

Research Report

**FLASHBACK, 2001:
IN 50-50 DEM-CONTROLLED SENATE,
BUSH'S CABINET NOMINEES "BREEZED" THROUGH
CONFIRMATION HEARINGS THAT, ON AVERAGE,
WERE SCHEDULED THREE WEEKS AFTER
BUSH ANNOUNCED HIS CHOICE.**

ACCOUNTABLE 

SUMMARY: As President-elect Joe Biden's Cabinet nominees face [historic partisan barriers](#) in the Senate, an **Accountable.US** analysis reveals that **despite Democratic control of a 50-50 Senate in the 17 days before President George W. Bush's 2001 inauguration, only two of 14 Cabinet secretaries had hearings scheduled after Jan. 20, and the average Bush nominee was given a hearing within three weeks of their announcement.**

Following the historically close and bitter 2000 election, Democrats held control of a perfectly divided Senate from Jan. 3 to Jan. 20, when the tie-breaking vote switched from Vice President Al Gore to the newly elected Republican Vice President Dick Cheney. **Despite the contentious partisan environment and Democratic control over a 50-50 Senate, A.US's analysis revealed:**

- **Over 85 percent of Bush's Cabinet nominees had a hearing before Inauguration Day, and, on average, the Democratic Senate gave Bush's nominees a hearing within three weeks of their announcement.** Of 14 Cabinet-level positions, only two nominees received hearings after Jan. 18. Labor Secretary Elaine Chao and Transportation Secretary Norman Mineta were both announced in January 2001 and received hearings a mere 13 and 22 days after their respective announcements. Notably, Chao was Bush's second nominee to head the Labor Department after his first, Linda Chavez, withdrew.
- **On average, Bush nominees were confirmed less than a month after their announcement.** The longest delay from announcement to confirmation was Bush's controversial pick for attorney general, John Ashcroft, who was confirmed on Feb. 1, by a 58-42 margin just 38 days after his Dec. 22 announcement. The ranking Democrat on the Senate Judiciary Committee refused to filibuster Ashcroft's nomination, saying, "I'm not going to be a part of that."
- **As Democratic Senate Majority Leader Tom Daschle predicted, Bush was able to assemble a full Cabinet a mere 12 days after taking office as half of Bush's nominees were confirmed via voice vote "just hours" after his inauguration.** Asked about Bush Cabinet nominees, Daschle said, "Ultimately, I think, most nominees are going to be confirmed quite easily." Ultimately, eight nominees were confirmed via voice vote and four were confirmed by votes of 100-0. The two that were confirmed via roll call vote with less than 100 percent support were the [controversial picks](#) of John Ashcroft for attorney general (58-42) and Gale Norton for interior secretary (75-24), who were still confirmed by comfortable margins. The New York Times reported that by and large Bush nominees "breezed" through the confirmation process.
- **Then-Republican Senate Leader Trent Lott praised the Democratic Majority Leader Tom Daschle.** Lott set the example for the Republican caucus, calling for bipartisanship, saying, "We don't want a prescription for gridlock," and "we'll show during the next 17 days and more importantly during the months beyond that, that we will always find a way to work together." **The Washington Times reported "even veteran Republican officials" praised Daschle as "classy" and "gracious."**

Only Two Bush Secretaries Did Not Receive A Hearing Before Inauguration Day And The Last Confirmation Was Feb. 1

From January 3 To January 20, The Democrat-Led Senate Held Hearings For A Dozen Of Bush's Cabinet Nominees And Confirmed Nearly Half Of Bush's Cabinet Via Voice Vote "Just Hours" After His Inauguration.

Democrats Held Control Of The Perfectly Divided Senate In The 17 Days Before The Inauguration, During Which Time Democrat Tom Daschle Was Majority Leader.

