

THE AMERICAN GOVERNMENT (I)

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ABSTRACT:

„GOVERNMENTS HAVE TAKEN MANY FORMS THROUGHOUT HISTORY. THE TYPE OF GOVERNMENT, ALONG WITH THE PEOPLE RUNNING THE GOVERNMENT, HAS HAD AN ENORMOUS IMPACT ON THE WAY COUNTRIES AND CULTURE DEVELOP. THERE ARE MANY DIFFERENT GOVERNMENTS AROUND THE WORLD EVEN NOW, WHICH CAN OFTEN LEAD TO POINTS OF CONTENTION BETWEEN COUNTRIES. IT IS IMPORTANT FOR STUDENTS TO UNDERSTAND THE DIFFERENCES BETWEEN GOVERNMENTS AND HOW THEY FUNCTION TO CREATE A FOUNDATION FOR FUTURE UNITS IN HISTORY AND SOCIAL STUDIES!

GOVERNMENT IS AN IMPORTANT ASPECT OF ANY SOCIETY AND AT THE VERY BASIC LEVEL, THEY EXIST TO ENSURE ORDER. THERE ARE NUMEROUS FORMS OF GOVERNMENT AND THE DIFFERENCES BETWEEN THEM IMPACT THE CITIZENS IN THEIR OWN SOCIETY AS WELL AS NEIGHBORING ONES.

THE RISE AND FALL OF MANY GOVERNMENTS HAS BEEN BECAUSE INDIVIDUALS OR GROUPS DESIRED A CHANGE. MONARCHY ROSE AND FELL BECAUSE PEOPLE WANTED A CHANGE AND TOOK IT UPON THEMSELVES TO MAKE THAT CHANGE. BY LEARNING ABOUT THE DIFFERENT TYPES OF GOVERNMENTS, STUDENTS CAN COME TO UNDERSTAND HOW THE CURRENT AMERICAN GOVERNMENT AND FOREIGN GOVERNMENTS FUNCTION, AS WELL AS HAVE A SOLID FOUNDATION TO UNDERSTANDING FUTURE CHANGES AND GLOBAL RELATIONSHIPS.”¹

THIS ARTICLE INTENDS TO ANSWER THE FOLLOWING QUESTIONS:

WHAT IS GOVERNMENT?

WHICH IS ITS PURPOSE?

WHICH IS ITS STRUCTURE?

KEY-WORDS:

AMERICAN GOVERNMENT, AMERICAN GOVERNMENT STRUCTURE, AMERICAN GOVERNMENT FOUNDATIONS, AMERICAN GOVERNMENT CONSTITUENT MEMBERS

¹ <https://www.storyboardthat.com/lesson-plans/introduction-to-government>

Introducere

“The Purposes of Government



Albrecht Dürer was an artist who worked during the Thirty Years War. His work reflects the turmoil of the time. The invasions of the German area during the Thirty Years War were ended by the Treaty of Westphalia, which defined the nation-state and the concept of sovereignty.

Why do governments exist? One major reason is that they create rules. But what rules are necessary or desirable? That is open to question, and different types of governments have certainly created a wide variety of rules.

GOVERNMENTs almost certainly originated with the need to protect people from conflicts and to provide law and order. Why have conflicts among people happened throughout history? Many people, both famous and ordinary, have tried to answer that question. Perhaps human nature dictates selfishness, and people inevitably will come to blows over who gets what property or privilege. Or maybe, as **KARL MARX** explains, it is because the very idea of "**PROPERTY**" makes people selfish and greedy.

Whatever the reasons, governments first evolved as people discovered that protection was easier if they stayed together in groups and if they all agreed that one (or some) in the group should have more power than others. This recognition is the basis of **SOVEREIGNTY**, or the right of a group (later a country) to be free of outside interference.



Part of a government's function is to protect its citizens from outside attack. Ancient Chinese emperors constructed a "Great Wall" to defend the borders of their empire.

A country, then, needs to not only protect its citizens from one another, but it needs to organize to prevent outside attack. Sometimes they have built Great Walls and guarded them carefully from invaders. Other times they have led their followers to safe areas protected by high mountains, wide rivers, or vast deserts. Historically, they have raised armies, and the most successful ones have trained and armed special groups to defend the rest. Indeed in the twentieth century, governments have formed alliances and fought great world wars in the name of protection and order.

