

The First Presidency, 1789

After the Constitution was ratified, plans for a working government were set in motion. A group of delegates called the **electoral college** was selected by each state to choose a President and a Vice-President. Now a single individual would control an entire branch of the American government and would serve as a representative of the wishes of the people.

In a unanimous vote (69), the electors chose George Washington President, John Adams became Vice-President with 35 votes. As Washington made his way from Mt. Vernon to New York City, then the nation's capital, he was greeted along the way by cheering mobs of supporters out to honor their new leader. The man who led the American army to victory would now lead the nation. On April 30, 1789, Washington took the oath of office before a crowd numbering in the thousands.

As the first President, Washington was concerned with charting the proper course. He was aware that future Presidents would look to his decisions as **precedents**, or examples to be followed later.

One decision he made which provided quite useful was in the selection of a **Cabinet**, or a group of advisors. Congress aided in this process by creating three executive departments: State, Treasury, and War. Two other advisors were Attorney General and Postmaster General.

Washington's First Cabinet

Name	Position	Home State
Thomas Jefferson	Secretary of State	Virginia
Alexander Hamilton	Secretary of the Treasury	New York
Henry Knox	Secretary of War	Massachusetts
Edmund Randolph	Attorney General	Virginia
Samuel Osgood	Postmaster General	Massachusetts

Washington's Domestic Policy

During Washington's first term, the overriding domestic issue was the economy. The United States was heavily in debt from borrowing money from other nations during the American Revolution. During the Confederation decade of the 1780s, many of the debts had not been repaid. Private citizens had also loaned the government money by buying **bonds**, or papers recognizing a debt that the government promises to pay back with interest at a later date. The states had also borrowed heavily.

As the first Secretary of the Treasury, Alexander Hamilton began work on a plan to pay off the new nation's debts. By doing so, he argued, foreign governments and merchants would begin to respect the new nation. Under Hamilton's plan, the federal government would 1. **assume**, or take over, the states' debts, 2. establish a Bank of the United States to handle the government's money matters, and 3. levy **tariffs**, or taxes on imports.

Much of Hamilton's plan was passed and accepted by Congress. Yet some congressmen disagreed, particularly those from the southern states which had already paid off their debts. Many of the leaders of these states, including Thomas Jefferson and James Madison, opposed Hamilton's plan to absorb the other states' debts. To gain southern support, Hamilton compromised with Jefferson, his fellow Cabinet member, to move the national capital to a more southern location. But to convince Pennsylvania to accept the plan, the capital was moved to Philadelphia where it remained for the next ten years while the new one was being built.

Beginning of Political Parties

As a result of the arguments that developed between Washington's Cabinet members over Hamilton's proposed financial plan, two political parties were formed. Members of political parties are those who hold the same political ideas. The opposing leaders developed as Thomas Jefferson and Alexander Hamilton. Jefferson became head of the Republican Party and Hamilton led the Federalists. Each based its philosophy around an interpretation of the new Constitution. **Republicans** favored a *strict* interpretation of the document, while **Federalists** favored a *loose* interpretation of the Constitution.

For example, Hamilton's financial plan included a national bank which was not called for in the Constitution. Jefferson felt the bank would be in violation of the Constitution and he therefore hesitated to support such a proposal. Hamilton, on the other hand, defended the plan as part of the government's responsibility to do all that could be considered "necessary and proper" to maintain a strong central government.

The basic beliefs of the first political parties are listed below.

Federalists	Republicans
Loose interpretation of the Constitution	Strict interpretation of the Constitution
Favored a strong central government	Supported strong state governments
Developed idea of Bank of the United States	Supported state banks
Believed in government led by a selected group of wealthy and educated people	Believed in power of the people to make wise political decisions
Enjoyed a firm base of support from merchants, mostly in New England and northern states	Enjoyed a firm base of support from farmers, mostly in southern and western states

Election of 1796

With Washington's decision not to run for a third term as President, the field was now open for a political struggle between two well-known figures of the day: John Adams, the first Vice-President, and Thomas Jefferson, the first Secretary of State. Political parties came upon the scene for the first time with Adams representing the Federalists, and Jefferson, the Republicans.

The race was close, with Adams receiving 71 electoral votes to Jefferson's 68. Under the system used at the time, the candidate with the second largest number became Vice-President.

NAME: _____ PER: _____ DATE: _____

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Do you feel Washington's concern about setting precedents was justified? Why?

How does Washington's selection of his Cabinet demonstrate his feeling that Americans of different geographic backgrounds should feel themselves a part of the government?

Why do you think the selection of Cabinet members was important to the President?

Washington's Domestic Policy

Why was the United States so heavily in debt and to whom was the debt owed?

Why did Hamilton want the debts paid?

Describe the compromises agreed upon for the acceptance of Hamilton's economic plan.

Beginning of Political Parties

What role did the Constitution have in forming political parties?

Washington opposed political parties because he felt they divided the nation. Do you agree with him? Why or why not?

Election of 1796

Show the electoral results in a bar graph.

Why do you think the race for the election was so close?