



EXAMINING THE PRESIDENTIAL CABINET*

Power and Influence of Local Leadership

Introduction

Local leaders have the experience and knowledge to drive America forward. Mayors, councilmembers and other city and county officials know what community members want and need, and public opinion polls consistently show that local leaders are viewed most positively of all politicians. A presidential cabinet—at its pinnacle—is meant to represent the best of America and the diversity of this great country. Cabinet officials leading departments like Transportation, Housing and Urban Development, Education, and other important agencies draw on knowledge and expertise garnered throughout their careers that equips them with the ability to lead in these critical roles. What better place to gain this type of knowledge than in our local communities?

Local leaders bring a valuable skillset to the national level. By not losing sight of our communities, they can translate local best practices, innovation and ideas into important national policy. Having local leaders at the head of the table can help ensure the interests of the American people are best represented. Furthermore, by having local elected officials

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^{*} About the National League of Cities. The National League of Cities (NLC) is the voice of America's cities, towns and villages, representing more than 200 million people. NLC works to strengthen local leadership, influence federal policy and drive innovative solutions. NLC's Center for City Solutions provides research and analysis on key topics and trends important to cities and creative solutions to improve the quality of life in communities.

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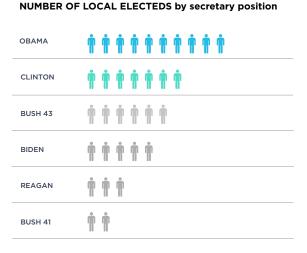
in these roles, the agencies can intentionally keep a closer ear to the ground and engage in direct conversations with local officials to collaborate on addressing the big challenges communities face every day.

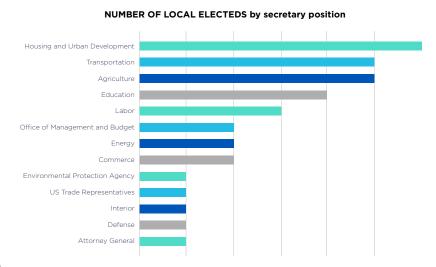
Over the years, there have been numerous local leaders chosen for these high-level roles, serving the public and running agencies with thousands of employees working on behalf of the American people. Mayors, councilmembers and other city and county officials have directly implemented and launched programs and provided funding to better support local government and the places we all call home. These bipartisan local leaders have been champions of far-reaching policies that have helped to create a better country and open opportunity, and most importantly, without forgetting the centrality of cities to the future of our great nation.

Data Overview

In the last 40 years and seven administrations, there have been 34 cabinet level officials who had previous experience as a local official. Presidents such as Barack Obama, George W. Bush and Bill Clinton top the list of having the highest number of local elected officials nominated into their cabinet as secretaries. President Joe Biden has started his first term with more local officials than both of Ronald Reagan's terms combined, as well as more than either George H.W. Bush or Donald J. Trump.

Interesting trends emerge when looking at cabinet position. The position of Secretary of Housing and Urban Development was held by former local officials in four out of the five most recent administrations, highlighting the key role, experience and voice that local officials bring to federal programs and policies related to housing. The position of Secretary of Transportation was also filled by local officials in four out of the five most recent administrations. Housing and transportation services are part of the core set of responsibilities municipalities provide to their constituents. Seeing representation of local experience in federal government is encouraging to continue to bolster local, state and federal collaboration, particularly in policy areas relevant to the every-day life of Americans.





Case Studies



HENRY CISNEROS

Henry Cisneros served as the mayor of San Antonio, Texas from 1981 until 1989, after having served on the city council for six years. As mayor, Cisneros rebuilt the city's downtown and economic base. In 1993, he became President Bill Clinton's first Secretary of Housing and Urban Development (HUD).

