

TEXAS VS NEVADA

We often think of state governments as miniature versions of the U.S. national government, assuming the structure and function of state governments are the same as their national counterparts. Of course, this thinking is not without foundation: Most state legislatures are bicameral like the U.S. Congress. All state governments feature separation of powers between legislative, executive, and judicial branches. All state governments have checks and balances across the three branches. Most state legislatures are elected by the single-member district (SMD) system. However, as you have already discovered, state governments vary significantly from the U.S. national government, and through boxes like these, you have discovered that Texas differs from other state governments as well.

One important area of difference is the role and function of state cabinets. Some states require state governments to have the governor preside over a cabinet, regular meetings of the governor and the heads of key state-level bureaucratic departments and agencies to coordinate policymaking, policy implementation, and policy development. These cabinets work to keep the executive branch running smoothly and efficiently, minimizing conflict within the executive branch. This approach to state executive branches is a mirror of the U.S. president and their cabinet, in which the president meets periodically with the heads of major executive departments such as State, Treasury, Education, Energy, and Defense. Each of the cabinet officers holds the title of department secretary, and they are appointed by the president and confirmed by the U.S. Senate.

Nevada is an interesting model of the executive cabinet. Unlike all other states with a cabinet, Nevada's state constitution does not mention a cabinet, nor does state law require a cabinet to exist. Instead, Nevada allows the governor to create a cabinet at their will, to determine the makeup of the cabinet, and to decide how often the cabinet meets. While some governors have served without a cabinet, others have relied heavily on a cabinet to help the governor accomplish his or her political goals and policy objectives.

The current Nevada governor, Brian Sandoval, followed the precedent of many governors by creating a cabinet. His cabinet consists of twenty-three members. While the governor has complete freedom to decide who serves and who does not serve in the cabinet, the method of selection to the respective offices varies. Fourteen members of the current governor's cabinet were appointed to their office directly by the governor. They are not approved or confirmed by anyone else and may be removed from their office by the governor at any time. These members answer solely to the governor for their actions in office. These appointees

include the heads of the Nevada Governor's Office of Economic Development, the Nevada Department of Health and Human Services, the Department of Public Safety, Nevada Department of Veterans Services, and Nevada State Budget Division. Some members are nominated by the governor and confirmed by a board or commission of state government including the director of the state tourism department and wildlife. In an unusual twist, the head of the state's agriculture department is nominated by the state agriculture board and then confirmed by the governor. The heads of the higher education and transportation are selected by their respective boards, giving the governor no direct control over those members of his cabinet; this method is also used by the Nevada Indian Commission.

The current lieutenant governor is directly and independently elected by the voters of Nevada, leaving the governor no control or influence over that office as well. However, the lieutenant governor is currently the only statewide elected officer in the cabinet. Other statewide elected officers like the attorney general are not included in the current cabinet. As a result, the Nevada cabinet consists of a majority of people the governor directly controls, but a number of key state agencies and offices are not included in the cabinet.

This approach to coordination in the executive branch stands in sharp contrast to the state of Texas, in which no executive cabinet exists. Instead, the governor either directly interacts with heads of various state agencies, often individuals he does not appoint or must serve more than one term to completely influence, in the case of some board and commissions. No regular meetings occur across with the governor and key state agency leaders like higher education, health, and transportation. In addition, the governor shares power with several directly elected executive branch agencies. While the governor in Nevada may face this situation in the case of the lieutenant governor or attorney general, Nevada's currently does attempt to include his direct appointees and other key agencies, but noticeably absent are individuals like the attorney general.

THINKING Critically

- ★ What are the advantages to having a state-level executive cabinet as practiced in many states?
- ★ What are the advantages of a cabinet that is structured like that of Nevada?
- ★ What challenges would Texas's governor face with creating and implementing a cabinet?
- ★ Would a cabinet make Texas's executive branch more efficient? Why or why not?