Hist/Spec

Coolidge's Cabinet

GWCIA 30

Letter From the Chair

(will be updated soon)

Introduction to the Committee

This committee takes place in August 1923, mere weeks after the sudden death of President Warren G. Harding and the swearing-in of President Calvin Coolidge. The nation is still reeling — not just from mourning a president, but from the rising tide of corruption now associated with his administration.

The Teapot Dome Scandal, involving secret oil leases and enormous bribes, has shaken the foundation of trust in the federal government. The American public demands accountability, transparency, and reform.

As members of President Coolidge's Cabinet and selected advisors, you are tasked with addressing this crisis in an emergency session. Though Coolidge is famously reserved — "Silent Cal" — the decisions and debates in this room will shape his administration and the future of American politics. The chair will be playing the role of President Coolidge.

This committee will be General Assembly-style, meaning all discussions and negotiations occur in a single chamber. There will be no backroom negotiations or crisis updates. Every decision is public, debated openly, and subject to vote.

List of terms/people to know

- Teapot Dome Scandal: A bribery incident involving Secretary of the Interior Albert B. Fall, who secretly leased Navy petroleum reserves at Teapot Dome, Wyoming, and other locations to private oil companies in exchange for personal profit.
- Albert B. Fall: U.S. Secretary of the Interior under Harding, and the central figure in the scandal. First former Cabinet member convicted of a felony in U.S. history. ● Petroleum Reserves: Specifically, lands owned by the federal government and set aside for future use by the U.S. Navy.
- Bribery: The offering or receiving of money or gifts to influence the actions of a public official. In this case, massive amounts of money changed hands illegally.
- Public Confidence: The trust the American people place in their government institutions — something that has been deeply damaged by the scandal.
- Accountability Measures: Steps taken by the government to investigate, punish, or prevent corruption, such as investigations, resignations, new laws, or public reports.
- Calvin Coolidge: The new President of the United States, known for his quiet demeanor and belief in small government. How he handles the scandal will define his presidency.

Topic: The Teapot Dome Scandal

In the summer of 1923, the United States government stands on uncertain ground. The sudden death of President Warren G. Harding has thrown the nation into mourning, but it has also peeled back the veil on one of the most explosive political scandals in American history: the Teapot Dome Scandal. What began as an obscure matter of government oil leases has now evolved into a national crisis — one involving corruption, betrayal, and a deep erosion of public trust.
At the center of the scandal is Secretary of the Interior Albert B. Fall, who secretly leased federally protected oil reserves — including the naval reserves at Teapot Dome, Wyoming — to private oil companies. In exchange, Fall received personal bribes amounting to hundreds of thousands of dollars in cash, bonds, and livestock. These arrangements were made behind closed doors, without competitive bidding, in clear violation of the public interest. Investigative journalists and Congressional watchdogs soon uncovered the scandal, sending shockwaves through the political establishment and outraging an already skeptical public.

President Harding died before he could publicly address the matter, leaving his successor, Calvin Coolidge, to manage the fallout. Coolidge, known for his silence and restraint, now faces a defining test of leadership: how to respond to a corruption scandal that implicates some of the most powerful members of the previous administration — and perhaps even those still serving in his Cabinet. As the new administration takes shape, President Coolidge and his Cabinet are pulled in multiple directions. Political, ethical, and strategic pressures collide at a time when the American public is calling for clarity and action. Each path forward carries its own risks, and

each decision will shape the legacy of both the President and his party.

The first and most urgent pressure comes from the public itself. In the wake of the Gilded Age, Americans have grown increasingly disillusioned with government. News of secret deals and corporate kickbacks has only confirmed their worst fears. Across the country, newspapers and civic organizations are demanding transparency, justice, and reform. If the administration does not act decisively, it risks permanently damaging the public's confidence in democratic institutions.

At the same time, the Republican Party is reeling from the scandal. With midterm elections fast approaching, many party leaders fear the political fallout of any public investigation. A strong response may cost the party valuable seats and donors; however, inaction could equally destroy its credibility. The question of how far to go — and how fast — divides the party internally, with some demanding accountability and others urging restraint for the sake of political survival.

Further complicating the situation are internal ties to the scandal. Some current officials may have had professional or personal connections to the figures involved in the oil leases. These connections may lead to conflicts of interest, muted responses, or behind-the-scenes attempts to stifle inquiry. The administration must determine whether it is willing to risk damaging its own ranks in the pursuit of justice.

Finally, the eyes of the world are watching. Foreign governments and international investors are

carefully monitoring the scandal, concerned about the stability and reliability of the U.S. government. A weak response may tarnish America's reputation abroad, discourage foreign investment, and call into question the nation's commitment to the rule of law. In an increasingly globalized economy, the consequences of perceived instability could extend far beyond domestic politics.