When joining HUD, Secretary Cisneros faced severe budget cuts towards the Department, and the threat of losing Cabinet status. In light of these challenges, Cisneros proposed consolidating nearly 60 HUD programs into a few block grants for state and local governments.² Other major HUD restructuring plans were submitted by Secretary Cisneros for Congressional consideration, including

transforming the Federal Housing Administration into a "business-like, Government-owned corporation."3

Central to Cisneros's plans was recognizing the power of local decision-making. Reflecting on his tenure as Secretary two and a half years in, Cisneros noted: "In contrast to its role today, which casts the Department as the grantor, decisionmaker, and senior partner, HUD will become the supporter of local initiatives, catalyst for change, and equal partner in local collaborations."4

A major undertaking of HUD under Secretary Cisneros was the implementation of the HOPE VI program. As HUD demolished tens of thousands of public housing units, HOPE VI made sure to replace nearly 100 percent of the demolished units with public housing, affordable units and market-rate units, incorporating a mixed-income approach to these developments.⁵ The goals of HOPE VI, to promote mixed-income housing and the use of housing subsidies to prevent the concentration of low-income households, were largely realized. Many former residents moved to better housing in less poor neighborhoods. Evidence suggests, unfortunately, that a large share of families faced significant barriers in their efforts to transition out of public housing to market-rate housing, limiting the overall impact of the program.⁶

Early in Secretary Cisneros's tenure, he prioritized helping individuals suffering from homelessness, unveiling a "continuum of care" framework to try and solve homelessness, rather than just continue to address it. To accommodate this new direction and to better serve local governments, HUD sought to better its "place-based" mission. To Secretary Cisneros, place was clear: "It doesn't matter what's said in Washington—it matters if it comes out of a place. Are we building public housing in a place? Are we alleviating poverty in a place?"⁷

As a federal department focused on communities, Secretary Cisneros centered the needs of local governments and communities in their interactions with HUD by consolidating applications, providing new technology to share information with residents and making use of its offices across the country.8 Secretary Cisneros centered local voices, stating, "We put a greater emphasis not on the massive budget, or 14 assistant secretaries, but on the 10 districts across the country. We tasked them with helping us figure out what we needed on the ground."9



JANET RENO

Janet Reno served as Attorney General during both of President Bill Clinton's terms from 1993 to 2001, making her the second-longest-serving Attorney General in U.S. history and the first woman to hold the position. Before joining the Clinton Administration, Secretary Reno served as the State's Attorney for Miami-Dade County from 1978-1993, where she was reelected to the position five times.

During her tenure, Secretary Reno oversaw one of the largest expansions in law enforcement grants to state and local government through the Community Oriented Policing Services (COPS) program. Signed into law under the Violent

Crime Control and Law Enforcement Act by President Clinton in September 1994, the COPS program has provided \$14 billion in assistance to state and local law enforcement agencies to help hire community police officers. During Reno's tenure, the COPS program oversaw \$9 billion in funding to increase the number of officers deployed in America's communities, fostering problem-solving, innovation and increased interaction with communities by police officers. Along with instituting community policing into state and local governments across the country, the COPS grants funded 100,500 officers and equivalents by May 1999.10

By February 8, 1995, Secretary Reno had secured \$434 million in new hiring grants for 6,600 police departments to hire more than 7,000 officers. When the COPS program was signed into law, Secretary Reno made sure that every law enforcement agency, city and county government serving populations less than 50,000 were mailed a one-page COPS FAST application. At this early announcement of the COPS program, Secretary Reno stated, "This money is a down payment on a safer American. These officers will help America's communities large and small, increase their police forces and create problemsolving partnerships to fight crime."11

At her last Senate hearing, Secretary Reno thanked the committee members and noted that "funding for the Department of Justice programs has grown by 92 percent, including a \$3 billion increase for grants to state and local criminal justice agencies."12



ALPHONSO JACKSON

Alphonso Jackson served as President George W. Bush's second Secretary of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) from 2004 to 2009. Prior to nomination, Secretary Jackson served as Deputy Secretary of the HUD from 2001 to 2004, Director of Public Safety for St. Louis, Missouri from 1977 to 1981, Executive Director of the St. Louis Housing Authority from 1981 to 1983, and President and CEO of the Housing Authority in Dallas, Texas from 1989 to 1996.13

Secretary Jackson is credited with turning around the Dallas Housing Authority, which ranked among the best-managed large-city housing

agencies during his tenure.14 Secretary Jackson is also credited with improving the unsafe condition of the city's aging public-housing units and arranging deals that improved neighborhood conditions.

