

United States Presidential Cabinet

Welcome

Dear Delegates,

Welcome to BUSUN 2009! My name is Sanjay Bhatt and I'll be your chair for the U.S. Presidential Cabinet this year. I am currently a junior double concentrating in economics and public policy. I'm from southern New Jersey and an avid Philadelphia Eagles fan. In addition to BUSUN, I am an economic policy editor for the Brown Policy Review, a finance director for the newly created Brown Socially Responsible Investment Fund, and the treasurer of a Greek organization here at Brown. I've been involved with BUSUN since my freshman year at Brown, spending my first time as the Director of Indian National Security Council and then as the chair of the WTO last year.

Model UN conferences are amazing opportunities to present and strengthen your knowledge, research, and interest in a particular area of international affairs. Our particular committee will also provide a great opportunity for you to grapple with key domestic and international issues as seen through the eyes of our government.

Although much advance preparation is often necessary for successful debate, the process can become much less daunting if you know where to look. Starting points such as vast databases, encyclopedias, the CIA World Factbook, and even Wikipedia are great to get your feet wet, but to fully understand your Cabinet member's views and the administration's current policies, you'll need to consult various federal documents, press releases on your department's government website, reputable news sources, etc. If you have any questions about your search for information, feel free to contact me.

I hope you all will have a great time at Brown this fall. I love this school and if at any time you have any questions about life here at Brown, about the university itself, or about your preparation for BUSUN, do not be afraid to e-mail me or approach me during the conference.

I'm looking forward to meeting you all this fall. Good luck with your BUSUN preparation!

Sincerely,
Sanjay Bhatt
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Committee History

The United States Presidential Cabinet is a domestic institution dating back to George Washington's administration consisting of the most senior appointed political officials in the President's executive branch. Members of the Cabinet are hand-picked by the President through a rather thorough vetting process before being presented and confirmed by the United States Senate. As a result, Cabinet members are often of the same political party and ideology of the President (in our case, heavily Democratic). The Cabinet's role is to advise and assist the President in his duties and decisions as the head of the executive branch of the U.S. federal government.

The Presidential Cabinet is largely an advisory committee in U.S. policy-making. Although it does not have any direct mode of policy making, its members are largely seen as trustworthy and loyal advisors to the President who often makes his executive decisions after consulting the necessary Cabinet officers. On the flipside, the President can often direct certain members of his Cabinet to carry out specific policies within their jurisdiction. The Cabinet positions and the incumbent officers as follows:

- *Secretary of State*: Hillary Rodham Clinton
- *Secretary of the Treasury*: Timothy Geithner
- *Secretary of Defense*: Robert Gates
- *Attorney General*: Eric Holder
- *Secretary of the Interior*: Ken Salazar
- *Secretary of Agriculture*: Tom Vilsack
- *Secretary of Commerce*: Gary Locke
- *Secretary of Labor*: Hilda Solis
- *Secretary of Health and Human Services*: Kathleen Sebelius
- *Secretary of Housing and Urban Development*: Shaun Donovan
- *Secretary of Transportation*: Ray LaHood
- *Secretary of Energy*: Steven Chu

- *Secretary of Education:* Arne Duncan
- *Secretary of Veterans' Affairs:* Eric Shinseki
- *Secretary of Homeland Security:* Janet Napolitano

Topic 1: “Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell”

Background

As the state-by-state and national gay rights and gay marriage movements gain more notice and opinions on both sides of the argument, the “Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell” policy in the United States military has come under recent scrutiny. President Clinton introduced the policy in 1993, which loosened the prohibition of homosexuals (both men and women) serving in the military. Although originally seen as a sign of progress for gay rights, several issues have arisen as a result. The policy allows gay men and women to serve in the military, however, only if they keep their sexual orientation secret and hidden (i.e. they cannot have a homosexual marriage, engage in homosexual acts or other homosexual conduct).

