

THE CABINET



The ever-fluxuating cabinate of Donald Trump

SECRETARY OF STATE • SECRETARY OF THE TREASURY • SECRETARY OF DEFENSE • ATTORNEY GENERAL • SECRETARY OF THE INTERIOR SECRETARY OF AGRICULTURE • SECRETARY OF AGRICULTURE • SECRETARY OF COMMERCE SECRETARY OF LABOR • SECRETARY OF HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES • SECRETARY OF HOUSING AND URBAN DEVELOPMENT SECRETARY OF TRANSPORTATION • SECRETARY OF ENERGY• SECRETARY OF EDUCATION •SECRETARY OF VETERANS AFFAIRS • SECRETARY OF HOMELAND SECURITY

SECRETARY OF STATE

MIKE POMPEO

~~REX TILLERSON~~

Tillerson has been on the outs for months with Trump. He reportedly called him “a moron” in a meeting last summer, and the two have diverged on key policy issues and global hot spots like Iran, Russia, and North Korea.

WHY TRUMP LIKES HIM

Pompeo is loyal. Trump and Tillerson disagreed on several important issues, including the Iran deal, the decision to withdraw from the Paris Climate Accord, and more recently the president’s approach to North Korea. Trump told reporters that by contrast, he and Pompeo have “a very similar thought process.”

BACKGROUND

Trump plucked Pompeo out of relative obscurity as a three-term congressman from Kansas when he nominated him to lead the CIA. Pompeo has loyally toed the president’s line on everything from intelligence matters to the question of Russian interference in the 2016 election. Before running for Congress, Pompeo served in the Army and then started an aerospace and private security firm.

EXPERIENCE

A little over a year as CIA director, and six years in the House before that



SECRETARY OF THE TREASURY

STEVEN MNUCHIN

WHY TRUMP LIKES HIM

Spot the pattern yet? He’s a successful businessman. But perhaps equally as important, Mnuchin was a relatively early convert to the Trump cause and joined the campaign as national finance chairman back in April, just as the Republican was shifting from relying on his own funds to setting up a more traditional fundraising apparatus. Mnuchin made clear early on he wanted the Treasury job, and Trump rewarded him.

BACKGROUND

He’s a banker. Specifically, Mnuchin is a former senior executive at Goldman Sachs and a hedge fund manager who bought the failed mortgage lender IndyMac from the government in 2009. He spun it off into OneWest and sold it for a huge profit five years later. Mnuchin is also a Hollywood producer whose credits include Avatar, American Sniper, and the X-Men movies.

EXPERIENCE

Forty-four years in the military, though none in civilian posts.

SECRETARY OF DEFENSE

JAMES MATTIS

WHY TRUMP LIKES HIM

For a guy who once said he probably knows “more about ISIS than the generals do,” he certainly likes hiring them for top positions. Mattis is known as a straight-shooter and a voracious reader, and Trump has gushed that he is “the closest thing to George Patton that we have.” Like Trump, Mattis is someone whose blunt talk occasionally crashes through the line of political correctness, and he has criticized the Obama administration stance toward Iran and its strategy across the Middle East. Trump seems to value his opinion: He told The New York Times that he was “impressed” when Mattis pointedly told him that torture does not work, though it did not change the president-elect’s support for the practice. Trump also seems fond of his nickname, Mad Dog.

BACKGROUND

Background: Mattis is a four-star Marine Corps general who led U.S. Central Command from 2010 to 2013. He commanded forces in both the Afghanistan and Iraq wars after the 9/11 terrorist attacks. Mattis also worked with General David Petraeus to produce the field manual on battling counterinsurgents in Iraq

EXPERIENCE

Forty-four years in the military, though none in civilian posts.

ATTORNEY GENERAL

JEFF SESSIONS

WHY TRUMP LIKES HIM

He doesn’t anymore, but originally it was loyalty. Sessions was the first senator to endorse Trump’s candidacy. Sessions’s top aides also worked in the Trump transition and policy adviser Stephen Miller eventually went on to serve as senior adviser to the president. Sessions has made his name opposing comprehensive immigration reform and citizenship for undocumented immigrants, and Trump adopted similar positions that helped vault him to the top of the GOP primary field.

BACKGROUND

Sessions represented Alabama in the Senate for 20 years, building up a record as a staunch critic of illegal immigration and expanded legal immigration. He’s been a conservative all around, opposing the Obama administration at nearly every turn. Before his election to the Senate, Sessions served as a federal prosecutor and then Alabama attorney general. He might have had a lifetime appointment to the federal bench had the Senate not rejected his nomination in 1987 over allegations that he made racist comments and praised the KKK while criticizing the NAACP and the ACLU.

EXPERIENCE

Extensive. He served in the U.S. Senate since 1997 and held public office in Alabama beginning in 1981.