In more recent years, government responsibilities have extended to the economy and public service. An early principle of capitalism dictates that markets should be free from government control. But when economies spun out of control during the 1930s, and countries sank into great depressions, governments acted. The United States Congress created the **FEDERAL RESERVE SYSTEM** in the early twentieth century to ward off inflation and monitor the value of the dollar. **FRANKLIN ROOSEVELT** and his "**BRAIN TRUST**" devised New Deal programs to shock the country into prosperity.



Governments become involved with the economic workings of their countries. In the 1930s, the Federal Reserve System began to take a role in helping the American economy prevent another depression by locating currency reserves at centralized banks.

Perhaps government responsibility to provide social programs to its citizens is the most controversial of all. In the United States the tradition began with the New Deal programs, many of which provided people with relief through jobs, payments, and food. During the 1960s **PRESIDENT LYNDON JOHNSON** unveiled his "**GREAT SOCIETY**" programs aimed at eliminating poverty in the entire country. Many European countries today provide national medical insurance and extensive welfare benefits. Many Americans criticize these programs as expensive ventures that destroy the individual's sense of responsibility for his/her own well being. So the debate over the proper role of government in providing for its people's general welfare is still alive and well today.

Though the rules and responsibilities vary greatly through time and place, governments must create them. Governments provide the parameters for everyday behavior for citizens, protect them from outside interference, and often provide for their well-being and happiness."²

„The Nature of Government



Is government to be feared or loved? Thomas Hobbes set out to discover that in his book *Leviathan*, which spawned this famous title page that depicts government as a giant towering over the land. Is the king protecting or threatening his country?

Do you believe in government "**BY THE PEOPLE, FOR THE PEOPLE, AND OF THE PEOPLE**"? Few Americans would say no, especially since these words spoken by Abraham Lincoln in his 1863 Gettysburg Address are firmly imbedded in the American political system. Yet governments over the centuries have not always accepted this belief in popularly elected rule.



Jacques-Louis David painted *The Death of Socrates* as a metaphor for the French government during the revolution. Socrates represents the revolutionaries that martyred themselves for their principles, while the Athenian government represents the corrupt French nobility.

² <https://www.ushistory.org/gov/1a.asp>

Even in the modern United States many skeptics criticize government as being controlled by greedy, corrupt people who are only interested in lining their own pockets. So which view is correct? Is government an instrument of its citizens, an entity that represents and protects a beloved country, or an oppressive, self-serving monster that deserves no one's respect?

If we look to the past for an answer, we find comments like these:

"Behold my sons, with how little wisdom the world is governed." -Axel Oxenstiern (1583-1654)

"The government that governs least governs best." –Thomas Jefferson



Governments are everywhere. From the earliest tribe through the most recent nation to find its place on the map, government in some form has been necessary to ensure safety and order. In the 1600s, Rembrandt painted the government of the local clothmaker's guild.

The conflict, alive and well today, is solidly based in the past. Governments are sometimes idealized and often criticized. Yet virtually every society in history has had some form of government, either as simple as the established leadership of a band of prehistoric people, or as complex as the government of the United States today.

Do varying opinions of political power rise from the fact that some governments are good and others are bad? Does power corrupt leaders, or is it possible for them to administer governments fairly? The American political system is rooted in the ideal that a just government can exist, and that its citizens can experience a good measure of liberty and equality in their personal lives.

We will begin by considering reasons why governments exist, and some types of government including democracy, particularly as it is practiced in the modern United States.”³

³ <https://www.ushistory.org/gov/1.asp>

Foundations of American Government



Sea travel expanded the horizons of many European nations and created prosperity and the conditions for the Enlightenment. In turn, the Enlightenment ideals of liberty, equality, and justice helped to create the conditions for the American Revolution and the subsequent Constitution.

Democracy was not created in a heartbeat. In a world where people were ruled by monarchs from above, the idea of self-government is entirely alien. Democracy takes practice and wisdom from experience.

The American colonies began developing a democratic tradition during their earliest stages of development. Over 150 years later, the colonists believed their experience was great enough to refuse to recognize the British king. The first decade was rocky. The **AMERICAN REVOLUTION** and the domestic instability that followed prompted a call for a new type of government with a constitution to guarantee liberty. The constitution drafted in the early days of the independent American republic has endured longer than any in human history.