After serving as Deputy Secretary of HUD for three years and less than one year into his tenure as Secretary, Jackson stated to a group of mayors: "I've met with mayors from across the country during the past four years. I've visited your cities and toured your housing developments - both the successes, and the troubled areas that we've pledged to work together to revitalize. I want you to know that you'll continue to have my personal support and the support of this Administration in working to make our cities better places to live, work, and raise a family."15

Secretary Jackson oversaw the production of the first "Annual Homeless Assessment Report to Congress," a first-of-its kind study that provides important baseline data on homelessness.¹⁶ This annual, nationwide snapshot has been integral to understanding not only how many people are experiencing homelessness, but critical information about the causes and consequences of homelessness and disproportionate impact on various demographics. This data has been essential to local, state and federal agencies' understanding of why certain programs are more effective than others.

Additionally, Secretary Jackson focused on decreasing chronic homelessness and renewing the HUD Veterans Affairs Supportive Housing program, that prioritizes bringing those experiencing chronic homelessness directly into housing, which is backed by supportive services. The program put more than 20,000 into permanent or transitional housing.¹⁷



JULIÁN CASTRO

Julián Castro served as President Barack Obama's second Secretary of Housing and Urban Development. Prior to joining the Cabinet, Secretary Castro served as mayor of San Antonio, Texas from 2009 to 2014, and as a city council member from 2001 to 2005—similar to his predecessor, Secretary Henry Cisneros.

At the Department of Housing and Urban Development, Secretary Castro equipped local leaders with the tools and funding to create change in their cities, towns and villages. For instance, Secretary Castro's HUD published the "Prosperity Playbook" for local leaders. The Playbook covers how to

expand affordable housing and economic mobility with a regional lens for officials.18 HUD under Secretary Castro's leadership sought to equip residents with needed broadband connectivity. With the ConnectHome program, HUD sought to connect 28 public housing communities with broadband, recognizing the importance of this access in the 21st century.19

Additionally, recognizing the impact of climate change, Secretary Castro advocated for expanding the use of Community Development Block Grants (CDBG) to build disaster-resilient infrastructure. Local projects funded through CDBGs provide an opportunity to start from the bottom up, as Secretary Castro recognized: "The fact of the matter is every park, school, road and drainage project has the potential to provide greater protection from the threats of future natural disasters."20

Secretary Castro centered his agenda in a whole-of-government approach, working closely with First Lady Michelle Obama on her Mayor's Challenge to End Veteran Homelessness. As Secretary Castro was leaving office, veteran homelessness had declined by 47 percent since 2010.21 Over 850 elected officials committed to the program.²² To build a fair housing market following the Fair Housing Act, Secretary Castro's HUD implemented an Affirmatively Furthering Fair Housing program, which sought to provide localities with data, information, assessments and technical assistance to make fair housing a priority for communities.²³



ANTHONY FOXX

Anthony Foxx served as President Barack Obama's second Secretary of Transportation. Before serving as Secretary of Transportation, Foxx served as mayor of Charlotte, North Carolina from 2009 to 2013. Prior to being elected mayor, Secretary Foxx served as a city council member from 2005 to 2009.

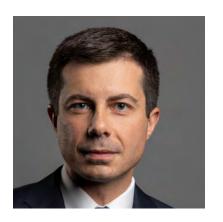
During his tenure as mayor of Charlotte, Secretary Foxx made efficient and innovative transportation investments the centerpiece of job creation and economic recovery efforts coming out of the Great Recession.24

Understanding the critical role that infrastructure plays in supporting a robust, resilient and efficient economy, Secretary Foxx released a 30-year transportation outlook to shift the federal conversation away from just funding towards better transportation policies that direct how funding is deployed with population shifts, demographic shifts and climate change in mind.²⁵

With this progressive mindset, Secretary Foxx shepherded through the first long-term surface transportation bill in over a decade, the Fixing America's Surface Transportation (FAST) Act. One of the Federal Highway Administration's implementation priorities was to get "funding in the hands of states, locals, Metropolitan Organizations, tribes and organizations who can put it to use through the country."26 With this enactment, local governments have been able to move forward on critical infrastructure projects with confidence in sustained federal partnership and funding.

