



Presidential Transitions

The Second Term and Beyond



Outgoing President George W. Bush and President-elect Barack Obama confer after the latter's election in 2008. (AP Photo/The White House, Eric Draper)

The roughly 75 days between a U.S. presidential election and the inauguration are as important to a second-term president as they are to a newly elected president, but the priorities are different.

A re-elected president is not under time pressure to fill a full slate of top government positions, but he likely will need to fill many of nearly 3,000 mid-level appointed positions as they become vacant. Some mid-level managers choose to pursue other jobs after gaining a few years of government experience. Others may retire.

The biggest challenge is finding the right people to fill those slots so that the business of government continues. Second-term presidents need a strong administration because they often face tougher challenges working with Congress, whose leaders

are familiar with the president's ideas and negotiating style.

How is the president's Cabinet chosen?

Even a re-elected president will have some decisions to make about the 15 executive department leaders who, along with the vice president, make up the Cabinet. In addition, seven officials in the Obama administration, such as the administrator of the Environmental Protection Agency and the U.S. Trade Representative, hold Cabinet-rank positions. Some of these leaders will remain in their jobs, but others may leave or move to a different position, or the president may choose to replace them.

The Cabinet is the president's group of top policy advisers. The U.S. Constitution specifies 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." The Cabinet usually meets with the president at least weekly.

The president can dismiss Cabinet members as he pleases. They also are expected to resign when a new president takes office, but some presidents invite selected Cabinet members from the previous administration to remain.

A Cabinet member cannot be a member of Congress, a sitting governor or a member of the president's immediate family. The president nominates Cabinet members, but the Senate must confirm them before they get the job. Sitting Cabinet members do not need to be re-confirmed.

The number of positions requiring Senate confirmation has grown considerably over time,

and the confirmation process can be lengthy. In August 2012, to help speed up the process of filling appointed positions, President Obama signed a law that removed 166 senior-level positions from Senate approval.

What happens to political appointees (incoming and exiting)?

At the level below Cabinet members are many politically appointed executives in dozens of large, complex agencies. These are the people who work with the “career” (civil service, foreign service and military) leaders to run the federal government. Others are appointed to support positions — advisers and aides — whose duties may involve advocating administration policies and programs.

According to *U.S. Government Policy and Supporting Positions* (informally called the “Plum Book”), a document printed every four years following a presidential election, a total of nearly 9,000 positions in the federal government can be appointed by a president or his administration. Of those, about 800 must be confirmed by the Senate. Even a second-term president spends a great deal of time getting his administration in place.

Anyone in these appointed positions may be replaced if the president, or one of his agency heads, chooses. While turnover is lower in a second term than in a new administration, transition means spending time on filling vacancies. One study has found that the average time on the job for political appointees is 2.5 years, with 25 percent staying fewer than 18

months. From election until the last days in office, filling executive and judicial posts is a regular part of the president’s job.

Life after the presidency

When an outgoing president and family depart the White House, usually around 10:45 a.m. each January 20, a team of White House workers begins a precisely organized transformation. In only a few hours, they move the outgoing family’s possessions out of — and the incoming family’s belongings into — the 132-room presidential mansion.

Former presidents retain certain privileges, including staff and office allowances, travel expenses, Secret Service protection and medical treatment at military hospitals.

Former presidents and other elected government leaders often stay active in areas of interest to them; greater name recognition affords presidents much attention and often power.

After one four-year term marked by international crises, Jimmy Carter was not re-elected, but he went on to win the Nobel Peace Prize for devoting his life to human rights issues and reducing suffering around the world. Bill Clinton has established several charitable foundations to address international issues and has served as a U.N. special envoy to Haiti. Other ex-presidents chose to lead quiet lives out of the public eye.

It has become customary for the official works and personal memorabilia of presidents to be preserved in libraries endowed for that purpose. After he died in

office, gifts Franklin Roosevelt received as president, as well as many of his personal papers, were donated to establish a library in his name. Harry Truman adopted the practice and now the U.S. National Archives and Records Administration manages 12 presidential libraries.

President George H.W. Bush, who turned 88 in June 2012, wrote a book about foreign policy but tended to avoid the public spotlight while his son, George W. Bush, was president. A notable exception occurred when the elder Bush worked closely with Bill Clinton, who defeated him in 1992, to raise funds for victims of the 2004 Indian Ocean tsunami. Presidents George W. Bush and Bill Clinton partnered in 2010 to raise funds following a devastating earthquake in Haiti.

Thomas Jefferson established the University of Virginia; John Quincy Adams served in Congress; and George Washington became a brewer and a gardener. Thomas Jefferson and John Adams both died on the Fourth of July, 1826. James Monroe died July 4, 1831.

President Barack Obama meets with his cabinet.
(AP Photo/Susan Walsh)

