**Civics 101**

**Episode 15: DEPARTMENT OF STATE DEPARTMENT OF DEFENSE**

**Virginia Prescott:** [00:00:00] I'm Virginia Prescott and this is Civics 101 a podcast refresher course on some basics that you may have forgotten from your U.S. history and government classes. Today we're talking about what have become two of the most powerful positions in a presidential cabinet. The secretary of state and secretary of defense respectively. Some of you have asked about how the approaches and responsibilities of these departments and their heads function in our government and our guide today is Linda Fowler. She's professor emeritus of government and chair in Policy Studies at Dartmouth College, author of several books including most recently Watchdogs on the Hill the decline of congressional oversight of U.S. foreign affairs from 1947 to 2008. Professor Fowler welcome to Civics 101.

**Linda Fowler:** [00:01:05] Well I always can use a refresher I had to do a little research before the show.

**Virginia Prescott:** [00:01:09] Well great. So everybody does.

**Linda Fowler:** [00:01:11] Glad to hear it.

**Virginia Prescott:** [00:01:12] Before we get to the origins of the position where are we now? Run through what the Department of State and the secretary of state includes what's under that purview.

**Linda Fowler:** [00:01:22] Well let's start with the Department of State which includes all of the ambassadors all of the administration for U.S. foreign aid programs that are not military aid. So this would be economic development creation of civil organizations, assisting with development of political institutions, whole set of things like that. The main function is diplomacy. There are an awful lot of things that happened behind the scenes where the secretary of state and undersecretaries are engaging with one on one conversations with their counterparts in other nations sometimes with our enemy sometimes with our friends and basically trying to understand each other and figure out where they can find common agreement. So it's a very sensitive post. It requires the Department requires people who have deep knowledge of the areas that they're responsible for, they provide the support for the ambassadors, many of whom are political appointees but many of whom are career diplomats and the secretary provides a lot of confidential advice to the president.

**Virginia Prescott:** [00:02:45] All right so that's the Department of State. How about the Department of Defense?

**Linda Fowler:** [00:02:48] The Secretary of Defense is also a major adviser to the president the Defense Department includes the Departments of the Navy the Army the Air Force, the Navy of course includes the Marines a variety of policy planning operations about procuring weapons overseas a lot of the private contractors that the U.S. government is employing now to manage drones in other field work for areas to engage in intelligence activities. And the secretary is responsible for coordinating activities between among the secretary of the Navy the secretary of the Air Force and the secretary of the Army. So it's an umbrella position and it of course oversees a huge bureaucracy. The defense budget is probably 600 billion dollars now. Compare that with the State Department budget which is about 10 to 12. The budgets of the two departments were much closer back in the late 1940s when the U.S. engaged in massive economic aid to Europe under the Marshall Plan.

**Virginia Prescott:** [00:04:13] Well let's go through that. Give us a little bit on the history of these two respective positions. When was the secretary of state position established?

**Linda Fowler:** [00:04:21] Well we had a secretary of state even before we were a nation because somebody had to be in Paris to negotiate the peace treaty to end the Revolutionary War. The first one was John Jay. And then he was followed by Thomas Jefferson a number of the secretaries of state have become president whether it's James Madison James Monroe James Buchanan. So it's an venerable position. It was has been extraordinarily important throughout our history up until recent times. And the reason for that is the United States was in peril after the Revolutionary War. We had the British patrolling the seas and occupying northern Canada. We had the French in Canada and on our western border in what became the Louisiana Territory and the and the Spanish on our southern border. And we had a very weak military and indeed the framers didn't want to have a standing army. They feared that a standing army would be utilized to waste taxpayers money and engage in unnecessary military interventions. So they put a lot of emphasis on diplomacy and that held true really up until probably the last couple of decades.

**Virginia Prescott:** [00:05:47] When was the secretary of defense position established?

**Linda Fowler:** [00:05:52] That was established in the 19 late 1940s as a reform enacted by Republicans after they gained control of Congress in 1947. And there they had promised to restore some balance to the government by strengthening Congress and bringing the president to heel after a long war. The secretary of defense was set up to ensure civilian control over the military and to put an end to the wasteful rivalries among the various war departments, the Army the Navy, and what came to be the Air Force.

**Virginia Prescott:** [00:06:33] But civilian control tell us more about that. This is something that did come up after Donald Trump named the retired four star Marine Corps General James Mattis as his pick for defense because he was considered, though retired, he'd been in the military very actively fairly recently.

