

Q17 – The President of the United States is in charge of which branch of government?

DOUGLAS GINSBURG, Federal Judge, U.S. Court of Appeals, D.C. Circuit:

The president is in charge of the executive branch -- as spelled out in Article II of the Constitution.

The Framers debated making the executive a committee or a co-presidency but settled on having one person – for two reasons: Efficiency: one person can make decisions more readily when they are needed. And accountability: everyone knows who's responsible for those decisions.

The Constitution says nothing about the president's staff. 70 years passed before Congress put up money for the president to hire a secretary. Until then, presidents often relied on their families to help out. For example, John Adams II worked as a secretary for his father – President John Quincy Adams.

The Great Depression of the 1930's greatly changed America – and the presidency.

The executive branch mushroomed. To oversee those many new agencies, Congress in 1939 created the Executive Office of the President.

Today, several thousand people work directly for the president. Between the executive branch, the postal service, and the armed forces, the president has authority over nearly four million government employees. That's a far cry from the days when Thomas Jefferson worked in a nearly empty White House, and lamented that the presidency "brings nothing but unceasing drudgery."