Where did this democratic tradition truly begin? The ideas and practices that led to the development of the American democratic republic owe a debt to the ancient civilizations of Greece and Rome, the **PROTESTANT REFORMATION**, and **GUTENBERG's PRINTING PRESS**. But the Enlightenment of 17th-century Europe had the most immediate impact on the framers of the United States Constitution.

The Philosophes

Europeans of the 17th century no longer lived in the "darkness" of the **MIDDLE AGES**. Ocean voyages had put them in touch with many world civilizations, and trade had created a prosperous middle class. The **PROTESTANT REFORMATION** encouraged free thinkers to question the practices of the **CATHOLIC CHURCH**, and the printing press spread the new ideas relatively quickly and easily. The time was ripe for the **PHILOSOPHES**, scholars who promoted democracy and justice through discussions of individual liberty and equality.



The ideas of 18th-century philosophes inspired the Founding Fathers to revolt against what they perceived as unfair British taxation. *Washington Crossing the Delaware* is one of the most famous depictions of the American Revolution.

One of the first philosophes was **THOMAS HOBBS**, an Englishman who concluded in his famous book, *LEVIATHAN*, that people are incapable of ruling themselves, primarily because humans are naturally self-centered and quarrelsome and need the iron fist of a strong leader. Later philosophes, like **VOLTAIRE**, Montesquieu, and Rousseau were more optimistic about democracy. Their ideas encouraged the questioning of absolute monarchs, like the Bourbon family that ruled France. Montesquieu suggested a separation of powers into branches of government not unlike the system Americans would later adopt. They found eager students who later became the founders of the American government.

John Locke

The single most important influence that shaped the founding of the United States comes from **JOHN LOCKE**, a 17th century Englishman who redefined the nature of government. Although he agreed with Hobbes regarding the self-interested nature of humans, he was much more optimistic about their ability to use reason to avoid tyranny. In his *SECOND TREATISE OF GOVERNMENT*, Locke identified the basis of a legitimate government. According to Locke, a ruler gains authority through the consent of the governed. The duty of that government is to protect the natural rights of the people, which Locke believed to include **LIFE, LIBERTY, AND PROPERTY**. If the government should fail to protect these rights, its citizens would have the right to overthrow that government. This idea deeply influenced **THOMAS JEFFERSON** as he drafted the **DECLARATION OF INDEPENDENCE**.

Important English Documents

Ironically, the English political system provided the grist for the revolt of its own American colonies. For many centuries English monarchs had allowed restrictions to be placed on their ultimate power. The **MAGNA CARTA**, written in 1215, established the kernel of limited government, or the belief that the monarch's rule was not absolute. Although the document only forced **KING JOHN** to consult nobles before he made arbitrary decisions like passing taxes, the Magna Carta provided the basis for the later development of **PARLIAMENT**. Over the years, representative government led by a **PRIME MINISTER** came to control and eventually replace the king as the real source of power in Britain.



The ideas of the French Enlightenment *philosophes* strongly influenced the American revolutionaries. French intellectuals met in salons like this one to exchange ideas and define their ideals such as liberty, equality, and justice.

THE PETITION OF RIGHT (1628) extended the rights of "commoners" to have a voice in the government. The **ENGLISH BILL OF RIGHTS** (1688) guaranteed free elections and rights for citizens accused of crime. Although **KING GEORGE III** still had some real power in 1776, Britain was already well along on the path of democracy by that time.

The foundations of American government lie squarely in the 17th and 18th century European Enlightenment. The American founders were well versed in the writings of the philosophes, whose ideas influenced the shaping of the new country. Thomas Jefferson, George Washington, James Madison, and others took the brave steps of creating a government based on the Enlightenment values of liberty, equality, and a new form of justice. More than 200 years later, that government is still intact.”⁴

„The Federal Government is composed of three distinct branches: legislative, executive, and judicial, whose powers are vested by the U.S. Constitution in the Congress, the President, and the Federal courts, respectively.”⁵

„The Constitution of the United States divides the federal government into three branches to make sure no individual or group will have too much power:

Legislative—Makes laws (Congress, comprised of the House of Representatives and Senate)

Executive—Carries out laws (president, vice president, Cabinet, most federal agencies)

Judicial—Evaluates laws (Supreme Court and other courts)

Each branch of government can change acts of the other branches:

The president can veto legislation created by Congress and nominates heads of federal agencies. Congress confirms or rejects the president's nominees and can remove the president from office in exceptional circumstances.

