

What does the executive branch do?

The Prime Minister and the Cabinet

executive branch: the part of government responsible for putting laws into action

- The **executive branch** includes the prime minister (PM) and the cabinet.
- The prime minister is the head of Canada's government. To become prime minister, you must be elected as the leader of a political party. Then, you must be elected as a member of parliament, and the party you lead must win the most seats in the House of Commons. You can read more about the House of Commons on page 27.
- The cabinet includes the people with responsibility for different government departments and agencies — or portfolios — such as health, finance and environment. The members of cabinet belong to the leading political party in the House of Commons, and are members of parliament (MPs) or senators.
- The members of cabinet are called cabinet ministers.
- The PM decides what portfolios to include in the cabinet and chooses cabinet ministers.
- The cabinet proposes most of the ideas that become laws.
- The PM and the cabinet run the day-to-day business of government. For example, the Minister of Environment runs the department of the environment, which has staff and equipment to, among other things, keep track of air pollution.



This is Jack Davis, Canada's first Minister of Environment. Prime Minister Pierre Trudeau created the environment portfolio in 1971, when problems from pollution and pesticides began to make environmental issues a priority for Canadians. It has been included in every cabinet since. Why might a prime minister create new cabinet positions?



CRITICAL THINKING CHALLENGE What factors do you think the prime minister takes into account when appointing the members of cabinet?

WHAT'S A POLITICAL PARTY?

A political party is a group of people who have similar ideas about how government should respond to issues facing society. Political parties are formally recognized as organizations. They put forward candidates in elections and seek to form the government. Each party develops policies, based on the shared values of its members, to respond to issues. Anyone, including Grade 9 students, can join a political party and have a voice. Canada has a variety of political parties because Canadians have different views and perspectives about what's best for them and for Canada.

What portfolios do cabinet ministers have?

This is the cabinet Prime Minister Stephen Harper appointed in January 2007.

Agriculture Gerry Ritz, Saskatchewan	Canadian Heritage Josée Verner, Québec	Citizenship and Immigration Diane Finley, Ontario
Defence Peter MacKay, Nova Scotia	Democratic Reform Peter Van Loan, Ontario	Environment John Baird, Ontario
Finance Jim Flaherty, Ontario	Fisheries and Oceans Loyola Hearn, Newfoundland and Labrador	Foreign Affairs Maxime Bernier, Québec
Health Tony Clement, Ontario	Human Resources and Social Development Monte Solberg, Alberta	Indian and Northern Affairs Chuck Strahl, B.C.
Industry Jim Prentice, Alberta	Intergovernmental Affairs Rona Ambrose, Alberta	International Cooperation Bev Oda, Ontario
International Trade David Emerson, B.C.	Justice Rob Nicholson, Ontario	Labour Jean-Pierre Blackburn, Québec
Natural Resources Gary Lunn, B.C.	Public Safety Stockwell Day, B.C.	Public Works Senator Michael Fortier, Québec
Revenue Gordon O'Connor, Ontario	Seniors Senator Marjory LeBreton, Ontario	Transport Lawrence Cannon, Québec
Treasury Vic Toews, Manitoba	Veterans Affairs Greg Thompson, New Brunswick	



CRITICAL THINKING CHALLENGE As prime minister, how could you use cabinet positions to respond to issues about government that concern Canadians?

connect to the big ideas

1. Go online and research the cabinet today. How is the cabinet today different than the one on this page? Compare types and number of portfolios, female/male ratios, perspectives or regions represented. Why do you think prime ministers change the structure and people of cabinet?
2. Research in more depth one current cabinet portfolio. Identify the roles and duties of the cabinet minister, and how the portfolio contributes to quality of life for Canadians.



THE LEGISLATIVE BRANCH

We catch up with our prime-minister-for-a-day, ready to continue her tour...