January 3, 2001: The Senate Was Split 50-50, Meaning Democratic Vice President Al Gore Was The Tiebreaker. "And the Senate was split 50-50 following the 2000 elections, giving Democrats majority control for 17 days beginning Jan. 3, 2001, since Al Gore was still vice president. Republicans gained control Jan. 20 when Dick Cheney was sworn in as George W. Bush's vice president." [Associated Press via Detroit News, [10/29/14](#)]

- **From January 3 To January 20, Democrat Tom Daschle Was Senate Majority Leader.** "In one of the many consequences of this past year's razor-thin electoral margin, Lott, R-Mississippi, and Democratic leader Tom Daschle, D-South Dakota, have temporarily reversed roles: As long as Vice President Al Gore retains his title of president of the Senate -- until he leaves office January 20 -- Daschle will be the Majority Leader of the Senate." [CNN, [1/5/01](#)]
- **January 20, 2001: Republican Dick Cheney Became The Vice President, Giving His Party Control Senate Control.** "And the Senate was split 50-50 following the 2000 elections, giving Democrats majority control for 17 days beginning Jan. 3, 2001, since Al Gore was still vice president. Republicans gained control Jan. 20 when Dick Cheney was sworn in as George W. Bush's vice president." [Associated Press via Detroit News, [10/29/14](#)]
 - **"With The Edge Cheney Will Afford Them ... Some GOP Members Said ... That Accountability And Responsibility Must Be Recognized And Exercised To Avoid Deadlock."** "Lott takes over once more when Republican Dick Cheney -- who chose his Senate office on Friday -- takes his oath of office. With the edge Cheney will afford them, effectively giving the Republicans a 51-50 majority, some GOP members said Friday that accountability and responsibility must be recognized and exercised to avoid deadlock." [PBS News Hour, [1/3/01](#)]

Two Days After The Session Began, The Full Senate Approved A Partisan Power-Sharing Plan That Allowed The Senate Majority Leader To Bring Measures To The Floor In The Event Of A Committee Tie.

January 5, 2001: The Full Senate Agreed To A Power-Sharing Plan "For Floor And Committee Procedures Intended To Even The Chamber's Partisan Playing Field, Which Is Evenly Split Between Republicans And Democrats." "The full Senate agreed Friday to a blueprint for floor and committee procedures intended to even the chamber's partisan playing field, which is evenly split between Republicans and Democrats." [CNN, [1/5/01](#)]

- **The "Chamber's Committees Will Now Be Split Evenly Among Democrats And Republicans ... With Republicans Retaining The Chairmanships, But Staffing And Resources Evenly Divided."** "Senators' approval was granted on a voice vote late Friday afternoon. The chamber's committees will now be split evenly among Democrats and Republicans -- both parties occupy 50 seats in Congress'

upper chamber -- with Republicans retaining the chairmanships, but staffing and resources evenly divided." [CNN, [1/5/01](#)]

- **In The Case Of A Committee Tie, Including “Tie Votes On Any Bush Administration Official Up For Confirmation, The Democratic Senate Majority Leader Could “Bring The Measure To The Senate Floor For A Full Vote.”** “In the case of a tie vote in a committee, the Senate majority leader can bring the measure to the Senate floor for a full vote. This includes tie votes on any Bush Administration official up for confirmation.” [CNN, [1/5/01](#)]
- **Republicans “Many Of Whom Initially Objected To The New Rules, Begrudgingly Agreed To The Terms.”** “In the case of a tie vote in a committee, the Senate majority leader can bring the measure to the Senate floor for a full vote. This includes tie votes on any Bush Administration official up for confirmation.” [CNN, [1/5/01](#)]

Democratic Senate Leader Tom Daschle: “Most [Cabinet] Nominees Are Going To Be Confirmed Quite Easily.”