The Justices of the Supreme Court, who can overturn unconstitutional laws, are nominated by the president and confirmed by the Senate.

This ability of each branch to respond to the actions of the other branches is called the system of checks and balances.”

⁴ <https://www.ushistory.org/gov/2.asp>

⁵ <https://www.usa.gov/branches-of-government>

Legislative Branch of the U.S. Government

The legislative branch drafts proposed laws, confirms or rejects presidential nominations for heads of federal agencies, federal judges, and the Supreme Court, and has the authority to declare war. This branch includes Congress (the Senate and House of Representatives) and special agencies and offices that provide support services to Congress. American citizens have the right to vote for Senators and Representatives through free, confidential ballots.

Executive Branch of the U.S. Government

The executive branch carries out and enforces laws. It includes the president, vice president, the Cabinet, executive departments, independent agencies, and other boards, commissions, and committees.

American citizens have the right to vote for the president and vice president through free, confidential ballots.

Key roles of the executive branch include:

President—The president leads the country. He or she is the head of state, leader of the federal government, and Commander in Chief of the United States armed forces. The president serves a four-year term and can be elected no more than two times.

Vice president—The vice president supports the president. If the president is unable to serve, the vice president becomes president. The vice president can be elected and serve an unlimited number of four-year terms as vice president, even under a different president.

The Cabinet—Cabinet members serve as advisors to the president. They include the vice president, heads of executive departments, and other high-ranking government officials. Cabinet members are nominated by the president and must be approved by a simple majority of the Senate—51 votes if all 100 Senators vote.

Executive Branch Agencies, Commissions, and Committees

Much of the work in the executive branch is done by federal agencies, departments, committees, and other groups.

Judicial Branch of the U.S. Government

The judicial branch interprets the meaning of laws, applies laws to individual cases, and decides if laws violate the Constitution. It is comprised of the Supreme Court and other federal courts.”⁶

„Established by Article I of the Constitution, the Legislative Branch consists of the House of Representatives and the Senate, which together form the United States Congress. The Constitution grants Congress the sole authority to enact legislation and declare war, the right to confirm or reject many Presidential appointments, and substantial investigative powers.

The House of Representatives is made up of 435 elected members, divided among the 50 states in proportion to their total population. In addition, there are 6 non-voting members, representing the District of Columbia, the Commonwealth of Puerto Rico, and four other territories of the United States. The presiding officer of the chamber is the Speaker of the House, elected by the Representatives. He or she is third in the line of succession to the Presidency.

Members of the House are elected every two years and must be 25 years of age, a U.S. citizen for at least seven years, and a resident of the state (but not necessarily the district) they represent. The House has several powers assigned exclusively to it, including the power to initiate revenue bills, impeach federal officials, and elect the President in the case of an electoral college tie.

The Senate is composed of 100 Senators, 2 for each state. Until the ratification of the 17th Amendment in 1913, Senators were chosen by state legislatures, not by popular vote. Since then, they have been elected to six-year terms by the people of each state. Senator’s terms are staggered so that about one-third of the Senate is up for reelection every two years. Senators

⁶ <https://www.usa.gov/branches-of-government#item-214495>

must be 30 years of age, U.S. citizens for at least nine years, and residents of the state they represent.

The Vice President of the United States serves as President of the Senate and may cast the decisive vote in the event of a tie in the Senate.

The Senate has the sole power to confirm those of the President's appointments that require consent, and to ratify treaties. There are, however, two exceptions to this rule: the House must also approve appointments to the Vice Presidency and any treaty that involves foreign trade. The Senate also tries impeachment cases for federal officials referred to it by the House.

In order to pass legislation and send it to the President for his signature, both the House and the Senate must pass the same bill by majority vote. If the President vetoes a bill, they may override his veto by passing the bill again in each chamber with at least two-thirds of each body voting in favor.

The Legislative Process

The first step in the legislative process is the introduction of a bill to Congress. Anyone can write it, but only members of Congress can introduce legislation. Some important bills are traditionally introduced at the request of the President, such as the annual federal budget. During the legislative process, however, the initial bill can undergo drastic changes.

After being introduced, a bill is referred to the appropriate committee for review. There are 17 Senate committees, with 70 subcommittees, and 23 House committees, with 104 subcommittees. The committees are not set in stone, but change in number and form with each new Congress as required for the efficient consideration of legislation. Each committee oversees a specific policy area, and the subcommittees take on more specialized policy areas. For example, the House Committee on Ways and Means includes subcommittees on Social Security and Trade.