Additionally, Secretary Foxx launched the U.S. Department of Transportation's \$40 million Smart City Challenge, which tasked mid-sized cities across America to develop ideas for a first-of-its kind integrated smart transportation system that uses data, applications and technology to help "move people and goods more quickly, cheaply and efficiently."27 The Challenge was about more than just technology, but it addressed the most pressing transportation problems facing cities by providing access to transportation to residents of all ages and abilities and by working to bridge the digital divide.²⁸ Through this program, Secretary Foxx directed \$40 million dollars to Columbus, Ohio, the winning city of the Smart City Challenge, along with an addition \$65 million in direct grants to cities to support community-driven advanced technology transportation projects in cities across America.²⁹

Going Forward with the Biden Administration Mayors in President Biden's Cabinet



PETE BUTTIGIEG

Pete Buttigieg is the current Secretary of Transportation under President Biden and is the first openly gay cabinet member in U.S. history. Before serving in the Biden administration, Secretary Buttigieg was the mayor of South Bend, Indiana from 2012 to 2020. While mayor, Secretary Buttigieg worked to rebuild South Bend after the Great Recession by revitalizing the downtown area through projects like the Smart Streets initiative.

During Secretary Buttigieg's confirmation hearing, he expressed that his approach as secretary would draw on his experience as a mayor to help

make the federal department work for state and local governments. The Department of Transportation under Secretary Buttigieg will focus on repairing outdated infrastructure, combating climate change and accommodating the country's anticipated population growth. Speaking to a group of mayors shortly before confirmation, Secretary Buttigieg said, "I'm looking forward to partnering with mayors to address transportation challenges. That will be one of the keys to getting this right."30



MARTY WALSH

Boston Mayor Marty Walsh received an overwhelmingly bipartisan vote in the U.S. Senate Health, Education, Labor and Pensions Committee to advance his nomination as Secretary of Labor. In addition to serving as Boston's mayor since 2014, Walsh served in the Massachusetts House of Representatives from 1997 to 2014. As mayor of Boston, Walsh helped create a world-class economy for all income groups by expanding workplace training, closing the gender wage gap and passing policies that advance racial equity.

Mayor Walsh's priorities leading the Department of Labor will be to strengthen our nation's workforce by ensuring that workers receive adequate pay, benefits and workplace protections, including access to training and mental health services, as the administration works to rebuild the economy in light of the pandemic.³¹ The Department of Labor under Mayor Walsh would seek to ready America's workforce to meet the challenges of the decade by partnering "with workers and businesses; states, cities and tribal territories."32



MARCIA FUDGE

Congresswoman Marcia Fudge has received a large, bipartisan vote in the Senate Banking Committee to advance her nomination as Secretary of Housing and Urban Development.³³ In addition to serving in Congress, Congresswoman Fudge served as the mayor of Warrensville Heights, Ohio from 2000 to 2008.³⁴ In her confirmation hearing, she referenced her experience as mayor and how it will inform her tenure as Secretary, stating, "As mayor of Warrensville Heights, Ohio I saw firsthand the need for economic development and affordable housing."35

With this background, and aligning with the Biden administration's priorities, the Department of Housing and Urban Development under Congresswoman Fudge will focus on alleviating the housing crisis, expanding HUD's resources to serve eligible populations, and reinstate the Affirmatively Furthering Fair Housing and the disparate impact rules.36,37

Looking Ahead

Right now, communities face an unprecedented set of challenges in responding to the COVID-19 pandemic, facilitating racial reconciliation and charting a way forward to economic recovery. Local leaders are ready and willing to meet the moment with President Biden's administration, which is focused on bridging the divides in our country. Local leaders will meet this moment as the most trusted level of government official by

Americans.³⁸ By relying on local officials and working alongside them, President Biden can begin leading all Americans down a path of tolerance and healing.

President Biden has already nominated five cabinet-level officials who have local experience, which is a great start to bringing local-level leadership to his administration. However, these five are only a fraction of the 4,000 appointments President Biden will nominate. If a position relies heavily on local governing experience, President Biden should consider appointing a candidate with municipal knowledge. As the case-studies outlined in this paper show, when local leaders are placed in cabinet positions, they are able to empathize and build programs for local leaders to directly use.

The President has committed to NLC's Leading Together 2020 Cities Agenda which focuses on:

- Building Sustainable Infrastructure,
- Creating A Skilled Workforce,
- Ending Housing Instability and Homelessness, and
- Reducing Gun Violence.

Working towards solutions on each of these issues will require local experience and expertise at the center of the administration's agenda to "Build Back Better."

