

Ontario Model United Nations III



President Wilson's Cabinet, Background Guide

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omun.ca

A Letter from the Chair

Delegates,

Welcome to the Cabinet of Woodrow Wilson. My name is Ty Greenberg, and I will be serving as your President (chair) in this committee. Vice-President (vice-chair) Thomas R. Marshall will be represented by Meg Fanjoy. Together, we will lead the United States of America for the next four (and hopefully eight) years, taking on the challenges of an impending World War and social turmoil at home, all while trying to cement our country's position as a global power.

This Background Guide is designed to assist you in understanding the issues we will be discussing at OMUN. It contains (intentionally) brief summaries of key developments at the outset of the Wilson presidency. In order to improve the quality of debate (and your standing within the committee), I would strongly recommend not only reading this guide, but also reading further on Wilson's presidency, the time period as a whole, and the character you will be representing. Most importantly, the chairs would look favourably upon this committee not simply simulating history. Be creative! Forge your own solutions to the problems at hand, and through our debate, we will determine whether or not we believe that the decisions and actions of the 28th President were the right ones.

In terms of the flow of committee, this Cabinet will function as a bridge of a specialized agency and crisis committee. There will be no personal crisis, however, the actions taken by the committee will be expressed primarily through directives. The committee will move through time, starting with the Inauguration in January 1913, through to the conclusion of the Presidency with each passing committee session. Crisis staff will also work with the committee to bring in real-time updates, which the Cabinet will have to act on to preserve American ideals at home and abroad.

Looking forward to seeing you all at OMUN III, and feel free to contact me with any questions!

Ty Greenberg
Chair, Cabinet of Woodrow Wilson Committee
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Woodrow Wilson: Background

Woodrow Wilson was born on December 28, 1856 in Staunton, Virginia. After serving as President of Princeton University from 1902 to 1910, Wilson was elected Governor of New Jersey. Two years later, as the Democratic Party nominee, he would run for and win the Presidency.

Election of 1912

Before 1912, no Democrat had been elected President since Grover Cleveland in 1892, and no Southerner had been elected since Zach Taylor in 1848.

Teddy Roosevelt, President from 1901 to 1909, lost his support for incumbent Republican William Howard Taft after he had backtracked on Roosevelt's policies surrounding tariffs, anti-trust laws, and conservationism during his first term. Roosevelt decided to contest for the Republican nomination, and after losing it to Taft, created the Progressive (Bull Moose) Party. This split of the Republican Party handed the Presidency to Woodrow Wilson, who managed merely 41.8% of the popular vote but was able to carry 40 states. He secured less votes than the Democratic nominees in three of the previous four elections, all of which had been lost to Republicans.

Thus, it is important to take into account that while we hold office for the next four years, we will need an exemplary first term in the eyes of the American electorate to secure a second. Not only did the Republican Party have greater support amongst the electorate, no Democrat has been elected to a second term since Andrew Jackson in 1832.

Issues to be Addressed

Domestic Policy

Heading into his first year in office in 1913, the most important legislative item on the mind of the President was lowering tariffs (taxes on imports from other countries with the end goal of protecting domestic industries), which had been augmented under Taft in 1909. Wilson believed that this would benefit consumers by lowering prices. However, in debate on the issue, this also must be weighed against the cons of reducing tariffs during the time period: the negative effects on producers who would receive less revenue, their workers, and importantly for this body, the decrease in government revenue. In order to make up for the loss of money coming to the government, Wilson proposed an idea never before executed in American politics: the imposition of a federal income tax.

The other major economic issue for this Administration is banking reform. Put simply, there was no strong banking system in place that could handle the growing American economy. In 1912, the National Monetary Commission published a report to Congress, suggesting one national reserve bank with branches that were owned and controlled by banks, however, there was fear that this was an effort designed for Wall Street to gain further control of American credit. Wilson has proposed the creation of a Federal Reserve Board to control money supply and interest rates, with regional reserve banks owned and controlled by member banks. Regardless of opinion, it remains integral for the banking system to be restructured at the dawn of the Wilson presidency.

Latin America

The Administrations of Theodore Roosevelt and William Taft brought about a significant American presence in Latin America. Throughout the last decade, the United States military has intervened to promote her economic and political interests in Cuba, Nicaragua, Venezuela, and of course in Panama, where the construction of a canal connecting the Atlantic and Pacific is nearing its completion. However, President Wilson has declared that under his Administration, “the United States will never again seek one additional foot of territory by conquest”. However, with government and business having \$1.6B invested in Latin America by the time of inauguration, it is integral that this Administration walk the fine line between economic prosperity and the humanitarian morality promised by President Wilson.

Turmoil in Europe

The turn of the 20th century brought an increased sense of nationalism to the world, particularly Europe. By January 1913, the region seems a catalyst away from war between major powers and militaries. As such, should a Great War break out during this Presidency, it will be integral that we, as a Cabinet, weigh our country’s best course of action.

There are many reasons for the United States to remain neutral in a potential war. First, we must approach conflict from the moral high ground. There is a fundamental belief throughout America and this Cabinet that war is for the wicked, democracy is above war, and that intervention would be an affront to humanity and international law. Congress and the press would like to see American neutrality, and peace movements are on the rise across the nation. As a country of European immigrants, we also must take caution when considering involving ourselves overseas. Germans are our largest immigrant population; the Irish (who scorn Great Britain) are the second largest. However, most importantly for this Cabinet, the public as a whole would not support a war effort, and fighting in Europe would almost certainly result in our defeat in 1916.

On the other hand, there would be significant incentive to join the war effort. This war effort can be seen as a great opportunity to spread American values to Europe – those of democracy, capitalism, disarmament and self-determination. The United States could not get to a negotiating table without sacrifice on the battlefield. Our strong economy would also provide incentive, as we could provide loans to other war-waging nations, receiving additional interest in return. However, a losing side would not necessarily be economically fit to pay back such debts, and so we would be smart to support our monetary interests. Lastly, the Declaration of London in 1909 stipulated the rights of neutral nations in conflict. Should either side attack America or her citizens, this Cabinet would be forced morally and politically to reconsider a potential stance of neutrality.

This Cabinet must be prepared, with whatever path it chooses, to address militarily and strategic impacts, economic realities, social changes on the homefront, and the political consequences.

Guiding Questions

How can the Cabinet ensure Wilson's re-election?

How will we respond to war abroad to preserve American interests?

Works Cited (Recommended Reading – Especially Arthur Link)

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