A bill is first considered in a subcommittee, where it may be accepted, amended, or rejected entirely. If the members of the subcommittee agree to move a bill forward, it is reported to the full committee, where the process is repeated again. Throughout this stage of the process, the committees and subcommittees call hearings to investigate the merits and flaws of the bill. They invite experts, advocates, and opponents to appear before the committee and provide testimony, and can compel people to appear using subpoena power if necessary.

If the full committee votes to approve the bill, it is reported to the floor of the House or Senate, and the majority party leadership decides when to place the bill on the calendar for consideration. If a bill is particularly pressing, it may be considered right away. Others may wait for months or never be scheduled at all.

When the bill comes up for consideration, the House has a very structured debate process. Each member who wishes to speak only has a few minutes, and the number and kind of amendments are usually limited. In the Senate, debate on most bills is unlimited — Senators may speak to issues other than the bill under consideration during their speeches, and any amendment can be introduced. Senators can use this to filibuster bills under consideration, a procedure by which a Senator delays a vote on a bill — and by extension its passage — by refusing to stand down. A supermajority of 60 Senators can break a filibuster by invoking cloture, or the cession of debate on the bill, and forcing a vote. Once debate is over, the votes of a simple majority passes the bill.

A bill must pass both houses of Congress before it goes to the President for consideration. Though the Constitution requires that the two bills have the exact same wording, this rarely happens in practice. To bring the bills into alignment, a Conference Committee is convened, consisting of members from both chambers. The members of the committee produce a conference report, intended as the final version of the bill. Each chamber then votes again to approve the conference report. Depending on where the bill originated, the final text is then

enrolled by either the Clerk of the House or the Secretary of the Senate, and presented to the Speaker of the House and the President of the Senate for their signatures. The bill is then sent to the President.

When receiving a bill from Congress, the President has several options. If the President agrees substantially with the bill, he or she may sign it into law, and the bill is then printed in the Statutes at Large. If the President believes the law to be bad policy, he may veto it and send it back to Congress. Congress may override the veto with a two-thirds vote of each chamber, at which point the bill becomes law and is printed.

There are two other options that the President may exercise. If Congress is in session and the President takes no action within 10 days, the bill becomes law. If Congress adjourns before 10 days are up and the President takes no action, then the bill dies and Congress may not vote to override. This is called a pocket veto, and if Congress still wants to pass the legislation, they must begin the entire process anew.

Powers of Congress

Congress, as one of the three coequal branches of government, is ascribed significant powers by the Constitution. All legislative power in the government is vested in Congress, meaning that it is the only part of the government that can make new laws or change existing laws. Executive Branch agencies issue regulations with the full force of law, but these are only under the authority of laws enacted by Congress. The President may veto bills Congress passes, but Congress may also override a veto by a two-thirds vote in both the Senate and the House of Representatives.

Article I of the Constitution enumerates the powers of Congress and the specific areas in which it may legislate. Congress is also empowered to enact laws deemed “necessary and proper” for the execution of the powers given to any part of the government under the Constitution.

Part of Congress’s exercise of legislative authority is the establishment of an annual budget for the government. To this end, Congress levies taxes and tariffs to provide funding for essential government services. If enough money cannot be raised to fund the government, then Congress may also authorize borrowing to make up the difference. Congress can also mandate spending on specific items: legislatively directed spending, commonly known as “earmarks,” specifies funds for a particular project, rather than for a government agency.

Both chambers of Congress have extensive investigative powers, and may compel the production of evidence or testimony toward whatever end they deem necessary. Members of Congress spend much of their time holding hearings and investigations in committee. Refusal to cooperate with a Congressional subpoena can result in charges of contempt of Congress, which could result in a prison term. The Senate maintains several powers to itself: It ratifies treaties by a two-thirds supermajority vote and confirms the appointments of the President by a majority vote. The consent of the House of Representatives is also necessary for the ratification of trade agreements and the confirmation of the Vice President. Congress also holds the sole power to declare war.

Government Oversight

Oversight of the executive branch is an important Congressional check on the President’s power and a balance against his discretion in implementing laws and making regulations.

A major way that Congress conducts oversight is through hearings. The House Committee on Oversight and Government Reform and the Senate Committee on Homeland Security and Government Affairs are both devoted to overseeing and reforming government operations, and each committee conducts oversight in its policy area.

