

Trump Completes Cabinet: 10 Key Highlights

The fast-moving process has ended. Look for shake-ups on energy, health, and more, along with battles in the Senate absent recess appointments.

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Republican Vice President nominee Sen. JD Vance (L) and former President Donald J. Trump (R) arrive at a rally at the Van Andel Arena in Grand Rapids, Mich., on July 20, 2024. Madalina Vasiliu/The Epoch Times



By Nathan Worcester

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President-elect Donald J. Trump has chosen the men and women who will likely play leading parts in his administration.

Transition Chief of Staff Susie Wiles announced the Cabinet was complete on Nov. 26.

Trump's Cabinet picks are generally expected to require confirmation from the Senate, though talk of recess appointments has not abated.



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The faces of Trump 2.0 are young, with heavy representation from the business world. They also show less influence of the pre-Trump GOP establishment than his first Cabinet.



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Here's what you need to know.

The Trump-Vance transition has moved fast, picking all or virtually all Cabinet-level positions within roughly three weeks of Election Day.

It stands in contrast to the transition process after Trump's first victory in 2016. It took months for that first Cabinet to be assembled.

Secretary of State Rex Tillerson, for example, was only announced on Dec. 13, 2016, and multiple positions were not named until the new year.

Secretary of Veterans Affairs David Shulkin was not announced until Jan. 11, 2017, while Secretary of Agriculture Sonny Perdue was publicly tapped a few days later. Trump's choices for director of national intelligence, Daniel Coats, and U.S. trade representative, Robert Lighthizer, also came in 2017.

Past presidents also took longer to name Cabinet members than Trump this time around.

Barack Obama was still picking Cabinet officials in late December 2008. The same was true of George W. Bush in 2000.

The incoming Trump administration will be confronted with world challenges, from the Middle East to Ukraine to the Pacific.



Sen. Marco Rubio (R-Fla.) speaks to reporters at the media filing center and spin room at the Pennsylvania Convention Center on Sept. 10, 2024. Madalina Vasiliu/The Epoch Times

The outgoing Biden administration gave Ukraine the go-ahead to launch long-range, American-made missiles into Russia. Russia, meanwhile, has fired a new hypersonic missile into Ukraine.

The Israel-Hamas conflict has escalated tensions between Israel and Turkey, the latter a key member of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO).

The NATO's military committee chair, Dutch Admiral Rob Bauer, told businesses on Nov. 25 that they must prepare for a wartime scenario, stressing the West's reliance on Chinese goods.

Many of Trump's national security picks have consistently voiced concern about the threat from China.

Sen. Marco Rubio (R-Fla.), nominee for secretary of state, John Ratcliffe, Trump's pick to run the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA), and Rep. Michael Waltz (R-Fla.), the national security adviser nominee, are known as China hawks.

"China is building an army specifically dedicated to defeating the United States of America," Pete Hegseth, Trump's choice for defense secretary, [said](#) on the "Shawn Ryan Show."

Bessent, Lutnick Key to Trade, Tax Plans

The Treasury and Commerce departments will be central to advancing Trump's economic agenda.

On the campaign trail, he pledged to make the cuts in his 2017 Tax Cuts and Jobs Act permanent and to lower the corporate tax rate to 15 from 21 percent.

The president-elect believes a 10 to 20-percent universal tariff and targeted tariffs against China will shore up America's finances amidst those moves on taxation.

Trump's Commerce Secretary pick, billionaire Howard Lutnick, will directly oversee the U.S. trade representative.

"Do we make a lot of money on tariffs, or do we bring productivity here, and we drive up our workers here? It's a win-win scenario. I like both of them," Lutnick told CNBC in October.



Investor Scott Bessent speaks on the economy in Asheville, N.C., on Aug. 14, 2024. Matt Kelley/AP Photo

Trump's choice for Treasury Secretary, billionaire financier Scott Bessent, will also play a crucial role as Treasury Secretary, the federal government's fiscal watchdog, addressing the nation's mounting debt and deficit.

