

Inside the White House – The Cabinet

December 11, 2009. (5 min. 48 sec.)

00:00

(music playing)

00:10

(The President)

I mean, it was fascinating.

The Great Wall was very cool.

(Chris Lu - Cabinet Secretary)

I was gonna say.

00:17

(The President)

One of the things I'm most proud of is the Cabinet we've assembled.

I mean, you've got extraordinarily talented people in each of these fields.

A lot of them are doing such a good job that they don't meet with me much because they're like the good students in class.

They are just handling the business really well.

00:34

(music playing)

(November 23, 2009)

Well hello, everybody.

It is good to see you guys.

00:39

(Chris Lu)

We try to do a Cabinet meeting every two months.

The meetings run about an hour and a half.

What we'll do is talk to a lot of different folks within the White House -- the Policy folks, the Chief of Staff's Office, the Communications Office, and find out what are the important initiatives that we want to talk to the Cabinet about, and also talk to the

Cabinet as well about the issues that they think are important to discuss with the President.

(Liz Smith – Deputy Cabinet Secretary)

So there is a series of internal meetings to discuss.

We hand write an agenda after that.

Iraq, Afghanistan, the Asia trip, jobs.

01:08

(Dan Pfeiffer – Communications Director)

I think -- I think that there should probably be robust discussion of job creation.

01:13

(Mona Sutphen – Deputy Chief of Staff)

This is a huge, kind of six, seven weeks that's coming up and a lot of the budget and the – obviously, the war decision, and a bunch of other things start coming down the pike, so...

01:24

(Chris Lu)

Each President has the discretion to decide who's in his Cabinet.

There are the heads of the 15 executive departments who are always in the Cabinet.

These are the people who are in the line of succession after the President and Vice President.

And then there are a number of folks who have Cabinet rank.

In our administration, that would be the head of OMB, EPA, the Chairman of the Council of Economic Advisors, the U.S. Trade Representative, and the Ambassador to the United Nations.

01:51

(Liz Smith)

We hadn't had coffee service in the past.

Maybe because it's an afternoon meeting, they want to give them a little caffeine; I'm not sure.

01:56

(music playing)

02:20

(Chris Lu)

I've worked for the President since he was in the U.S. Senate, so I'm very used to sitting behind him at meetings.

But to now sit in a Cabinet meeting in the historic Cabinet Room – you're just surrounded by history of this institution; it's humbling.

02:34

(music playing)

02:48

(Bill Allman – White House Curator)

The Cabinet Offices were created as soon as the Constitution was ratified and the government was established in 1789 under the new Constitution.

02:57

(Chris Lu)

The first Cabinet meeting, I understand – from 1793 – the president had his four Cabinet members there.

We now have 25 people around the table.

Each of the Cabinet members sit in a certain seat depending on when their department was created.

03:14

(Bill Allman)

It's still tradition that a Cabinet Officer would have the opportunity of taking the chair away himself or herself – to buy the chair from the government.

It's one of those great souvenirs of being a Cabinet Officer.

03:27

(Chris Lu)

The Cabinet meeting is one of the few times that I'm aware of where the Secret Service allows the entire Cabinet to be in one place at one time.

As you know, during State of the Union Addresses, we typically ask one member of the Cabinet to sit out.

These are closed sessions and the President really welcomes frank, unvarnished advice from the advisors.

03:46

(The President)

I want to, number one, make sure that they know that they have my ear.

The second thing is to reinforce the real strong sense of camaraderie that the Cabinet members have built around themselves.

03:57

(Peter Orszag – Director, Office of Management and Budget)

How you doing?

What's going on?

(Ken Salazar – Secretary of the Interior)

Can I hug him?

It means a lot more than sending him an e-mail.

(Peter Orszag)

Yeah.

There still is something to the human interaction that you only get from the in-person meetings.

04:08

(Gary Locke – Secretary of Commerce)

Well, I – I don't think there's any substitute for the entire Cabinet coming together.

These Cabinet meetings are an incredible way for everybody to communicate, for everyone to really understand what the issues are, and to help us all get on the same page so that we can advance the President's priorities.

04:22

(The President)

Today, we're going to be focusing a lot on jobs because, obviously, with the economy as – in such a hole, one of the things that we want to make sure of is, is that we leave no

stone unturned when it comes to helping people get jobs.

04:34

(Chris Lu)

What we've typically done is bring the press in at the end of the meeting.

The Cabinet meeting is an important system of government at work.

(music playing)

4:43

(The President)

The primary focus of our discussion today, though, had to do with the same thing that Americans sit across – kitchen tables all across the country are focused on, and that is jobs and the economy.

04:54

(Hillary Clinton – Secretary of State)

You would think that in a world like the one we're living in where you can communicate with anybody in the world at, literally, a click of a mouse or, you know, some other – picking up a cell phone, that you wouldn't need a lot of face-to-face meetings.

But in fact, I think that it's not only as important as it always was in the era before instantaneous communication, but to some extent even more so.

So that people can look each other in the eye, they can watch the body language and they can work together to get to the resolution of whatever the issue is.

So these Cabinet meetings give everybody a chance to do that.

5:30

(Chris Lu)

This is one of the biggest problems, that people walk out of here without their BlackBerrys.

So now I have to actually go find out who all these BlackBerrys belong to.

So – all right, so Chu has walked out without –

(music playing)