**Linda Fowler:** [00:06:49] Well as part of the creation of this position because it was to impose a civil civilian control there is a restriction that no general may occupy the office unless he or she has been out of uniform for seven years. Now there was an exception made for General George Marshall who is one of the chief architects of the World War II effort and a major player in constructing the post-war policies of containment. And so he was given an exemption and that's the only one we've had until General Mattis.

**Virginia Prescott:** [00:07:30] So the secretary of state is now fourth in line of succession after the president, the secretary of defense is the sixth, I'd love to hear more about the difference in their approaches. And traditionally there has been some tension between the two spheres of influence thinking of more recently Donald Rumsfeld and Colin Powell and then Condoleezza Rice under George W. Bush. Are they, these two positions by their very nature oppositional?

**Linda Fowler:** [00:07:57] Well yes and that's actually healthy. It's best if the president hears competing views about how the U.S. should respond to a crisis. In this current world where the U.S. is the superpower and is expected to and sees itself as having interests all around the globe, there are always debates about whether one should send a destroyer or an aircraft carrier or insert Special Forces or try to settle disputes diplomatically. So a good example would be General Eisenhower's handling of the situation with China where the Chinese were threatening to seize two islands Quemoy and Matsu. And there were huge debates about whether the U.S. should intervene militarily against China, having been in war with China over Korea, and so they engaged in diplomacy and saber rattling. The president sent ships to sort of demonstrate resolve but at the same time there were major talks going on behind the scenes and that's often how big how major international crises happen particularly in the nuclear era. You don't want to confuse your enemy. You don't want to send the wrong signals or have them misunderstand the signals. So diplomacy is really important but we tend to dismiss it because we don't see it. And if it's successful we really don't see it because the bad thing didn't happen.

**Virginia Prescott:** [00:09:55] Well I think of it as those sort of quiet conversations in hushed rooms with lots of drapery you know and one of my colleagues came up with a great analogy for it. Like if you look at a cop show you've got a tense situation and then you've got a negotiator there who's trying to talk down the person who's holding the hostages and they're saying no, give me more time to talk this out and the SWAT team saying no we're going in there. Does that analogy actually work for the secretary of state and secretary of defense?

**Linda Fowler:** [00:10:24] I think that's a good one. And the secretary of defense's job is basically to outline the alternatives. This is what we could reasonably expect to achieve with force at this particular level of force. Here's the risk we assign to that outcome with more force we might increase the probability but we would also raise the costs and we're always at the risk of diminishing U.S. prestige if we intervene militarily and it fails. So what these two secretaries are doing is trying to communicate to the president what are the costs and benefits of an array of policies that the president could adopt. And both of these secretaries of course work closely with the president's national security adviser in the White House and also with the CIA director.

**Virginia Prescott:** [00:11:21] Well now we in the current administration we have a political outsider as secretaries of state in Rex Tillerson and then we have General Mattis 'Mad Dog' Mattis as he is often called as the secretary of defense. So to people who haven't served in the government traditionally, the case has been made that because they are outsiders they have more of those kind of out of the box kind of ideas and solutions. How do you look at that kind of current configuration?

**Linda Fowler:** [00:11:47] I think out of the box is greatly over rated. When you're dealing with complicated international issues and I let just put my bias out there. There are a lot of ideas that haven't been adopted that have been considered in the past and they haven't been adopted because actually they should be in the box. And so having continuity and having experienced people I think is very important. But I don't consider General Mattis to be an outsider. He's been stationed in the Pentagon. That's an enormous bureaucracy. He's had interactions with the National Security Council and with both President Obama and President Bush. So generals aren't outsiders. He is known to be outspoken and known to be willing to deliver bad news. He came to my class a couple of years ago. He had retired. Aha yeah. And he he lived up to his reputation. I found him terrific with the students he was engaging he was forthright. He was extremely impressive but outsider is not the word I would use. I would say in many ways Secretary Tillerson is also not an outsider in the conventional world. The oil company he ran is a global player. They have operations in Africa and the Middle East in Latin America and all over the place and many of these of the countries where the company is dealing trying to extract oil, they have to deal directly with governments and often these governments are not very stable. So I would say he's probably more knowledgeable about international affairs than he's probably been given credit for. So he's not an amateur in the way that our president is.

**Virginia Prescott:** [00:13:59] Professor Fowler thank you so much for speaking with us.

**Linda Fowler:** [00:14:02] You're welcome.

**Virginia Prescott:** [00:14:03] Linda Fowler is professor emeritus of government at Dartmouth College and author of several books most recently watchdogs on the Hill about the decline of congressional oversight of America's foreign affairs. From 1947 to 2008.

[00:14:20] OK.