SECRETARY OF THE INTERIOR

RYAN ZINKE

WHY TRUMP LIKES HER

Trump has shown that he favors plucking people from the private sector who will come in and shake up a government agency, and DeVos fits that bill. She has strong support among Republican school reformers, especially those who favor both expanding charter schools and vouchers. (Democrats favor the former but not the latter.) She is further to the right on education than two other women Trump interviewed: Eva Moskowitz, a charter school leader in New York, and Michelle Rhee, the former chancellor of the Washington D.C. public schools.

BACKGROUND

Zinke was a Republican member of the House who had just been reelected to his second term. He had been expected to run for the Senate in 2018, but at least for now, he’s heading the Interior Department. Zinke served for more than 20 years in the Navy SEALs before entering politics, earning numerous medals. In Congress, he has opposed the sale of federal lands but supported mining and drilling on them.

EXPERIENCE

None.

SECRETARY OF AGRICULTURE

SONNY PERDUE

WHY TRUMP LIKES HIM

Trump took a while to pick an agriculture secretary and went with a drama-free Southerner whose cousin, David Perdue, is one of the president’s closest allies in the Senate.

BACKGROUND

Perdue is the former governor of Georgia, having served two terms ending in 2011. An immigration hawk, he grew up on a farm and earned a doctorate in veterinary medicine.

EXPERIENCE

Two terms as governor of Georgia.

SECRETARY OF COMMERCE

WILBUR ROSS

WHY TRUMP LIKES HIM

The two businessmen go back many years together and share a critical view of U.S. trade policy in the last two decades. Ross, who specialized in turning around manufacturing firms, served as an adviser to Trump during the campaign. Ross, the president-elect said in nominating him, “is a champion of American manufacturing and knows how to help companies succeed. Most importantly, he is one of the greatest negotiators I have ever met, and that comes from me, the author of The Art of the Deal.”

BACKGROUND

Another billionaire, Ross is the chairman of a private equity firm that he founded and later sold. For 25 years, he led Rothschild Inc., where he made a reputation as a turnaround specialist who bought up and restructured steel, textile, and mining companies, among other industries.

EXPERIENCE

None.

SECRETARY OF LABOR

ALEX ACOSTA

~~ANDREW PUZDER~~

Puzder withdrew his nomination before conformation.

WHY TRUMP LIKES HIM

Acosta had a sterling academic and legal pedigree, having graduated from Harvard and clerked for future Justice Samuel Alito when he served on a federal appellate court. Trump reportedly also wanted a Hispanic in his Cabinet, and while that may have not been an overriding factor, Acosta’s nomination did check that box. Finally, as Trump noted, Acosta had already won Senate confirmation three times, and after the failure of his first labor nominee, Andrew Puzder, the president needed someone who could get the job.

BACKGROUND

Acosta is a veteran of the George W. Bush administration, having served as head of the Justice Department’s civil-rights division and later as a U.S. attorney in Florida. He also served for a year as a member of the National Labor Relations Board, and for the last eight years as dean of Florida International University’s law school.

EXPERIENCE

Extensive. Acosta served in the federal government for nearly the entire George W. Bush administration in a variety of roles.

SECRETARY OF HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES

ALEX AZAR

~~TOM PRICE~~

Price resigned under pressure in late September after spending more than \$400,000 in taxpayer-funded travel bills for taking chartered flights all over the country. The scandal angered Trump, who was already unhappy with Price over Congress's failure to repeal the Affordable Care Act.



WHY TRUMP LIKES HIM

Trump has tended to go with safe picks after resignations or withdrawals, and Azar fit that bill. He was experienced in health policy and though he faced opposition from most Democrats, he survived the confirmation process without much trouble and won approval on a 55-43 vote.



BACKGROUND

Azar was a safe and entirely conventional choice as Price's replacement. He served in senior positions at HHS under President George W. Bush before becoming a top executive at Eli Lilly, the pharmaceutical company.

EXPERIENCE

More than six years at HHS during the Bush administration, first as its general counsel and then as deputy secretary.

SECRETARY OF HOUSING AND URBAN DEVELOPMENT

BEN CARSON

WHY TRUMP LIKES HIM

Again, loyalty. Carson endorsed Trump after he dropped out of the presidential race, and though he wasn’t his most effective surrogate, he stayed with him through the ups and downs of the general election. Trump lambasted him during the primary, mocking his childhood struggle with what Trump described as “a pathological temper.” The two have long since patched things up, however. Carson was pegged for a Cabinet post early on, but it figured to be the Department of Health and Human Services, given his deep experience in medicine. Trump and Carson do appear to share an up-by-the-bootstraps philosophy toward combating poverty, where government programs play a smaller role than they do now.

BACKGROUND

The conservative former Trump rival for the Republican presidential nomination has no formal experience in housing policy. He’s a retired neurosurgeon renowned for pioneering a procedure to separate conjoined twins. But what Carson brings to HUD is the personal experience of having grown up poor in Detroit. He has written and spoken extensively about his upbringing, saying that his hard work and passion for reading, along with the firm encouragement of his single mother, helped him to escape the poverty of the inner city.