Bessent has advocated fiscal responsibility, concluding that Washington has a "spending problem" and that the country needs to grow the economy to improve its finances.

"This is the last chance for America to grow its way out of its debt problem. If you can increase growth, you can change the trajectory," he told CNBC in September.

Bondi Replaces Gaetz as AG Nominee

One of Trump's most high-profile picks has already withdrawn.

Former Rep. Matt Gaetz (R-Fla.), who resigned from his congressional seat after Trump nominated him as attorney general, dropped out of contention against the backdrop of a House Ethics Committee report on allegations of sexual misconduct and other inappropriate actions.

Committee chair Rep. Michael Guest (R-Miss.) [has declined](#) to issue the report, describing it as an “unfinished work product.”

An earlier sex trafficking investigation into Gaetz by the Department of Justice led to no charges. Gaetz has denied the accusations.

His wife Ginger, sister of Anduril founder Palmer Luckey, has [signaled her support](#) for her husband on social media.

Gaetz, known for highlighting stock trading among lawmakers, has [indicated a willingness](#) to take secretary of state pick Rubio’s senate seat, run for governor of Florida, or serve as a special counsel—a position that doesn’t require Senate confirmation.

Trump swiftly moved to replace Gaetz, selecting Florida Attorney General Pam Bondi as his nominee.



Health Nominations Signal Shake-Up Ahead

Robert F. [Kennedy](#), Jr., Trump's choice to lead the Department of Health and Human Services, is one of multiple Big Pharma critics elevated by an administration now tied to the "Make America Healthy Again" slogan.

Dr. Marty Makary, known for his opposition to COVID-19 vaccine mandates, has been [selected](#) to lead the Food and Drug Administration.

Vaccine safety advocate Dr. Dave Weldon, who has more of a socially conservative record on abortion than Kennedy, is Trump's pick to lead the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC).

It could be a sea change from the Biden administration.

At a Council on Foreign Relations talk on Nov. 25, Dr. Mandy Cohen, the current leader of the CDC, defended the lack of a 9/11 Commission-style inquiry into the COVID-19 response.

"I do think that we have done a lot of work to hear feedback," she said.



Presidential candidate Robert F. Kennedy Jr. speaks at the Nixon Library in Yorba Linda, Calif., on June 12, 2024. John Fredricks/The Epoch Times

Energy Picks Mark a Rethink

Trump's energy-related choices don't look like business as usual.

In addition to naming North Dakota Gov. Doug Burgum interior secretary, he has placed the politician and businessman at the helm of a new National Energy Council.

“This council will oversee the path to U.S. energy dominance by cutting red tape, enhancing private sector investments across all sectors of the economy, and by focusing on innovation over longstanding, but totally unnecessary, regulation,” Trump wrote in a statement on the choice.

Energy secretary pick Chris Wright, a fracking entrepreneur, will also be part of the council.

Concerns about energy aren't siloed in a few departments. Bessent's "3-3-3" rule for the economy includes a goal of adding 3 million barrels of oil per day to domestic energy production.

Energy will no doubt factor into foreign policy too, as part of the administration's goal of reducing reliance on China, Russia, the Gulf states, and other actors that use control over resources as leverage against the United States.

America First Policy Institute Quietly Dominates

Trump sought to distance himself from the Heritage Foundation's Project 2025 policy blueprint on the campaign trail. Yet, at least some of his picks have ties to the document.

Russ Vought, Trump's choice to run the Office of Management and Budget, authored [the chapter](#) on the Executive Office of the President (EOP).

Project 2025's advisers included Ratcliffe and Tom Homan, Trump's non-Cabinet border czar.

Yet, it was the America First Policy Institute, which steered clear of Project 2025, that supplied an outsized percentage of Cabinet nominees.

Its president and CEO, Brooke Rollins, was Trump's choice to lead the Department of Agriculture.