Congress also maintains an investigative organization, the Government Accountability Office (GAO). Founded in 1921 as the General Accounting Office, its original mission was to audit

the budgets and financial statements sent to Congress by the Secretary of the Treasury and the Director of the Office of Management and Budget. Today, the GAO audits and generates reports on every aspect of the government, ensuring that taxpayer dollars are spent with the effectiveness and efficiency that the American people deserve.

The executive branch also polices itself: Sixty-four Inspectors General, each responsible for a different agency, regularly audit and report on the agencies to which they are attached.

The power of the Executive Branch is vested in the President of the United States, who also acts as head of state and Commander-in-Chief of the armed forces. The President is responsible for implementing and enforcing the laws written by Congress and, to that end, appoints the heads of the federal agencies, including the Cabinet. The Vice President is also part of the Executive Branch, ready to assume the Presidency should the need arise.

The Cabinet and independent federal agencies are responsible for the day-to-day enforcement and administration of federal laws. These departments and agencies have missions and responsibilities as widely divergent as those of the Department of Defense and the Environmental Protection Agency, the Social Security Administration and the Securities and Exchange Commission. Including members of the armed forces, the Executive Branch employs more than 4 million Americans.

The President

The President is both the head of state and head of government of the United States of America, and Commander-in-Chief of the armed forces. Under Article II of the Constitution, the President is responsible for the execution and enforcement of the laws created by Congress. Fifteen executive departments — each led by an appointed member of the President’s Cabinet — carry out the day-to-day administration of the federal government. They are joined in this by other executive agencies such as the CIA and Environmental Protection Agency, the heads of which are not part of the Cabinet, but who are under the full authority of the President. The President also appoints the heads of more than 50 independent federal commissions, such as the Federal Reserve Board or the Securities and Exchange Commission, as well as federal judges, ambassadors, and other federal offices. The Executive Office of the President (EOP) consists of the immediate staff to the President, along with entities such as the Office of Management and Budget and the Office of the United States Trade Representative.

The President has the power either to sign legislation into law or to veto bills enacted by Congress, although Congress may override a veto with a two-thirds vote of both houses. The Executive Branch conducts diplomacy with other nations, and the President has the power to negotiate and sign treaties, which also must be ratified by two-thirds of the Senate. The President can issue executive orders, which direct executive officers or clarify and further existing laws. The President also has unlimited power to extend pardons and clemencies for federal crimes, except in cases of impeachment.

With these powers come several responsibilities, among them a constitutional requirement to “from time to time give to the Congress Information of the State of the Union, and recommend to their Consideration such Measures as he shall judge necessary and expedient.” Although the President may fulfill this requirement in any way he or she chooses, Presidents have traditionally given a State of the Union address to a joint session of Congress each January (except in inaugural years) outlining their agenda for the coming year.

The Constitution lists only three qualifications for the Presidency — the President must be 35 years of age, be a natural born citizen, and must have lived in the United States for at least 14 years. And though millions of Americans vote in a presidential election every four years, the President is not, in fact, directly elected by the people. Instead, on the first Tuesday in November of every fourth year, the people elect the members of the Electoral College.

Apportioned by population to the 50 states — one for each member of their congressional delegation (with the District of Columbia receiving 3 votes) — these Electors then cast the votes for President. There are currently 538 electors in the Electoral College.

President Donald J. Trump is the 45th President of the United States. He is, however, only the 44th person ever to serve as President; President Grover Cleveland served two nonconsecutive terms, and thus is recognized as both the 22nd and the 24th President. Today, the President is limited to two four-year terms, but until the 22nd Amendment to the Constitution, ratified in 1951, a President could serve an unlimited number of terms. Franklin Delano Roosevelt was elected President four times, serving from 1932 until his death in 1945; he is the only President ever to have served more than two terms.

By tradition, the President and the First Family live in the White House in Washington, D.C., also the location of the President’s Oval Office and the offices of the his senior staff. When the President travels by plane, his aircraft is designated Air Force One; he may also use a Marine Corps helicopter, known as Marine One while the President is on board. For ground travel, the President uses an armored Presidential limousine.

The Vice President

The primary responsibility of the Vice President of the United States is to be ready at a moment’s notice to assume the Presidency if the President is unable to perform his duties. This can be because of the President’s death, resignation, or temporary incapacitation, or if the Vice President and a majority of the Cabinet judge that the President is no longer able to discharge the duties of the presidency.