Daschle: “Ultimately, I Think, Most Nominees Are Going To Be Confirmed Quite Easily.” “JENNINGS: Can you--can you assure the public now that every one of his nominees will be confirmed both by the respective committees and the Senate? Senator DASCHLE: I don't know that I can assure it. I think it's a--it's a very strong likelihood. I don't know that there will be any difficulties. Obviously the work hasn't been completed yet, but assuming that we have not had any glitches along the way, I don't think there's going to be any difficulty ultimately, and the confirmation of most of the nominees--there will be a vigorous debate on Mr. Ashcroft, maybe Ms. Collins, but ultimately, I think, most nominees are going to be confirmed quite--quite easily.” [ABC News, 1/20/01]

Daschle “Vowed Democrats Will Work With Republicans Once The Bush Administration Takes Over.” “He vowed Democrats will work with Republicans once the Bush administration takes over and hands the Senate tie-breaking power to the Republicans.” [PBS News Hour, [1/3/01](#)]

- **Daschle: “Some People Say That It Will Take Another Miracle For This Congress And Administration To Find A way To Work Together. As We Being This Historic Congress,, Let Us Resolve That We Will Work In Good Faith With Each Other To Do The People’s Business. That Is Our Pledge From This Side Of The Aisle.”** [PBS News Hour, [1/3/01](#)]

“Even Veteran Republican Officials” Praised Daschle As “Classy” And “Gracious.”

“Even Veteran Republican Officials Praised Mr. Daschle’s Speech,” Which “Sought To Smooth Over These Partisan Differences,” As “Classy” And “Gracious.” “Mr. Daschle, South Dakota Democrat, sought to smooth over these partisan differences as he took over yesterday. ‘I'm honored to serve as majority leader, but I also recognize that the majority is slim,’ Mr. Daschle told his colleagues, only 37 of whom showed up in person to hear his remarks. ‘This is still one of the most closely divided Senates in all of history. Polarized positions are an indulgence . . . that the Senate cannot afford and our nation will not tolerate.’ Even veteran Republican officials praised Mr. Daschle's speech as ‘classy’ and ‘gracious.’ But some conservatives said Mr. Daschle merely proved yesterday that he is a polished partisan operator.” [Washington Times, 6/7/01]

2001 Republican Senate Leader Trent Lott: We “Cannot Allow” A “Prescription For Gridlock.”

Republican Senate Leader Trent Lott: “We Don’t Want A Prescription For Gridlock. We Cannot Allow That. We Have To Extend The Hand Of Friendship To Our Colleagues And Try To Find A Way To Get The Substantive Issues To The Floor Of The Senate.” “We don't want a prescription for gridlock,” Republican Senate leader Trent Lott told reporters Friday. “We cannot allow that. We have to extend the hand

of friendship to our colleagues and try to find a way to get the substantive issues to the floor of the Senate.”
[CNN, [1/5/01](#)]

- Lott: “We Are Showing Here Today, And We’ll Show During The Next 17 Days And More Importantly During The Months Beyond That, That We Will Always Find A Way To Work Together.”** “We are showing here today, and I hope we’ll show during the next 17 days and more importantly during the months beyond that, that we will always find a way to work together. It is quite often not easy to find consensus, as is forced upon us quite often in the Senate, but we must strive for it and quite often Senator Daschle and I do our very best to find a logical solution to a problem or an agreement, and we have 98 other Senators that may not agree with what we can come up with, but we will continue to work together to make this great republic the best, the most outstanding the minds of men have ever created to work as it should.” [PBS News Hour, [1/3/01](#)]

Despite Democrat Control And A Bitter Election Fight, Bush’s Nominees “Breezed Through Their Senate Committee Hearings,” Which Were Primarily Held In The Two Weeks Before Bush’s Inauguration.

Bush’s Nominees “Breezed Through Their Senate Committee Hearings,” Which Were Held Over The Two Weeks Before Inauguration. “Senate approval of Bush’s nominees, who had breezed through their Senate committee hearings held over the past two weeks, is the final step before they are formally sworn into office.” [New York Times, [1/20/01](#)]

The Average Bush Cabinet Nominee Received A Hearing Roughly Three Weeks After Their Announcement And Were Confirmed, On Average, Less Than Four Weeks After Announcement. More details can be found in the table below. [United States Senate, “George W. Bush Cabinet Nominations,” accessed [1/12/21](#)]