A key aspect to "Build Back Better" is to help communities on the long-term path to recovery while building resiliency for future shocks to the system. This starts with fiscal assistance, as it took almost a decade for municipalities to recover from the Great Recession in 2008—only for that recovery to be wiped out by the pandemic. The Biden administration and Congress must not only help stabilize local budgets through emergency aid but also invest in federal programs that will restore and revitalize cities, towns and villages. The best way to do this is to support formula-based block grants allocated directly to local governments, which prove to be the most efficient and effective means of quickly moving public funds to at-risk populations and areas in need of relief. President Biden's administration can give cities, towns and villages their own local decision-making power backed with federal resources to make the changes they want in their communities. By taking this federalism approach, President Biden could set a new bipartisan precedent for future administrations.

Conclusion

Many local officials who have served in cabinet positions have brought with them a sense of empathy and problem solving rooted in the interconnected and complex realities of governing America's cities, towns and villages. This is demonstrated through the vision and policy decisions of their federal leadership, as well as the administrative changes that those with local government experience brought to their cabinet posts. Some of the most significant lessons learned from these officials include:

- Focus on addressing problems in a place. Solving some of the toughest challenges facing our nation, from homelessness and police violence to unemployment and education, requires targeting federal policies and programs in ways that not only help individuals, but that transform neighborhoods so that places thrive and can support progress in the long-term. During his tenure, Secretary Cisneros made drastic changes to HUD operations that reoriented programs and partnerships toward comprehensive community revitalization, including job creation and incentivizing private capital investment in neighborhoods.³⁹
- Let those closest to the people lead, with partnership from the federal government. Local officials are best situated to understand the challenges in communities and to put resources to best use. However, they are often constrained by limited resources, including funding, technology, data or staffing. Effective federal policy and programs bolster the capacity of local leaders to lead. Secretary Jackson's efforts to ensure timely, nationwide data on homelessness provided critical information for more effective local decisions and more impactful intergovernmental partnerships grounded in a common understanding.
- Recognize that success will come when policies are crafted with an understanding of how different issues affect each other at the local level. In the real world, housing, infrastructure, economic development and so many other issues affect each other, and their relationship must be considered within broader strategies. To the extent possible, federal policy and programs should reflect this reality. For example, Secretary Foxx's Fixing America's Surface Transportation (FAST) Act focused on utilizing federal funding for transportation to not only improve infrastructure access and quality, but also to address climate change and employment.
- Remove administrative hurdles. Managing applications, requirements and paperwork related federal programs is often a roadblock to putting federal resources to work locally. Removing these hurdles ensures that localities can access new resources. For example, Secretary Reno's COPS program not only allocated funding, but also ensured that smaller, more resource constrained localities were provided a straightforward and shortened funding application.

A review of those former local officials who have served as cabinet secretaries reveals that local experience provides a unique perspective on and approach to federal policies and programs that are responsive to the realities of governing. It reflects a sense of how people in communities interact with their government and are impacted by the resources available to them. The Biden administration is off to a strong start with a growing share of the cabinet composed of former local leaders. The influence of local leadership is already evident in proposed policy positions that value our nation's cities, towns and villages.

Appendix

Methodology

The National League of Cities researched the last 40 years' worth of administrations to determine how many local officials were nominated and confirmed for a cabinet-level secretary position. For consistency, the NLC considered a "local official" as a city or county level elected official or executive of a department/organization. The secretary positions examined include Secretaries of Agriculture, Commerce, Defense, Education, Energy, Health and Human Services, Homeland Security, Housing and Urban Development, Interior, Labor, State, Transportation, Treasury, Veteran Affairs and Attorney General.

