

# Guide to Cabinet

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## INTRODUCTION

Congratulations and welcome to the Harvard Model Congress Asia's Presidential Cabinet Program! You are about to embark on a journey through both the hallowed halls of Congress and the back rooms of the nation's most powerful dealmakers. As you travel through the maze of paperwork that every Cabinet member must navigate, you should never be without your most important piece of equipment: the Guide to the Presidential Cabinet. This guide will help you prepare for your role as one of the United States' top policy experts and it will help you make decisions that will impact the country and the world around you.

## HISTORY AND BACKGROUND

The Cabinet arose from a clause in the United States **Constitution** that states that the President “may require the opinion, in writing, of the principal officer in each of the executive departments, upon any subject relating to the duties of their respective offices” (**Article II**, Section II, **Clause I**). Over the years, new Cabinet positions have been created as new departments have been added to the executive branch. The original Cabinet consisted of the Secretary of State, Secretary of the Treasury, Attorney General, Postmaster General (removed during the Nixon Administration), Secretary of War, and Secretary of the Navy (the Departments of War and the Navy were combined to form Department of Defense in 1947). The Departments of Agriculture and the Interior were added in the next century, and the Departments of Commerce and Labor (originally a single department, but now two separate departments), Health and Human Services, Housing and Urban Development, Transportation, Energy, Education, and Veterans Affairs were subsequently added as well. In January 2003, President George W. Bush signed the Homeland Security Act into law, creating the newest department, the Department of Homeland Security.

The Cabinet is composed of the highest-ranking officers of each of the 15 executive departments, as well as other federal officials that the president chooses to elevate to Cabinet rank. Each of these executive officers advises the president on specific issues of their own personal

**Constitution**—for more information see the [Guide to the Constitution](#).

**Article, Clause**—refer to specific sections or sentences in the Constitution.



expertise and also on more general issues which may impact their department. At some points in history, Cabinet members may not have been the president's closest advisors.

For example, President Andrew Jackson kept many of his political enemies in his Cabinet, which he supplemented with an informal "kitchen cabinet" of top advisors, named after the place where they held their meetings.

Today, the Presidential Cabinet is the top advisory board in the executive branch. Cabinet members have to digest information quickly and make informed and difficult decisions at a moment's notice. Cabinet members will have to perform many roles simultaneously. Cabinet members will engage in policy debate during classified meetings, testify before full congressional committees, and write editorials in the newspapers.

The federal government is too large for any one person to be an expert on every issue that faces the country, which makes the Cabinet an important resource for Congress and the president. Because each Cabinet department implements the policies that Congress and the president create, Cabinet secretaries should always consider such pragmatic concerns as the feasibility of implementation, costs and benefits of a policy, and departmental **jurisdiction** when evaluating **legislation**.

The members of the Cabinet make their recommendations based on their expertise, their department's general principles, their own informed considerations of departments' competing needs, and their understanding of the practical **implications** of policymaking. Generally, Cabinet members are supportive of the president's overall platform, since they were appointed by the president. However, Cabinet members can often disagree with each other because resources allocated to one are often taken from another and also because their jurisdictions frequently overlap. These disagreements are what make Cabinet debates exciting.

**Jurisdiction**—*having legal authority over something.*

**Legislation**—*laws passed by Congress.*

**Implications**—*effects.*

## MAKING POLICY – WRITING THE AGENDA AND SETTING THE PLATFORM

The Guide to Making Policy will help you achieve your major goals as a member of the Presidential Cabinet. You will be able to understand your party's **platform** on certain issues, set a specific agenda, and engage in debate with other political actors. Throughout, you will be able to use your influence and resources of political capital to persuade legislators to accomplish the objectives the President has put high on his agenda.

**Platform**—*a set of policies or ideals that a political party agrees upon.*

The goal of the President is to implement an **agenda** that reflect a set of ideals that his party supports. Accomplishing these goals is not



always easy, especially since the public occupies a central role in the American political process. **Power-player** politicians must constantly work to shape the public's mindset and convince the public of a particular message. As advisors and policy-makers, you have an important role to play in creatively finding new methods of overcoming opposition to successfully advocate your positions.

The first task of each Cabinet member is to debate and create his or her platform. This is a comprehensive statement of the convictions and beliefs of the President's political party, and serves as a guide for legislators, **constituents**, and the press throughout the conference. It covers a range of issues spanning foreign and domestic policy and political ideology.

