

The Executive Branch

Article II of the Constitution establishes the executive branch of the federal government, which carries out and enforces federal laws. The executive branch includes the president, vice president, cabinet members, executive departments, independent agencies, and other boards, commissions, and committees. The vice president becomes president if the sitting president is disabled, removed from office or dies.



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 nominates ambassadors and other officials to help run the government, along with Supreme Court justices and other federal judges. The president can also make treaties (agreements) with other countries, which must be ratified by two-thirds of the Senate.

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 president can issue executive orders, which direct the actions of federal agencies 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.

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 and enforcement of federal laws. These departments and agencies include a wide range of organizations such as the Department of Defense, 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.

**In print or online look for news about the president or other members, agencies or departments of the executive branch.
Share your findings as a class.**

*Next installment: **The Judicial Branch***



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