Current Situation

Proponents of gay rights find many flaws with the current “Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell” policy. For one, it places an additional stress on servicemen and servicewomen in that it requires them to deceive others as a routine part of their work. Some gay rights advocates also believe that Pentagon officials are selective in their enforcement of the policy, citing the number of military personnel discharged for homosexuality halving from 2001 to 2006 as an example of ignoring sexual orientation in times when recruitment becomes more difficult.

Advocates of the current policy include socially conservative politicians and those who maintain the argument that homosexuality in the military can become a distraction and in some cases a detriment to morale. This argument stems from the belief that support for the current policy is relatively strong within the military when compared with the sentiments of the general American public.

During the President’s campaign, Barack Obama promised to reverse the “Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell” policy. However, since taking office, the Obama administration has largely upheld the policy in its current state and sees no rush in repealing the ban on homosexuals serving openly in

the United States Armed Forces.

Beyond questions of various perceptions and opinions on gays openly serving in the military are political issues that must be overcome and/or considered by this Cabinet. For instance, the law was originally passed by Congress and can only be repealed with the support of the majority of Congress. Therefore, this Cabinet will have to consider the current political makeup of Congress and consider the political feasibility of such a move. Other options include having the President tell the Secretary of Defense to take a much lighter approach towards investigating issues of open homosexuality in the military and stirring up public support for a repeal on the ban.

Helpful Resources

- Don’t Ask Don’t Tell Turns 15, Time Magazine
<http://www.time.com/time/nation/article/0,8599,1707545,00.html>
- Dismay Over Obama’s Turnabout on “Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell”
<http://www.time.com/time/nation/article/0,8599,1903545,00.html>

Topic 2: Iraq and Afghanistan: A Long-Term Solution

Background

Shortly after the September 11th attacks in 2001, the U.S. and international allies launched Operation Enduring Freedom in response, marking the beginning of the war in Afghanistan. A few years later, in 2003, based largely on suspected threats of weapons of mass destruction and Iraqi links to terrorist groups in Afghanistan, the U.S. invaded Iraq. To this day, both campaigns continue. However, there has been much debate throughout the course of the 2008 Presidential Campaign continuing through to the present over troop levels needed in both countries and establishing timetables for complete withdrawals from both regions.

Current Situation

Earlier this year, as Obama moved forward with promises to gradually withdraw armed forces from Iraq, beginning with the transfer of power in major cities to local authorities, the President also approved a “surge” of forces in Afghanistan. As both situations stand, Afghanistan appears to be the longer-term war with a less definite end in sight. President Obama approved of a 17,000-troop surge in Afghanistan in February. More recently, the elections in Afghanistan were marred by several allegations of fraud on the side of the U.S.-backed president Hamid Karzai.

In Afghanistan, some conservative estimates of handing over airfields and bases back to the Afghan government see 2020 at the earliest possible withdrawal date. Estimates such as these, coupled with the large number of ongoing base-building and infrastructure projects in the country, lead many to believe that certain American bases are to be permanent, furthering the debate over the long-term plans for the U.S. in the area.

This Cabinet must not only consider long-term military plans for Afghanistan and Iraq, but should also consider the effects of our military presence upon their neighbors. Russia, for example, has been uneasy about the American buildup and potential permanence in the Afghan region. Certain Middle Eastern countries and hostile organizations also see the occupation of Iraq as a reason to continue to attempt to wage war on the United States.

In Iraq, the situation is a little clearer. President Obama announced the withdrawal of most troops in the country by the end of August 2010. However, the President stopped short of declaring a full pullout plan, saying that up to 50,000 troops will stay in Iraq through 2011 in a more advisory or secondary role. This Cabinet must consider the effects of this longer-term presence and must hash out some of the specifics of a longer-term strategy in Iraq. Keeping in mind that President Obama's original campaign promise to pull troops out of Iraq completely within 16 months of his presidency and vision for a quicker exit strategy in Afghanistan, this Cabinet must confront the reality of instability in the two countries and potential public justifications for extending any timetables or military presence should this Cabinet decide it a necessary solution. A final consideration is financial: with the domestic health care debate heating up and issues of the American budget deficit at the forefront; the expensive wars will face more and more public scrutiny for their ongoing necessity. This Cabinet must therefore be very careful in acknowledging both foreign and domestic policy when prescribing suggestions for long-term solutions for the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq.

