

Chapter 28 -- Washington's First Term In Office



Dates:
1789-1793

Sections:

- The First President Establishes The Executive Branch

Time: 1789-1793

The First President Establishes The Executive Branch



Washington in Masonic Garb (1732-1799)

Washington's inaugural takes place in the capital, New York City, at Federal Hall, which will serve as the initial home of the U.S. Congress. The oath of office is administered on the balcony in front of a cheering crowd, and he then delivers a brief address in the Senate chamber. Like all presidents over the next 75 years, Washington's annual pay is set at \$25,000.

Several critical challenges face the new President as he assumes power:

- On the domestic front, he needs to create from scratch a strong Federal government structure capable of fixing the many shortcomings that have plagued the Confederation years.
- In foreign affairs, his number one priority lies in assuring the nation's security against the potential military threats on each of its borders.
- Above all else, he must insure that the "sovereign states" he governs begin to behave as one unified entity, avoiding divisive factions, moving America toward the destiny he sees for it.

He begins by setting up the infrastructure needed to run a federal government, including the “cabinet system” that places senior officials at the head of various departments. Washington’s cabinet is limited to five men.

Washington’s First Cabinet: 1789

Position	Name	Home State
Vice-President	John Adams	Massachusetts
Secretary of State	Thomas Jefferson	Virginia
Secretary of Treasury	Alexander Hamilton	New York
Secretary of War	Henry Knox	Massachusetts
Attorney General	Edmund Randolph	Virginia

As Secretary of State, Thomas Jefferson’s brief is to play off the European powers against each other, in order to keep America out of further wars. Jefferson has just returned from four years as Ambassador to France, and is a renowned Francophile all his life. He supports the “people’s revolution” already under way there, and is forever suspicious of British intentions.

Alexander Hamilton’s job is to create a vibrant and forward looking economy, get the nation out of debt, and set up a stable banking system that protects the value of the currency, both domestically and in foreign markets.

Henry Knox, famed for transporting the cannon of Ft. Ticonderoga to Dorchester Heights in 1776, is charged with building a capable army, should it be needed.

Finally, Edmund Randolph, author of the “Virginia Plan,” who refused to sign the Constitution in Philadelphia and then worked hard to ratify it in Virginia, is asked to oversee the Federal judicial system, as Attorney General.

But Washington’s focus during this first term is on domestic policy, especially around creating the foundations for economic growth and for running the government.

The burden for setting up the required policies and mechanisms falls on the President’s right hand man, Alexander Hamilton, the first Secretary of the Treasury.

Washington's First Term: Key Events

1789	Milestones
January 10	Voting ends in first general election
March 4	New York chosen as site of capital
April 1	New government goes into effect
April 6	Quorum met in House of Representatives
April 30	Washington and Adams are inaugurated
July 4	First Protective Tariff (5-15%) passed by Congress
July 14	Bastille Day – French Revolution begins
1790	
March 26	Naturalization Law (for citizenship) is passed
May 29	Rhode Island is last to ratify the 1787 Constitution
July 16	The District of Columbia chosen as the permanent capital
August 4	Federal government assumes all debts from war with Britain
September 25	Congress passes 12 Amendments For Ratification
December 6	Capital moves from New York to Philadelphia
December 13	Hamilton calls for a federal Bank of the United States (BUS)
1791	
February 2	North Carolina Ratifies Constitution + Amendments
February 15	Jefferson protests BUS on the basis of the 10 th Amendment
February 25	Washington signs bill to create the BUS
March 3	First Internal Revenue Bill (including tax on spirits) is passed
March 4	Vermont admitted to the Union (#14)
May 29	The Supreme Court meets for the first time
November 4	Miami Indians defeat US force of 1400 in Ohio
1792	
January 12	Thomas Pinckney named first Ambassador to England
March 1	Rhode Island Ratifies Constitution + Amendments
May 8	The Militia Act requires all white males 18-45 to sign up
May 17	The Buttonwood Agreement initiates the NY Stock Exchange
June 1	Kentucky admitted to the Union (#15)
August 21	First protests against the Whiskey Tax, in Pittsburg
October 2	Washington tries to end the Jefferson-Hamilton feud
October 13	Cornerstone laid at site of the future White House
December 5	Second presidential election ends with Washington the winner
1793	
January 21	Louis XVI is guillotined during the Reign of Terror in France
February 1	France declares war on Britain, Spain and the Netherlands
February 12	Congress passes a Fugitive Slave Act mandating return of run-aways
February 18	<i>Chisolm v Georgia</i> decided by the Supreme Court; later overturned

Estimates of economic activity during Washington's first term signal the start of rapid expansion for America.

Key Economic Overview – Washington’s First Term

	1790	1791	1792	1793
Total GDP (\$000)	189	206	225	251
% Change	---	9%	9%	12%
Per Capita GDP	48	51	54	58