**3.2 The Executive Branch**

**SSCG11: Explain the functions of the departments and agencies of the federal bureaucracy.**

**SSCG11a: Compare and contrast the organization and responsibilities of independent regulatory agencies, government corporations, and executive agencies.**

When the framers of the Constitution developed our government, they gave Congress the authority to create the departments necessary to carry out the day-to-day responsibilities of governing. Congress exercised this power first in 1789 when it created the Department of State to assist the president in conducting foreign policy. But since then, Congress has created hundreds of departments and agencies to address the growing responsibilities of government. This vast network of government agencies constitutes the federal bureaucracy. The federal bureaucracy falls under the jurisdiction of the executive branch; even though Congress has the authority to create these agencies, the Constitution designated the president as the person responsible for implementing and administering its decisions.

A **bureaucracy** is a large, complex administrative structure that handles the everyday business of an organization. The United States’ federal government is the largest organization in the country. When many Americans hear the word ‘bureaucracy’, they automatically think of red tape and delays. A bureaucracy is a method of organizing large organizations. There are both public and private bureaucracies. There are several different parts of our governments’ bureaucracy, and they can be placed into several different categories.

**Independent regulatory agencies** are federal organizations are independent from the three branches of government; they operate independently and are not under the direct control of the president. These agencies are created to regulate certain aspects of the nation’s economy and exercise authority over certain aspects of activity to protect consumers. Examples include: the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), the Federal Trade Commission (FTC), the Consumer Product Safety Commission (CPSC), the Securities and Exchange Commission (SEC), and the Food and Drug Administration (FDA). These agencies act as ‘watchdogs’**.**

**Government corporations** do not belong to any department. Government corporations are created by Congress and are set up to perform business of the federal government; they operate much like a regular corporation operates. They charge fees and compete with private businesses. Examples include: the U.S. Postal Service, Amtrak, and the Tennessee Valley Authority (TVA). Government corporations are run by a board of directors and have a general manager who directs the day-to-day operations, as directed by the board of directors. Congress decides the purpose for each and the functions that the government corporation can perform.

**Executive agencies** are organized much like the Cabinet departments but are not part of the President’s Cabinet. They are given extremely important public tasks to perform, such as NASA. They range in size; some of the smaller executive agencies include: The Civil Rights Commission and The National Transportation and Safety Board.

**SSCG11b: Explain the functions of the President’s cabinet.**

One of the largest elements of the executive branch is the cabinet. The **cabinet** is an informal advisory committee comprised of the heads of the 15 cabinet departments, the Vice President of the United States, the White House Chief of Staff, and few others chosen by the President. The members of the cabinet serve as advisors and experts. The President appoints the heads of the 15 cabinet departments, and the Senate must approve the presidential nominations. There are several factors that influence the President’s choices for department heads: party, loyal supporters of the President, and professional qualifications.

Cabinet members have two main duties:1) function as the administrative head of one of the executive cabinet departments, and 2) together they serve as the primary advisors to the President.

**SSCG12: Describe the tools used to carry out United States foreign policy, including diplomacy and treaties; economic, military, and humanitarian aid; and sanctions and military intervention.**

The Constitution says the president shall have the power “to make treaties,” and “he shall receive ambassadors and other public ministers” from other countries. The Framers gave the president much foreign policy power because the philosophers that inspired the American Revolution also argued that the executive should be assigned the primary role in foreign affairs. To carry out this role, the President utilizes a variety of diplomatic strategies and foreign policy tools. Generally speaking, **Foreign policy** refers to a state’s international goals and its strategies to achieve those goals.

The first of these foreign policy strategies is the use of diplomacy. **Diplomacy** is the act of dealing with other nations, usually through negotiation and discussion. Diplomacy involves meetings between leaders, sending diplomatic messages, and making public statements about the relationship between countries. For example, the American President often hosts leaders and chief diplomats of other nations at the White House to discuss a variety of issues. Most diplomacy occurs behind the scenes.

The United States primarily carries out diplomacy through the Department of State. The U.S. Department of State is headed by the Secretary of State. The Secretary of State is nominated by the President and confirmed by the Senate. The Department of State is one of the oldest cabinet departments; it was formed in 1789. The Secretary of State and his or her staff travel around the world to build alliances with other nations, promote democracy and human rights, and mediate conflicts.