The Vice President is elected along with the President by the Electoral College — each elector casts one vote for President and another for Vice President. Before the ratification of the 12th Amendment in 1804, electors only voted for President, and the person who received the second greatest number of votes became Vice President.

The Vice President also serves as the President of the United States Senate, where he or she casts the deciding vote in the case of a tie. Except in the case of tiebreaking votes, the Vice President rarely actually presides over the Senate. Instead, the Senate selects one of their own members, usually junior members of the majority party, to preside over the Senate each day.

Michael R. Pence is the 48th Vice President of the United States. Of the 47 previous Vice Presidents, nine have succeeded to the Presidency, and four have been elected to the Presidency in their own right. The duties of the Vice President, outside of those enumerated in the Constitution, are at the discretion of the current President. Each Vice President approaches the role differently — some take on a specific policy portfolio, others serve simply as a top adviser to the President.

The Vice President has an office in the West Wing of the White House, as well as in the nearby Eisenhower Executive Office Building. Like the President, he also maintains an official residence, at the United States Naval Observatory in Northwest Washington, D.C. This peaceful mansion, has been the official home of the Vice President since 1974 — previously, Vice Presidents had lived in their own private residences. The Vice President also has his own limousine, operated by the United States Secret Service, and flies on the same aircraft the President uses — but when the Vice President is aboard, the craft are referred to as Air Force Two and Marine Two.

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. The individual offices that these advisors oversee have grown in size and number since the EOP was created. Some were formed by Congress, others as the President has needed them — they are constantly shifting as each President identifies his needs and priorities, with the current EOP employing over 1,800 people.

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. Less visible to most Americans is the National Security Council, which advises the President on foreign policy, intelligence, and national security.

There are also a number of offices responsible for the practicalities of maintaining the White House and providing logistical support for the President. These include the White House Military Office, which is responsible for services ranging from Air Force One to the dining facilities, and the Office of Presidential Advance, which prepares sites remote from the White House for the President’s arrival.

Many senior advisors in the EOP work near the President in the West Wing of the White House. However, the majority of the staff is housed in the Eisenhower Executive Office Building, just a few steps away and part of the White House compound.

The Cabinet

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, the members of the Cabinet are often the President’s closest confidants. In addition to running major federal agencies, they 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. All the members of the Cabinet take the title Secretary, excepting the head of the Justice Department, who is styled Attorney General.

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 USDA employs more than 100,000 employees and has an annual budget of approximately \$95 billion. It consists of 17 agencies, including the Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service, the Food and Nutrition Service, and the Forest Service. The bulk of the department’s budget goes towards mandatory programs that provide services required by law, such as programs designed to provide nutrition assistance, promote agricultural exports, and conserve our environment.

The USDA also plays an important role in overseas aid programs by providing surplus foods to developing countries.

The United States Secretary of Agriculture administers the USDA.

DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE

The Department of Commerce is the government agency tasked with improving living standards for all Americans by 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. The Secretary of Commerce oversees a \$6.5 billion budget and approximately 38,000 employees.

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 department’s headquarters is at the Pentagon.

The DOD consists of the Departments 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. The DOD occupies the vast majority of the Pentagon building in Arlington, VA.

The Department of Defense is the largest government agency, with more than 1.3 million men and women on active duty, nearly 700,000 civilian personnel, and 1.1 million citizens who serve in the National Guard and Reserve forces. Together, the military and civilian arms of DOD protect national interests through war-fighting, providing humanitarian aid, and performing peacekeeping and disaster relief services.

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.

The Department administers federal financial aid for education, collects data on America’s schools to guide improvements in education quality, and works to complement the efforts of state and local governments, parents, and students. The U.S. Secretary of Education oversees the Department’s 4,200 employees and \$68.6 billion budget.

DEPARTMENT OF ENERGY

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

The DOE promotes America’s energy security by encouraging the development of reliable, clean, and affordable energy. It administers federal funding for scientific research to further the goal of discovery and innovation — ensuring American economic competitiveness and improving the quality of life for Americans. The DOE is also tasked with ensuring America’s nuclear security, and with protecting the environment by providing a responsible resolution to the legacy of nuclear weapons production.

The United States Secretary of Energy oversees a budget of approximately \$23 billion and more than 100,000 federal and contract employees.

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