The Teapot Dome scandal is more than a case of individual wrongdoing. It is a national crisis that challenges the very structure and credibility of American governance. For the Coolidge administration, this is a moment of decision — one that will determine whether the federal government is capable of policing itself and restoring its integrity.

As members of President Coolidge's Cabinet and closest advisors, you are tasked with shaping the government's response. Will you push for investigations, criminal charges, and structural reforms to prevent future corruption? Or will you prioritize political survival, limit exposure, and attempt to move past the scandal without opening further wounds? There are no easy answers. Justice may come at the cost of political capital. Loyalty may come at the cost of public trust. But inaction — or indecision — may come at the cost of the Republic itself.

Guiding Questions

To help structure your debate and resolutions, consider the following guiding questions: 1. How should the Coolidge Administration respond to the Teapot Dome Scandal? ● Do we fire or prosecute remaining implicated officials?

- Should Coolidge make a public statement, or remain silent?

2. What reforms should be introduced to prevent future corruption?

- Should Cabinet officials be subject to more oversight?
- Do we need new laws on lobbying or campaign finance?

3. What role should Congress and the courts play in addressing the scandal?

- Should an independent investigation be formed?
- Is a special prosecutor necessary?

4. How do we rebuild public trust?

- Should we release internal documents?
- Do we offer public apologies or compensation?

5. How should we handle the press and foreign observers?

- Do we maintain transparency, or manage information release carefully?

6. How much scandal can the Republican Party afford?

- Should the party sacrifice key figures to preserve the broader institution?
- What are the electoral implications of action vs. inaction?

Character List:

Each delegate will play a historical figure or fictional advisor close to the Coolidge Administration. While some names are drawn from the historical record, others have been added for narrative flexibility and to ensure a well-rounded simulation. All delegates are expected to debate, draft policy, and vote on how to respond to the Teapot Dome crisis.

1. Grace Coolidge – First Lady. Charismatic and well-respected, she serves as a symbolic voice for public morality and perception. Not a policymaker, but a strong influence on her husband and the Cabinet.
2. Herbert Hoover – Secretary of Commerce. A rising political star known for efficiency and humanitarian work during WWI. Advocates for transparency, modern governance, and government accountability.
3. Charles Evans Hughes – Secretary of State. Former Supreme Court Justice. Concerned with preserving the international credibility of the United States and maintaining a steady hand in foreign affairs.
4. Andrew Mellon – Secretary of the Treasury. Powerful businessman and financier. Prioritizes economic stability and limited government. Likely to oppose dramatic reform efforts.
5. Harry M. Daugherty – Attorney General (outgoing). A controversial figure tied to Harding-era corruption. May be under investigation himself. Defensive and politically calculating.
6. Harlan F. Stone – Attorney General (incoming). Though not yet appointed, he represents reform-minded legal thinking and a potential break from the scandals of the Harding administration.

7. John W. Weeks – Secretary of War. More focused on military readiness and defense policy but concerned with public trust in federal institutions. May take a middle-ground stance.
8. Hubert Work – Secretary of the Interior (appointed after Fall). A replacement for Fall, eager to clean up the department's reputation but wary of public criticism and political instability.
9. Senator William Borah – Republican Senator from Idaho. A prominent progressive voice and critic of corruption. May push for Senate-led investigations and independent inquiries.
10. Senator Thomas J. Walsh – Democratic Senator from Montana. Led early investigations into Teapot Dome. Advocates for justice regardless of party loyalty. Wants full accountability.
11. Everett Sanders – Coolidge's Executive Secretary. Manages internal politics and messaging within the White House. A loyal aide to Coolidge, focused on keeping the administration intact.
12. Clarence T. Mallory – (Fictional). Coolidge's Press Secretary. Handles media inquiries and public messaging. Must weigh transparency against political damage.
13. Jasper C. Eddington – (Fictional, loosely based on contemporary figures) Represents the business interests tied to the scandal. Could be seeking to defend their company, shift blame, or negotiate a quiet resolution.
14. Florence Harding – Former First Lady. Protective of her late husband's legacy. May obstruct efforts to expose wrongdoing tied to the Harding administration, or quietly support reform to restore dignity.
15. Ida Tarbell – Investigative journalist and muckraker (fictionalized role). Serves as a representative of the free press. May expose new evidence or push for public hearings.

16. Rev. Josiah Bell – (Fictional) Civic and religious leader. Represents the moral and faith-based constituencies of the country. Urges the administration to uphold truth and virtue.

Works Cited

(To be added)