In order to create a solid platform, think critically about what the President stands for. What are his core **philosophical** beliefs? What policies has he supported in the past and how can these be adapted for the present and future? What policies should be implemented to overcome the nation's challenges? Has some world event or timely policy discussion created the need for new priorities?

Coming up with an agenda is the next step of an effective Cabinet. The agenda is the party's agenda, and serves as an outline of the President's policies. An agenda is not the same thing as a platform or ideological foundation; rather, it is an ordered listing of bills, initiatives, and plans to accomplish the goals of the President. The Cabinet members should prioritize the items depending on how certain policies will achieve the long-term goals of the President.

**Agenda**—a set of goals.

**Power-player**—a politician with a lot of political influence.

**Constituents**—people who vote for a politician.

**Philosophical**—referring to basic beliefs or values.

## HOW IT WORKS

### *Before the Conference*

When you are notified of your selection to the Presidential Cabinet, you will be able to access the following materials on the HMC Asia website ([www.hmccasia.org](http://www.hmccasia.org)):

1. A brief biography of your Cabinet member.
2. Issue Briefings for Senate and House committees written by the HMCA Staff.
3. Additional materials and research suggestions regarding your topics.

following section provides you with pointers on researching your policy proposals.

### *Research*



### Step One: The Basics

Your first step in research should be to read the briefings written by the HMC Asia staff. The briefings provide excellent outlines of the issues to be discussed and go into a fair amount of detail on the various points of debate that will be guiding the legislators.

While studying these briefings, you should keep a particularly close eye on the “Focus of Debate” and “Possible Solutions” sections, as they will address your questions most directly. By the time you have finished reading the briefing, you should have a good idea of the types of issues legislators will be addressing, as well as the concerns and goals of the executive branch regarding the topic. It is quite likely that when you are testifying in the House of Representatives or Senate, the members of Congress will bring up points and arguments from these sections, so you should be sure you can address these quickly and accurately with well-crafted responses reflecting the administration’s views. As you contemplate the best way to conform to administration policy, please pay special attention to the viewpoint your department would take.

For more information on any of the points addressed in the briefings, take a look at the bibliography; you may find it easiest to refer to the same sources used by the author. A very common source of information for HMC Asia briefings is Congressional Quarterly and Congressional Research Service (CRS) Issue Briefs/Info Packs. One way of finding these sources is the Internet. Typing in the title of CRS briefs into a search engine will lead you to websites that post these briefs.

### Step Two: Researching Different Opinions

#### *The President’s Opinion*

You will often be able to glean a good amount of information from the briefing itself, which may even have very specific information on the presidential opinion regarding an issue. If the topic you are researching is one that has been in the news recently, check US newspapers and periodicals, especially the *New York Times* (for financial issues, *The Economist* is a valuable resource). These sources will generally have excellent coverage of major news, with a special emphasis on presidential opinion. Again, an Internet search may also be useful in determining the presidential opinion on a topic. The White House Press Office can be accessed by searching [www.whitehouse.gov](http://www.whitehouse.gov).

If you have access to an on-line search facility such as LEXIS-NEXIS, you can very easily conduct a word search combining (for example) “Bush” and “cable TV regulation,” which will give you full-text printouts from newspapers, magazines, and radio and television shows from around the US.



### *Your Department's Opinion*

The process of getting your department's opinion on a particular issue is similar to the process of ascertaining the president's view. All departments have homepages, which are great sources of information and often have the latest speeches, press releases, and department actions listed. You will find that even if the department has not **enunciated** a position on the specific issue in the brief, look for other similar topics (i.e. search for "drug policy" if "marijuana for medicinal purposes" does not yield results).

You may very well find something written about your department in the mainstream media. Again, a computer search combining your department's name or your Cabinet member's name ("Condoleezza Rice," for example) with key words from the issue you are researching should yield some helpful information.

Some departments will have their own publications (the Department of State Dispatch, for example) which highlight key issues being discussed within the department. You should check with your library for availability of such publications. If you find that they are not locally available, you may try to contact your department's press office directly.

**Enunciated**—*clearly explained.*

### *Your Role's Opinion*

This may very well be the trickiest part of your research. While information on a department's perspective on an issue may be available, it is often much more difficult to find information on an individual's opinion. Much of your work in researching your role's opinion will be based on inference from your attitudes and perspectives. You can access biographies of Cabinet members on the HMC Asia website, including that of your role ("yourself"). There you will find information on your education and occupation before the president called on you to serve the nation. You should use this information to deduce your political leanings. Keep your own background in mind as you go back and reread the briefings for a second time.