OVERVIEW

ADMINISTRATION	CABINET POSITIONS	NAME	YEARS IN ROLE	PAST ROLE(S) IN LOCAL GOVERNMENT
Reagan	Environmental Protection Agency	Anne Gorsuch Burford	1981-1983	Deputy Distrct Attorney, Denver, CO (1971-1973)
Reagan	Education	Terrel Bell	1981-1984	Superintendent Rockland Valley School, Rockland Valley, ID (1947-1954); Star Valley Schools, Afton, WY (1955-1957); Weber County School District, Ogden, UT (1957- 1962); Granite School District, Salt Lake City, UT (1971-1974)
Reagan	Energy	John Herrington	1985-1989	Deputy District Attorney, Ventura County, CA (1965-1981)
Bush 41	Agriculture	Edward Rell Madigan	1991-1993	Lincoln Board of Zonning Appeals, Lincoln, NE (1965-1969)
Bush 41	Labor	Lynn Morley Martin	1991-1993	Boardmember Winnebago County Board, IL (1972-1976)
Clinton	Agriculture	Dan Glickman	1995-2001	Wichita School Board, Wichita, KS (1973-1976)
Clinton	Commerce	Norman Mineta	2000-2001	Mayor of San Jose, CA (1971-1975); Vice Mayor of San Jose, CA (1968-1971); Councilmember San Jose, CA (1967-1971)
Clinton	Defense	William Cohen	1997-2001	Mayor of Bangor, ME (1971-1972); Councilmember of Bangor, ME (1969-1972)
Clinton	Energy	Federico Pena	1997-1998	Mayor of Denver, CO (1983-1991)
Clinton	Housing and Urban Development	Henry Cisneros	1993-1997	Mayor of San Antonio, TX (1981-1989)
Clinton	Transportation	Federico Pena	1993-1997	Mayor of Denver, CO (1983-1991)
Clinton	Attorney General	Janet Reno	1993-2001	State's Attorney for Miami-Dade County, FL (1978-1993)
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Biden	Transportation	Pete Buttigieg	2021-	Mayor of South Bend, IN (2012-2020)
Biden	Labor	Marty Walsh	2021-	Mayor of Boston, MA (2014 - 2021)
Biden	Interior	Deb Haaland	2021-	Chairwoman of the Laguna Development Corporation Board of Directors, Alberquerque, NM (2010-2015)
Biden	Housing and Urban Development	Marcia Fudge	2021-	Mayor of Warrensville Heights, OH (2000-2008)
Biden	Agriculture	Tom Vilsack	2021-	Mayor of Mount Pleasant, IA (1987-1992)
Obama	Office of Management and Budget	Shann Donovan	2014-2017	Commissioner of the New York City Department of Housing Preservation and Development, NY (2004-2009)
Obama	US Trade Representatives	Ron Kirk	2009-2013	Mayor of Dallas, TX (1995-2002)
Obama	Transportation	Anthony Foxx	2013-2017	Mayor of Charlotte, NC (2009-2013); Councilmember Charlotte, NC (2005-2009)
Obama	Transportation	Ray LaHood	2009-2013	Youth Services Bureau Director, Rock Island County, IL (1972-1974)
Obama	Labor	Tom Perez	2013-2017	Councilmember, Montgomery County, MD (2002-2006)
Obama	Housing and Urban Development	Julian Castro	2014-2017	Mayor of San Antonio, TX (2009-2014); Council Member of San Antonio, TX (2001-2005)
Obama	Housing and Urban Development	Shann Donovan	2009-2014	Commissioner of the New York City Department of Housing Preservation and Development, NY (2004-2009)
Obama	Education	John King Jr.	2016-2017	Education Commissioner of New York City, NY (2011-2015)
Obama	Education	Arne Duncan	2009-2016	CEO of Chicago Public Schools, Chicago, IL (2001-2009)
Obama	Commerce	Gary Locke	2009-2011	Executive of King County, WA (1994-1997)
Obama	Agriculture	Tom Vilsack	2009-2017	Mayor of Mount Pleasant, IA (1987-1992)
Bush 43	Office of Management and Budget	Jim Nussle	2007-2009	Attorney Delaware County, IA (1986-1990)
Bush 43	Transportation	Norman Mineta	2001-2006	Mayor of San Jose, CA (1971-1975); Vice Mayor of San Jose, CA (1968-1971); Councilmember San Jose, CA (1967-1971)
Bush 43	Housing and Urban Development	Alphonso Jackson	2003-2008	Executive Director of the St. Louis Housing Authority, MO (1989-1996)
Bush 43	Housing and Urban Development	Mel Martinez	2001-2003	Chair of the Orlando Housing Authority, Orlando, FL (1984-1986); Chairman Orange County, FL (1998-2000)
Bush 43	Education	Rod Paige	2001-2005	Superintendent Houston Indepenent School District, Houston, TX (1994-2001)
Bush 43	Agriculture	Mike Johanns	2005-2007	Mayor of Lincoln, NE (1991-1999); Councilmember Lincoln, NE (1989-1991); Lancaster County Board, NE (1983-1987)

Endnotes

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