

### The federal bureaucracy

The federal bureaucracy has three major functions; executing laws, creating rules and adjudication. The constitution states that the president shall 'take care that the laws be faithfully executed'. Congress introduces bills, the president makes these into laws and the federal bureaucracy sees that the laws are executed. Bureaucrats are required to write specific rules that decide how laws should be executed. If dispute arises between executing the laws and creating the rules, it is the function of the federal bureaucracy to adjudicate in such disputes.

There are currently 15 executive departments, each headed by a member of the Bush Cabinet. Originally there were three departments; State, War and the Treasury. However, that number has increased at the same rate as the expansion in the role of the federal government. There are now 15; State, Defense, The Treasury, Interior, Justice, Agriculture, Commerce, Labour, Health and Human services, Housing and Urban development, Transportation, Energy, Education, Veterans Affairs and Homeland Security. There is a great range of size and budget within the list of departments. They are also ranked in terms of most important, with State, Treasury, Defense and Justice being ranked in the first tier (the most important) whilst the other departments are second tier (less important).

The State department is responsible for foreign policy and represents the United States abroad. The Treasury department deals with tax policy and collection, and currency manufacturing, whilst the Defense department, which resides in the Pentagon, conducts the Armed forces and is involved in conflicts with other countries. The Justice department offers legal advice to the president and represents the executive branch of the federal government.

As well as the executive departments, the federal government is also made up of Executive agencies, Independent regulatory commissions and Government corporations. Executive agencies are very similar to executive departments, except their directors are not members of Bush's cabinet (although the president appoints them). In the past executive agencies have been promoted to executive departments, such as Housing. An example of an executive agency is *The Environment Protection Agency* (EPA), which regulates air and water pollution controls, regulates drinking water and organises the safe disposal of hazardous materials. The independent regulatory commissions are administratively independent of all three branches of the federal government. They are not under presidential control, but are pressured from other bodies such as Congress and Industries that they regulate. An example of an IRC in the Consumer Product Safety Commission (CPSC) which sets safety standards for products and has the ability to ban any which do not meet the required standard. Government corporations were established in the 1930's to principally perform commercial functions. For example, The United States Postal Services.

Congress mainly checks the federal bureaucracy, since Congress can establish, merge or abolish departments and agencies. Congress can also check the power of federal bureaucracy by legislation and with its powers of oversight and investigation. A related dilemma faced by bureaucracy is the conflict between authority and accountability. If efficiency were the only objective of administration, bureaucracies would be given extensive power and discretion. However, in a political system in which the powers of government are derived from the people, the government must be accountable to the people for how it exercises those powers. On the one effectiveness demands that bureaucracies and bureaucrats be armed with the tools, authority and flexibility they need to accomplish the tasks they are assigned. However, popular governance demands that bureaucracies and bureaucrats be held accountable for their actions. These objectives are not always compatible. Time spent responding to congressional inquiries and investigations or holding public hearings satisfy the demands of accountability, but they directly diminish the capacity of bureaucracies to accomplish their allotted responsibilities.