You may also find substantial information on yourself reported in the media during your confirmation hearings. If your confirmation was not widely reported, check CQ and the Congressional Record (a **transcript** of congressional hearings) for information.

What did politicians think were the strengths and weaknesses you brought to your office? Who were your friends and who were your adversaries in the Senate during your hearings? What controversies clouded your nomination hearing? From this you ought to be able to get a clearer picture of how you—as an individual—may stand on a given issue. You may also find articles discussing your opinions on particular issues in the popular media, especially if policy proposals pertinent to your department are currently being debated in public.

**Transcript**—*written record.*

As a final preparation, we would encourage you to familiarize



yourself (i.e. read the newspaper, speak with your faculty advisor) with all of the issues to be discussed at the conference. While your testimony will be **solicited** for a few issues, your informed opinions will contribute to debate over all of the bills before the congress and other organizations.

## THE CABINET MEMBER AS LOBBYIST

**Solicited**—*in this sense, asked for.*

Because you will oversee the implementation of any law that is passed regarding your department, your words will carry extra weight as “expert” testimony in other committees. In discussing various proposals and ideas, members of Congress and others will look to you and your expertise to see how those proposals will actually come to fruition.

## PREPARING TESTIMONY

Along with debate among Cabinet members, testimony will represent the greatest part of your responsibility during congressional sessions. Here are some questions you will want to keep in mind while you prepare for giving testimony to House and Senate committees.

- Does your testimony reflect your departmental responsibilities? Are you striking a proper balance between these two roles? Are you representing the president’s view on the issue as well?
- Who will be your friends and who will be your opponents in committee?
- Are you effectively addressing the concerns of your political opponents while remaining true to the administration?

What are the overall implications of your plan? Are there **short-term** gains versus **long-term** losses, or vice-versa?

While you are in front of a committee, remember that you represent the President of the United States. Your actions may reflect the president in a positive or negative light. Present yourself as a representative of the president and your office will be given the respect you deserve.

**Short-term**—*effects or gains that will occur soon.*

**Long-term**—*effects that only occur after a long period of time but tend to last longer.*

### *Tips on Testifying*

Part of being spokesperson for the administration and your department is serving as an expert witness. You will act as a witness when a congressional committee requests your testimony on an issue. When you are called to testify, you will have only a few minutes to tell the committee whatever you would like to tell them. After you speak, they



will question you about the issue and can recall you later during the debate for more questions. During your testimony, there are some things that you should try to do:

- Be organized. Prepare an outline or summarize your major points before you enter the committee room. No matter how prepared and rehearsed you are, it is always reassuring to have something written down to fall back upon.
- Use facts and quotes. Periodically in your speech, use statistics which support your viewpoint, but be careful not to focus entirely on reciting numbers. In addition, starting or concluding your speech with an effective quote can also help you. Some of the best quotes are ones that are emotional and can speak to the members' consciences.
- Be clear and straightforward. If you speak too long on one point, you risk losing everyone's attention. Be concise and to the point.
- Address the questions that are asked of you. After your testimony, the committee may ask you questions that you should answer directly rather than rehashing your testimony. Don't fear questions; they are an extra opportunity for you to convince the rest of the committee of the position you are advocating.

Respect the committee. Even if you think all the members are wrong, always be polite while you speak. Remember, you represent your department and the President of the United States.

## SPEECHWRITING

In the real world, the president has a team of speechwriters which work to produce all or most of the official public and private addresses that the president delivers. The president has an opportunity to review these drafts, of course, but the primary force behind speechwriting is a team of relatively unknown White House staffers who have mastered the art of political communication. Here at Harvard Model Congress Asia, Cabinet members will work together to produce a shorter version of the State of the Union Address.

The State of the Union Address has a history almost as long as the history of the United States. On January 8, 1790, George Washington fulfilled his constitutional duty set forth by Article II, Section 3. In doing so, he set a precedent for future presidents by delivering the first annual message to Congress. Though the Union that Washington addressed was just a young democracy, the presidents that followed have given Congress their assessment of one of today's most influential na-



tions. While the length, frequency, and even delivery method have varied over the years, presidents now appreciate the opportunity to advance their agenda through the State of the Union Address.

