they have divided loyalties. They serve the president as an "inner circle" of most trusted advisers. Many have offices in the West Wing of the White House, and they often compete for space as close as possible to the president's Oval Office. Their titles include special assistant, counsel, aide, and press secretary.

Staff members gather information, write reports, give advice, lobby lawmakers, and present the president's views to the media. The chief of staff is usually particularly influential as the director of all the operations of the White House Office.

The job of presiding over the nation's government requires many assistants and administrators. Some people have criticized presidents for having such large staffs in the Executive Office. Recent presidents have tried to cut back, but they generally have found that this large, complex country would be difficult to run without them.

**Unseen - Unknown - Underestimated**

There are several jobs at the White House that are ignored by the media and the public, but are very important to the president — at least in a personal sense. Two of these are the president's executive secretary and the president's body man.

The executive secretary is essentially an executive assistant. She or he plays an important role in screening the president's contacts and helping plan and arrange the president's schedule. The executive secretary serves as a "gatekeeper" between the president and those members of his staff who do not have automatic access. The relationship between the president and executive secretary gives her or him significantly more influence than people might understand.

The body man is the president's personal assistant — somewhat like a valet. He or she accompanies the president on every trip and spends more time with the president than almost any other person. Like the executive secretary, a part of the body man's responsibilities is to be a gatekeeper, protecting the president's time and resources. Again, due to the enormous amount of time spent with the president, there is a significant relationship that can result in influence that may be underestimated.

**Reflect: What Would be the Best Part?**

**Poll**

If one of your parents became president, which of the following perks of living in the White House do you think would be the best?

- Your own private movie theater with first-run movies the day they arrive in the regular theaters
- Chefs/cooks at your beck and call for snacks and food of any kind, any time you want
- Your own private indoor swimming pool
- Your own basketball court and gym
- A private vacation retreat in the Catoctin Mountain Park about 62 miles from Washington D.C. (and a helicopter ride there)
- Riding in a limo everywhere you go
Expand: First Ladies

Overview - The Historical Role of First Ladies

Prior to 1933, most first ladies were simply hostesses in the White House. This excluded Edith Bolling Wilson who, in 1919, took a more active but still private role assisting her husband, when President Woodrow Wilson was afflicted by a stroke. In fact, her iron control over access to her husband left many wondering if we already had our first female president, at least in practice. However, as the niece of one president and the wife of another, it was Eleanor Roosevelt in the 1930s and 1940s who opened the door for first ladies doing more.

Eleanor Roosevelt took an active role in championing civil rights, becoming in some ways a bridge between her husband and the civil rights movement. She coordinated meetings between FDR and members of the NAACP, championed anti-lynching legislation, openly defied segregation laws, and pushed the Army Nurse Corps to allow black women in its ranks. She also wrote a newspaper column and had a weekly radio show.

Her immediate successors returned to the less visible role held by her predecessors, although in the early 1960s, Jacqueline Kennedy gained attention for her efforts to refurbish the White House along historical lines, and Lady Bird Johnson in the mid- and late-1960s endorsed an effort to beautify public spaces and highways in the United States. She also established the foundations of what came to be known as the Office of the First Lady, complete with a news reporter, Liz Carpenter, as her press secretary.

Betty Ford took over as first lady in 1974 and became an avid advocate of women’s rights, proclaiming that she was pro-choice when it came to abortion and lobbying for the ratification of the Equal Rights Amendment (ERA). She shared the news of her breast cancer diagnosis and subsequent mastectomy with the public. Her successor, Rosalynn Carter, attended several Cabinet meetings and pushed for the ratification of the ERA as well as for legislation addressing mental health issues.

The increasing public political role of the first lady continued in the 1980s with Nancy Reagan’s “Just Say No” anti-drug campaign, and in the early 1990s with Barbara Bush’s efforts on behalf of literacy. The public role of the first lady reached a new level with Hillary Clinton in the 1990s when her husband put her in charge of his efforts to achieve health care reform, a controversial decision that did not meet with political success.

A New Role for the First Lady?

While running for the presidency for the first time in 1992, Bill Clinton frequently touted the experience and capabilities of his wife. There was a lot to brag about. Hillary Rodham Clinton was a graduate of Yale Law School, had worked as a member of the impeachment inquiry staff during the height of the Watergate scandal in Nixon’s administration, and had been a staff attorney for the Children’s Defense Fund before becoming the first lady of Arkansas. Acknowledging these qualifications, candidate Bill Clinton once suggested that by electing him, voters would get “two for the price of one.” The clear implication in this statement was that his wife would take on a far larger role than previous first ladies, and this proved to be the case.

Hillary Clinton remained a political lightning rod for the rest of the Clinton presidency; her handling of the Monica Lewinsky scandal brought criticism as she stood by her husband. But ultimately, Hillary Clinton
turned it all into becoming a political force in her own right: becoming a U.S. senator from New York; a serious presidential candidate in 2008; secretary of state under President Obama; and finally, the Democratic Party’s nominee for president in 2016.

Clinton’s successors, Laura Bush in the first decade of the 21st century and Michelle Obama in the second, returned to the roles played by predecessors in advocating less controversial policies: Laura Bush advocated literacy and education, while Michelle Obama emphasized physical fitness, healthy diet, and exercise.

Nevertheless, the public and political profiles of first ladies remain high, and in the future, the president’s spouse will have the opportunity to use that unelected position to advance policies that might be less controversial and more appealing than those pushed by the president.

Lesson Toolbox

Additional Resources and Readings

Inside the White House: The Cabinet
- A behind the scenes video where President Obama and Cabinet members share their perspectives on their bimonthly meetings
  - https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xXSvi6JCCfk

The American President’s Cabinet Explained
- A video discussing the history of the president’s Cabinet and who makes up the Cabinet
  - https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qGzn636DREY

American 101: What is the Cabinet? | History
- A video where Ben Stein explains the history and current state of the president’s group of closest advisors, the Cabinet
  - https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8oier528TrE

Lesson Glossary

**inner Cabinet**: the most important Cabinet members, including Secretaries of Defense, Justice, State, and Treasury

**outer Cabinet**: all Cabinet members excluding Secretaries of Defense, Justice, State, and Treasury

Check Your Knowledge

1. Two jobs that are very important to the president, but are often ignored by the media and public, are the executive secretary and the body man.
   - A. True
   - B. False

2. Cabinet members are appointed by the Senate and confirmed by the president.
   - A. True
   - B. False
3. As the size of the Cabinet and their departments have grown, presidents have relied more heavily on members of the Executive Office and the White House staff.

A. True
B. False

Answer Key:
1. A  2. B  3. A

Citations

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