Helpful Resources

- NATO Base in Afghanistan gets Major Expansion <http://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=92427328>
- Losing Afghanistan? , Economist http://www.economist.com/opinion/displaystory.cfm?story_id=14258750

- Obama Outlines Iraq Pullout Plan <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/americas/7914061.stm>
- Obama says Iraq entering critical phase <http://www.reuters.com/article/topNews/idUSTRE5363FF20090407>

Topic 3: The Cuban Trade Embargo

Background

In 1962, the United States imposed an all-encompassing embargo against Castro's government in Cuba. The embargo was partially in response to the confiscation of U.S. citizens' property and businesses at the hands of Fidel Castro's government. The United States, in response to Cuba's alliance with the Soviet Union during the Cold War, placed trade restrictions on Cuba. After the Cuban Missile Crisis, President Kennedy extended the embargo by establishing travel restrictions between the U.S. and Cuba. The nature of the embargo has gone through several tweaks throughout the years, including President Carter's refusal to renew travel restrictions followed by President Reagan's reinstatement of the trade embargo in 1982. In 1996, Congress passed the Helms-Burton Act, which strengthened and maintains the United States embargo against Cuba today. The embargo's objectives varied at different times throughout its history, including overthrowing Castro, containing Cuban communism, promoting democracy, and retaliation against the seizure of U.S. property.

Current Situation

The international community has often criticized the effects and intentions of the U.S. embargo against Cuba. One of the issues most apparent is that many believe that the embargo hurts the people of Cuba, rather than the government, in that it limits the nation's economic resources, particularly when it comes to problems such as food shortages, lack of proper medicines, and clean water. Although the U.S. has done much to alleviate some of these criticisms recently by allowing and increasing the exportation of food and medicine to Cuba, many are still concerned with the overall adverse effects of the trade sanctions.

Politically, the embargo seemed to have had an opposite effect of its intention on Fidel Castro's rule, allowing him to rally the support of his people against the enemy (United States). He was also able to use the United States as a scapegoat for his country's economic problems.

The United Nations has overwhelmingly voted against the embargo in every year since 1992, stating that it

not only violates the UN's Charter, but that it negatively affects free trade and cooperation in international law. U.S. relations with parts of the Latin American region have also taken a hit as a result, more recently with Venezuela's Hugo Chavez aligning with the Castro government in riling up anti-American sentiment. The United States' strongest allies in the EU must even distance themselves when it comes to the issue of the embargo against Cuba.

President Obama has taken small steps recently towards relaxing some of the restrictions affecting Americans by abandoning restrictions on family travel and remittances to Cuba. President Obama has made no promise of a full repeal of the embargo against Cuba, but if he were to do so, Congressional approval would be required.

Although Fidel Castro has announced his resignation as Cuba's Leader, the United States has affirmed its commitment to the embargo against Cuba. The international community seems to strongly favor the repealing of the embargo, but America's leaders must be convinced to do so for anything to happen. With Fidel Castro's resignation and the potential for a new era for Cuba, strong international opposition to the embargo, now is a very appropriate time for the U.S. Presidential Cabinet to take a harder look at the embargo and attempt to settle the disputed issue once and for all.

Helpful Resources

- Obama to Loosen Restrictions on Policy with Cuba
<http://www.nytimes.com/2009/04/05/world/americas/05cuba.html>
- Economic Embargo Against Cuba, Timeline
<http://www.historyofcuba.com/history/funfacts/embargo.htm>
- The Cuban Embargo
<http://www.freetrade.org/issues/cuba.html>