EXPERIENCE

None.

SECRETARY OF TRANSPORTATION

ELAINE CHAO

WHY TRUMP LIKES HER

While Trump surely appreciated Chao’s deep experience in government and Washington, there was probably another factor in his decision to nominate her for transportation secretary: Chao is married to Mitch McConnell, the Senate majority leader and a man who holds wide sway over whether Trump’s agenda makes it into law. In particular, she’s been a key player in Trump’s push for an expensive infrastructure package.

BACKGROUND

As labor secretary for the full two terms of the George W. Bush administration, Chao brings more civilian experience in the federal government than anyone else in Trump’s Cabinet. Before that, she directed the Peace Corps and led United Way. During the first Bush administration, Chao also served as a deputy secretary in the department she is poised to lead.

EXPERIENCE

Extensive: see above.

SECRETARY OF ENERGY

RICK PERRY

WHY TRUMP LIKES HIM

Perry is another example of a Republican who fought bitterly with Trump only to make amends. Early in the 2016 race, Perry was actually more confrontational with Trump than any other Republican. He gave an entire speech devoted to attacking him in July 2015, during which he said Trump was “a cancer on conservatism.” But Perry was out of the race a few months later, and he came around to Trump once he secured the nomination and campaigned for his election..

BACKGROUND

Perry served three-and-a-half terms as the governor of Texas, succeeding George W. Bush after he became president. He then ran for president twice, failing to win the Republican nomination in 2012 and then again in 2016. His experience in energy-rich Texas would, on the surface, seem to make him a natural fit, but the Energy Department is actually more of a national security agency that’s responsible for designing and protecting the nation’s stockpile of nuclear weapons. The last two energy secretaries were award-winning scientists.

EXPERIENCE

Three-and-a-half terms as governor of Texas, a short stint as lieutenant governor, and eight years as Texas agriculture

SECRETARY OF EDUCATION

BETSY DEVOS

WHY TRUMP LIKES HER

Trump has shown that he favors plucking people from the private sector who will come in and shake up a government agency, and DeVos fits that bill. She has strong support among Republican school reformers, especially those who favor both expanding charter schools and vouchers. (Democrats favor the former but not the latter.) She is further to the right on education than two other women Trump interviewed: Eva Moskowitz, a charter school leader in New York, and Michelle Rhee, the former chancellor of the Washington D.C. public schools.

BACKGROUND

DeVos is a longtime philanthropist and Republican donor and the former chairwoman of the state party in Michigan. She’s been a major advocate for education reform centered on expanding charter schools and private-school vouchers. She led the advocacy group, American Federation for Children, that pushes for increased school choice for parents. The New York Times reported on her successful effort to kill legislation in Detroit that would have imposed tougher accountability standards on charter schools.

EXPERIENCE

None.

SECRETARY OF VETERAN'S AFFAIRS

RONNY JACKSON

~~DAVID SHULKIN~~

Rumors of Shulkin's departure had been brewing for weeks. Shulkin, the only Obama administration holdover in Trump's Cabinet, appeared to be off to a strong start, as he received praise from the president. But over time, he drew criticism from conservatives pushing for the privatization of veterans' health care. His relationship with his own staff also began to crumble, eventually leading to an armed guard being posted outside his office.

WHY TRUMP LIKES HER

In a statement, the president said Jackson “has seen firsthand the tremendous sacrifice our veterans make and has a deep appreciation for the debt our great country owes them.” But the truth might be that Trump appreciated Jackson’s performance on television in January, when he pronounced the president to be in “excellent” health and described the results of his physical examination in detail.

BACKGROUND

Jackson, a rear admiral, currently serves as the physician to the president. He was appointed to the position by former President Barack Obama in 2013.

EXPERIENCE

Jackson began his career with the Navy in 1995. Former President George W. Bush appointed him to be a physician for the White House in 2006 and he was later appointed by Obama to be his presidential physician, a role he continued to fill under Trump.

SECRETARY OF HOMELAND SECURITY

KIRSTJEN NIELSEN

~~JOHN F. KELLY~~

The DHS job opened up when Trump brought in Kelly to replace Reince Priebus as White House chief of staff.



WHY TRUMP LIKES HER

The more operative phrase might be: Why Kelly likes her. The chief of staff brought her into DHS, then the White House, and was instrumental in her being named his successor at DHS. Since winning Senate confirmation on a 62-37 vote in December, she has helped formulate Trump’s immigration proposals and defended the hard line he has taken in negotiations over extending the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals program.



BACKGROUND

Nielsen served as chief of staff to Homeland Security Secretary John Kelly and then followed him to the White House when Trump named him his own chief of staff. During the Obama administration, Nielsen ran her own cyber-security consulting firm.

EXPERIENCE

She previously held senior staff jobs in the Bush administration.