Though today the State of the Union is broadcast world-wide, the president's remarks have not always been so public. For example, Thomas Jefferson wrote out his goals for 1801 and sent copies of the message to Congress because he believed that Washington's oral address was too "kingly" for the new nation. For the next century, presidents followed Jefferson's example. However, the advent of radio and television changed the nature of the President's annual remarks by opening up his conversation with Congress to the American public at large. Woodrow Wilson broke with Jefferson's precedent and spoke before Congress in 1913. Ten years later, Calvin Coolidge's remarks were broadcast by radio and, in 1947, Harry Truman addressed the nation via television. Since then, the State of the Union has become a major opportunity for the President to set forth his agenda for the upcoming year in front of the millions who elected him to office.

The State of the Union is delivered before a **joint session** of Congress in the House chamber. The Cabinet, Supreme Court, Joint Chiefs of Staff, First Lady, invited guests, and other dignitaries are also in attendance. Each year, one Cabinet secretary and a few members of Congress are held back from the Capitol as a safety precaution.

The speech is broadcast in primetime to a national and international audience and is covered by every major news organization in the world. According to Nielsen Media Research, over 51 million people watched the 2002 State of the Union, and 62 million watched the 2003 address. Transcripts and highlights of the speech are distributed to millions more through newspapers, news programs, and the Internet. In short, the speech has become a major national and international event.

Just as the importance of the message has evolved over time, so too has the content. In the 19<sup>th</sup> Century, the speech served as a report or update to the Congress on Executive Branch activities during the past year. Now it fulfills a much greater purpose. According to the Congressional Research Service, the State of the Union functions "as a report to Congress and the nation on national conditions; as a platform to announce and rally support for the President's legislative agenda for the coming year; and as a unique opportunity for the chief executive to convey personally his vision for the nation to Congress and the American people." Presidents use the State of the Union both to emphasize the administration's accomplishments over the previous year and to outline their vision for the nation for the upcoming year. Typically, presidents address both domestic and foreign policy concerns in general terms, often citing legislative priorities in detail. Dozens of special interest groups will be competing to be mentioned in the speech, so it is important to assess and evaluate points raised in the party agenda to determine

**Joint-session**—*when the House and Senate meet together; only occurs several times a year.*



which issues to emphasize. But most importantly, the State of the Union is a powerful, rousing speech designed to motivate and inspire the American citizenry.

Just as the power of the presidency has expanded during the 20<sup>th</sup> Century, so too has the length of the State of the Union. Washington's first message came in at 833 words, or about four to seven minutes when delivered. Today, the President's speech runs about an hour, including the interruptions for applause. In 2003, President

George W. Bush spoke for 59 minutes, 40 seconds and was interrupted 77 times for applause. As a result, many describe the speech as presenting a "laundry list" of legislative ideas to support the president's larger vision. At the HMCA conference, we will not have enough time to craft or deliver such a lengthy address. Invoking the tradition established by Washington, a shorter speech will be more appropriate.

You will work with your fellow Cabinet members to help the President produce a speech which addresses the issues of the conference. Below you'll find some steps which will help you accomplish this task.

### *Step 1: Reflect*

First alone and then with the other members of your staff, spend time reflecting both on the accomplishments of the president over the previous year and on the party's priorities for the upcoming one. Consult the platform for vision and principles and the agenda for specific legislative goals. Before you sit down to write, it is essential that you know who your party is and what you want to do.

### *Step 2: Brainstorm and Consult*

Once you have a sense of what your party is about, begin brainstorming a list of what the party considers to be its most important issues and goals. The process of writing the State of the Union is strongly connected with the Party Platform and the Agenda that you will have created earlier in the conference. The platform lays out the core beliefs of the party, which should guide the vision of the State of the Union. The agenda lists and prioritizes the policy goals of the administration, and is thus more limited and specific in its scope. The State of the Union combines the two and also reflects on recent challenges and accomplishments. Finally, it adds rhetoric to lend energy to ideas. You should also consider what special interest groups or constituencies and Members of Congress are affected in order to measure the political weight of the issue at hand. At this point, you should bring in advice from outside groups and members of Congress. Meet with them to discuss their top priorities and concerns, both to add expertise and to build a broad base of support. If they are consulted, they will be more likely to support your initiatives in the future, thereby increasing your political capital.



### *Step 3: Draft*

Divide the speech into manageable sections to begin drafting. Typically, the President begins by reviewing the administration's major accomplishments and then segues into his goals for the upcoming year. Domestic and international policy might be another helpful distinction. Within domestic policy, you might think about homeland defense, health care, education, the economy, and social issues, among others. You will want to make mention of some of the issues being discussed at the conference.