Rollins, McMahon, Bondi, and Ratcliffe are just four of the Cabinet picks listed among the institute's [staff](#).

There's also Lee Zeldin, Trump's choice to head up the Environmental Protection Agency, and Scott Turner, who will lead the Department of Housing and Urban Development.



Brooke Rollins, president and CEO of the America First Policy Institute speaks during a rally for Donald Trump at Madison Square Garden, in New York City, on Oct. 27, 2024. Andrew Kelly/Reuters

Confirmation Battles Likely Loom in Senate

Gaetz's departure hasn't quelled concerns from senators over some names.

Hegseth, now facing scrutiny over a 2017 sexual assault allegation [that he denies](#), could meet with difficulties.

So could Kennedy, whose past comments on vaccines and abortion may rankle some key GOP senators.

On the other hand, Sen. Jared Polis (D-Colo.) has thrown his support behind the nomination.

Former Democratic congresswoman Tulsi Gabbard, too, could face challenges from some Republican lawmakers over her past statements on Russia and meeting with Syrian leader Bashar al-Assad.



Former U.S. Representative from Hawaii Tulsi Gabbard speaks as former U.S. President Donald Trump listens at a rally at the Greensboro Coliseum on Oct. 22, 2024, in Greensboro, North Carolina. Anna Moneymaker/Getty Images

Recess appointments have been floated as a possible maneuver to circumvent the Senate, now led by Sen. John Thune (R-S.D.).

Opponents cite [the Constitution's](#) “advice-and-consent” provision in Article II, Sec. II, which requires Senate involvement in federal appointments.

At Vought’s think-tank, the Center for Renewing America, former Trump assistant attorney general Jeff Clark has pointed out that the recess appointments clause in Article II, Sec. II empowers the president to act “singly,” in the words of [Federalist 67](#), in staffing executive branch roles.

Clark also drew attention to the Federal Vacancies Reform Act, which enables the extension of recess appointments.

“The question is whether the law and our history confirm the president’s belief that he should be allowed to assemble his Cabinet

quickly via recess appointments? The answer is ‘yes,’” Clark wrote.

‘Make America Florida’

Trump’s administration likely won’t be short of politicians from Florida, the state he now counts as his home.

The names emanating out of Palm Beach’s Mar-a-Lago include many Floridians.

There’s Rubio, who as secretary of state would be fourth in the line of succession to the presidency. Wiles, Waltz, and Bondi, who replaced “Florida Man” Gaetz, also fall into that category.



Rep. Mike Waltz (R-Fla.) speaks at a Trump campaign press conference at the Trump Hotel in Chicago on Aug. 21, 2024. Travis Gillmore/The Epoch Times

But New York is also well represented among the longtime Manhattan real estate mogul’s nominees.

The Empire State supplied Rep. Elise Stefanik (R-N.Y.), his pick as ambassador to the United Nations, and Zeldin.

Homan, who began his career as a police officer in New York State, is one of more than a few high-level non-Cabinet picks with New York ties.

Alumni and Loyalists Rewarded

While the administration has many new names, Trump has chosen more than a few men and women who served in his first administration.

McMahon, his education secretary pick and co-chair of the transition team, led the Small Business Administration during Trump's first term.

Vought's [return to the OMB](#) establishes continuity in the office, which is critical to Trump's ambition to assert greater executive authority over the administrative state.

Cabinet positions for former Democrats Gabbard and Kennedy are in line with the changing composition and policy preferences of the Trump-era GOP electorate.

Loyalists like South Dakota Gov. Kristi Noem and Stefanik, both once discussed as possible Trump running mates, were also rewarded.



South Dakota Gov. Kristi Noem (L) and Republican presidential candidate, former President Donald J. Trump (C) during a town hall at the Greater Philadelphia Expo Center & Fairgrounds in Oaks, Pa., on Oct. 14, 2024. Madalina Vasiliu/The Epoch Times

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Author's Selected Articles

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Nov 26, 2024



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Nov 25, 2024



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