

# A Very Big Branch

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

## We've Got a Job to Do

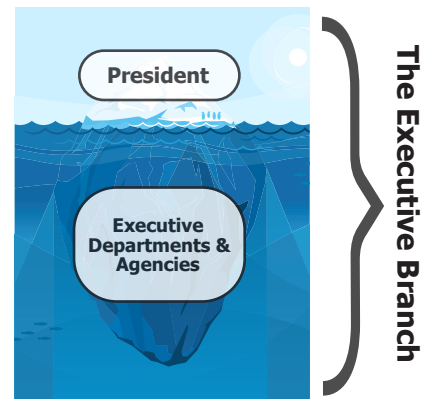
The job of the executive branch is to carry out the laws that the legislative branch passes. When you think of the executive branch, you probably think of the president. But the president is only the head of the executive branch. He is like the tip of the iceberg: underneath, there is a giant organization with lots of people doing many different jobs. In fact, the executive branch is the largest branch of our government!



*Vice President Kamala Harris ceremonially swearing in Attorney General Merrick Garland.*

## Help from Many

Most of the executive branch is made up of departments and independent agencies. **Departments** are the main organizations in the executive branch. There are 15 departments. Each one focuses on a specific type of activity such as education, transportation, defense, or energy. Each department has smaller agencies that do specific jobs. For example, the Department of Justice (DOJ) operates our justice system and works to prevent crime. Two agencies inside the DOJ are the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) and the Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA). The FBI investigates certain kinds of crimes, while the DEA deals with crime related to drugs and controlled substances.



The president appoints a **secretary** to lead each department. (But the head of the Department of Justice is called the Attorney General.) These secretaries do more than just lead a department. They are the president's **cabinet**—a group of people that give advice to help the president make important decisions. Officials who hold these cabinet-level positions such as the Secretary of Defense, the Secretary of Education, or the Secretary of Homeland Security are very important players in the executive branch.

### Government Corporations

Some parts of the executive branch are businesses that the government owns, such as AMTRAK, which operates passenger trains, and the Federal Deposit Insurance Corporation (FDIC), which insures bank deposits in case a bank fails.

**Independent agencies** are government organizations that also focus on specific issues, but they are different from departments because they aren't directly controlled by the president or executive branch. These agencies are created by Congress in order to address concerns not easily solved through legislation. They are often controlled by a board or commission, and there are usually restrictions on how the president appoints and removes the members.

## Carrying Out Laws: Enforcement

What does it mean to "carry out" a law? That depends on the kind of law that needs to be carried out. Some laws make things illegal and describe consequences for those who do those things. Executive agencies **enforce** the law when someone isn't following it. There are several things an agency can do to enforce a law:

- Educate the public about new laws
- Monitor the public to make sure laws are being followed
- Catch individuals or organizations not following the law
- Take the offenders to court
- Follow any other enforcement procedures the agency may have



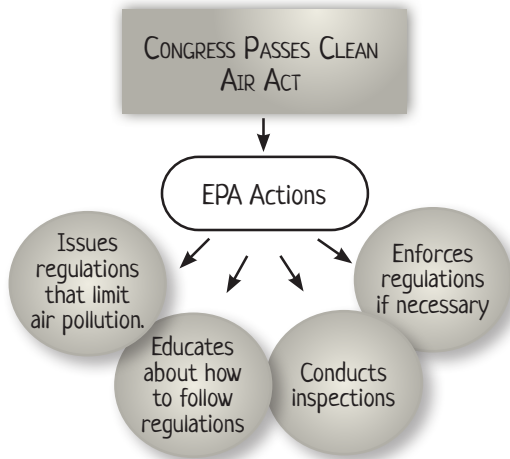
*The U.S. Marshals Service is the oldest federal law enforcement agency. Marshals provide court security, hunt fugitives, and offer witness protection.*

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## Carrying Out Laws: Regulations

Other laws are just instructions about something that must be done, such as installing new security procedures at the nation's airports. A law like this will not include every last detail about how it should be carried out. Instead, the law will authorize the executive branch to decide these details. The rules the executive branch makes about how the law will be carried out are called **regulations**. Regulations have power similar to laws. Some regulations make activity illegal, and others give instructions for how something must be done.



## Agencies Enforce and Regulate

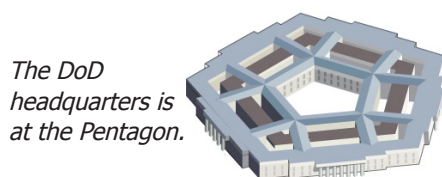
Most departments and agencies both enforce laws and make regulations. For example, the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) is an independent agency whose goal is to protect the environment and human health. It carries out laws passed by Congress, such as the Clean Air Act that is designed to limit air pollution. The Clean Air Act authorizes the EPA to set limits on how much pollution can be put into the air. To do this, the EPA issues regulations that say exactly how much pollution vehicles, factories, and other sources can put into the air. The EPA then works to enforce these regulations. Violating them can result in penalties.

## Maintaining Order and Safety

We depend on many parts of the executive branch to keep us safe and to keep order. For example, the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) is responsible for protecting the United States against all kinds of threats. It includes agencies that deal with terrorism, natural disasters, and border protection. It also includes the Secret Service, whose agents protect the president and vice president and their families. Inside the DHS, the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) responds to natural disasters to help people get the help they need in an orderly way. The Coast Guard, also part of DHS, patrols our nation's coastlines to watch for threats and helps boats in distress.



*A Secret Service agent stands guard outside the White House.*



*The DoD headquarters is at the Pentagon.*

The Department of Defense (DoD) is the biggest department. It includes all the military departments such as the Army, Navy, and Air Force, as well as many other agencies. Together, all the parts of the Department of Defense work together to make sure our armed forces are prepared to protect our nation's security.

## Busy, Busy

Remember that most of the day-to-day activity in the executive branch involves ordinary people doing the work that needs to be done: an FBI agent conducts an investigation, a soldier participates in training exercises, or a worker monitors a nuclear reactor at an energy plant. The executive branch needs people to answer phones, program computers, file papers, do scientific research, process mail, fly airplanes, and clean bathrooms. In fact, the federal government is the nation's largest employer, and most of those jobs are in the executive branch.



*A U.S. Postal Service employee works hard to deliver your mail.*