### *Step 4: Revise and Strategize*

Read back through the speech with a careful eye towards political strategy. Have you appealed to all of your key constituencies? Are there any major points on which the opposing party is sure to attack, and if so, have you appropriately addressed or minimized their concerns with counterarguments? Does the speech highlight your key accomplishments? Is the tone of the speech positive and energizing throughout?

### *Step 5: Fine-Tune and Advance*

Do one final read-through to ensure that the speech is both polished and professional. Distribute copies if possible to major media outlets so that they will quote you in their articles. Build final support for your speech amongst members of Congress, members of the press, and others.

## THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN THE PRESIDENT AND THE CABINET

### *"I Serve at the Pleasure of the President"*

As a member of the Cabinet you have proven yourself to be one of the nation's most capable public servants. You possess deep convictions, strong opinions, expert knowledge, and savvy political skills. You know that in the private sector you could parlay these skills into a healthy salary – but you're not with a corporation. You work long hours in cramped offices and can't remember the last time you had a social life. And on top of it all, you don't even get to take credit for your successes. Instead, as your commission reads, you "serve at the pleasure of the president." This means that you must have a passion for **anonymity** – your successes are your leader's successes. That speech you just spent two months writing? To the outside world, it was your party's speech.



Yet if you make a blunder, it will be considered your mistake. So what makes it worthwhile?

For some it may be the **allure** of power; for others a lust for competition and success. But for most, it is a compelling sense of duty. You are now part of a team that shares the same beliefs, and wants to make this country a better place. Furthermore, you believe in the leader of your party. You work in the most powerful building in the world, just steps away from the office where President John F. Kennedy prevented nuclear war, Richard Nixon spoke to a man on the moon, and George W. Bush comforted the nation after the September 11th tragedy.

At Harvard Model Congress Asia, Cabinet members will be directly interacting with both President George W. Bush and Vice President Dick Cheney. As the most trusted executive advisors, you will be expected to present sound and well researched policy proposals to your superiors. These proposals should serve the best interests of the president, his party, and most importantly, the American people. At every critical juncture, the President will have the option to accept or reject your proposals. Although you are experts in your respective fields, the President has final determination as to whether the White House will support or oppose any particular policy. No matter his decision, you must stand by your leader and work to implement the particular plans he espouses. Once a course has been set, the Cabinet can draft bills and present them to Congress. Of course, only lawmakers themselves can introduce the legislation in Congress, but the executive branch certainly draft bills and attempt to find legislators to introduce them.

**Anonymity**—*writing something for which you will not receive credit.*

**Allure**—*appeal.*

## SOME FINAL REMINDERS

Since you will be given a specific identity, you want to be as convincing as possible. Play that role with fervor. Your research and preparation will be rewarded when you have the undivided attention of the senators and representatives. A good Cabinet member will research both sides of the issue, thereby learning both the strong and weak points of his or her argument. And, of course, enjoy your alter ego and have fun with your role.

In addition, you need to find out how certain members of Congress feel about your assigned issues. As you search through sources to learn about each topic, take notes on the positions and actions of individual members on the issue. Also take note of the types of members of Congress that support each side of the issue — the party affiliation, ideological or religious beliefs, or social or economic interests of members or their constituents that determine where they stand on the issues that you are researching.



Once again, nothing can prepare you better for the conference than research on the issues the committees will debate. If you are a handy and reliable resource, senators and representatives will come to depend on you for vital information. And when they realize that you know more than they do on an issue, you will have a much easier time convincing them to vote in your favor.

Remember, you appear before a committee to lobby for a position, but you are not a lobbyist. Try and distinguish yourself from the extremist, **vociferous** lobbyists as an expert who, after careful objective analysis, has arrived at a position. You do not represent any special interest group or business; you represent the president of the United States and your department.

Try to appeal to both Democrats and Republicans with your expert knowledge, and always be cognizant of the president's agenda. When preparing to lobby, you should remember that you may also need to persuade your fellow Cabinet members, so try to understand their objections and positions as well. This will maximize your effectiveness.

**Vociferous**—*loud, boisterous.*

## CONCLUSION

You have been chosen to be part of a select group of people with the power to influence the president on the most pressing and crucial issues. Your recommendations on whether to sign or to veto legislation passed by the House and Senate will be critical for a presidential decision. Solid testimony given beforehand will also help promote more of the administration's legislative agenda. These detailed yet flexible guidelines for preparing for Harvard Model Congress Asia Presidential Cabinet are designed as a launching point for your work in this role. Now it is time for you to get to work, read your issue briefings, research, contact your Cabinet member's office, and draft your policy proposal. We look forward to seeing you at HMC Asia!