Additionally, the Department of State manages the U.S. embassies located throughout the world. Ambassadors are nominated by the President and confirmed by the Senate.

Another import foreign policy tool that the president can utilize is economic aid. **Economic aid** consists of giving or loaning money to other countries. The Marshall Plan is an example of an economic aid plan designed to assist Western Europe after WWII. It was known as the ERP, or European Recovery Plan. Much of the agricultural production in Western Europe was devastated by years of war, and Europe was on the brink of famine. In addition, Europe’s infrastructure was damaged. From 1948 until 1952, the United States gave $13 billion in direct financial aid to Western Europe to assist in the rebuilding of the economy and infrastructure. The plan was named after the Secretary of State, George Marshall, who developed the plan.

Sometimes our allies need assistance in the form of military supplies or support. **Military aid** includes sending American troops to other countries, providing military training to other countries, or even supplying weapons or equipment. Military aid can be controversial. Its’ stated aim is to help allies or poor, underdeveloped countries fight terrorism, counter-insurgencies, or drug wars. There are three main programs for military funding in the United States: 1) Foreign Military Financing – provides grants that enables U.S. allies to attain U.S. military equipment, services, and training, 2) Peacekeeping Operations – this provides voluntary support for international peacekeeping situations and usually falls within the interests of the United Nations, and 3) The International Military Education and Training Program – offers military training to foreign, usually U.S. allies, military officers.

Military aid has increased dramatically in the past decade due to the ongoing War on Terror with Iraq and Afghanistan. The United States currently provides the majority of military aid to: Iraq, Afghanistan, and Israel.

On the other hand**, Humanitarian aid** is material or logistical assistance provided for humanitarian purposes. Humanitarian aid is typically provided in instances of natural or man-made disasters, such as famine or war. The primary objective of humanitarian aid is to save lives, alleviate suffering, and maintain human dignity. Types of aid include: clean water, food, shelter, and medical care.

The president also has the ability to make deals with other countries on a variety of topics**. Treaties** are formal agreements ratified by countries entering into the agreement. In the United States, a treaty must receive the consent/approval of the Senate for ratification. There are three types of treaties: 1) peace treaties – bring fighting to an end or bargain peace terms, 2) alliance treaties – agreements to help each other for defense, economic, scientific, or other reasons, and 3) commercial treaties – economic agreements to trade on favorable terms.

An example of an economic alliance treaty is NAFTA (North American Free Trade Agreement). NAFTA was a treaty signed between the United States, Mexico, and Canada, to decrease trade barriers, such as tariffs, and trade restrictions.

Another example of an alliance treaty is the European Union (EU). There are currently 28 member states. The EU was formed in 1993 to establish favorable trade agreements, a common currency, and mutual support.

Unfortunately, our relationship with some nations may become strained for a variety of reasons. When this happens, the President has several options to influence the behavior of other countries. A **sanction** is defined as a threatened penalty for disobeying a law. In the United States, the Office of Foreign Assets Control (OFAC), part of the United States Treasury, administers a number of different sanction programs. Sanctions can include the blocking of assets and trade restrictions to accomplish foreign policy and national security goals. One of the most famous examples of economic sanctions is a fifty-year old United States embargo against Cuba.

The ways in which the United States can symbolize that it disagrees with a country’s policy include: financial sanctions – withdraw financial aid, embargoes – stop buying (boycott) goods made by the country, and reduction of imports.

The most severe corrective measure that our president can employ is to send out armed forces into action. **Military intervention** is the deliberate action of a nation or group of nations to introduce its military forces into the course of an existing controversy. One of the most difficult issues in American foreign policy is deciding when the United States should conduct a military intervention. Most citizens would agree that military intervention is necessary when there is a vital threat to the United States or its citizens; the problem arises when there is disagreement about what constitutes a vital threat.

The following is an example of a disagreement on what is considered a vital threat: situations that do not impose an immediate threat to U.S. national security, but could imperil it in the future, such as when a region becomes unstable and the instability may lead to wider conflicts. Humanitarian assistance is another example of where citizens disagree on whether the U.S. should intervene militarily. Opponents would argue that even though the U.S. is viewed as the most powerful democratic nation, we should not get involved in affairs unless our nation is threatened. They would argue that the expense and possible loss of life of our American service men and women should take priority in cases where the U.S. is not directly threatened.