AGENCY	ANNOUNCED	EARLIEST HEARING	CONFIRMED	# OF DAYS FROM ANNOUNCEMENT TO HEARING	# OF DAYS FROM HEARING TO CONFIRMATION	# OF DAYS FROM ANNOUNCEMENT TO CONFIRMATION	VOTE MARGIN
Agriculture (Ann Veneman)	12/20/00	1/18/01	1/20/01	27	2	31	Voice vote
Commerce (Donald Evans)	12/20/00	1/4/01	1/20/01	15	16	31	Voice vote
Defense (Donald Rumsfeld)	12/20/00	1/4/01	1/20/01	15	16	31	Voice vote
Education (Roderick Paige)	12/29/00	1/10/01	1/20/01	12	10	22	Voice vote
Energy (Spencer Abraham)	1/2/01	1/18/01	1/20/01	16	2	18	Voice vote
Health & Human Services (Tommy Thompson)	12/29/00	1/18/01	1/24/01	20	6	22	100-0
Housing & Urban Development (Mel Martinez)	12/20/00	1/17/01	1/23/01	28	6	34	100-0

Interior (Gale Norton)	12/29/00	1/18/01	1/30/01	20	12	32	75-24
Justice (John Ashcroft)	12/22/00	1/16/01	2/1/01	25	16	38	58-42
Labor (Elaine Chao)	1/11/01	1/24/01	1/29/01	13	5	13	Voice vote
State (Colin Powell)	12/16/00	1/17/01	1/20/01	32	3	35	Voice vote
Transportation (Norman Mineta)	1/2/01	1/24/01	1/24/01	22	0	22	100-0
Treasury (Paul O'Neill)	12/20/00	1/17/01	1/20/01	28	3	31	Voice vote
Veterans Affairs (Anthony Principi)	12/29/00	1/18/01	1/23/01	20	2	25	100-0
AVERAGE				~21	~7	27.5	

[United States Senate, "George W. Bush Cabinet Nominations," accessed [1/12/21](#)]

The Last Bush Nominee Hearing Date Was January 24, 2001, For Both Labor Secretary Elaine Chao And Transportation Secretary Norman Mineta. [United States Senate, "George W. Bush Cabinet Nominations, accessed [1/12/21](#)]

- **Chao Was Bush's Second Labor Secretary, Nominated After His Initial Pick Withdrew For Sheltering An Undocumented Immigrant; Chao Was Confirmed 13 Days After Announcement.** President George W. Bush announced Linda Chavez on January 2, 2001. The Washington Post reports she withdrew her nomination on January 9, 2001, "over the haven she gave an illegal immigrant from Guatemala in the early 1990s." Chao was nominated on January 11, 2001, and confirmed 18 days later, five days after her January 24 hearing. [United States Senate, "George W. Bush Cabinet Nominations, accessed [1/12/21](#); Washington Post, [1/9/01](#)]
- **Mineta Was Among The Last Announcements And Was Confirmed 22 Days After Announcement.** [United States Senate, "George W. Bush Cabinet Nominations, accessed [1/12/21](#)]

The Senate Confirmed "The First Seven Members" Of Bush's Cabinet "Just Hours After Bush Was Sworn In As The 43rd President." "The U.S. Senate confirmed the first seven members of President George W. Bush's Cabinet on Saturday, just hours after Bush was sworn in as the 43rd president of the United States." [New York Times, [1/20/01](#)]

- **In A "Single Voice Vote," The Senate Confirmed Bush's Secretaries Of State, Defense, Treasury, Education, Commerce, Agriculture, And Energy.** "In a single voice vote, the 100-member Senate confirmed Colin Powell as secretary as state, Donald Rumsfeld as secretary of defense and Paul O'Neill as treasury secretary. It also confirmed Education Secretary Rod Paige, Commerce Secretary Don Evans, Agriculture Secretary Ann Veneman and Energy Secretary Spencer Abraham." [New York Times, [1/20/01](#)]

The Last Bush Nominee Confirmed Was John Ashcroft, Bush's Controversial Pick For Attorney General; He Received A Hearing Before The Inauguration And Was Confirmed 38 Days After He Was Announced. [United States Senate, "George W. Bush Cabinet Nominations, accessed [1/12/21](#)]