# POSITION DESCRIPTION

# assistant to the president and counsel to the president, white house

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| **OVERVIEW** |
| Position Type | Presidential appointment (PA) |
| Agency Mission | The Office of White House Counsel advises the president, the Office of the President and the White House staff on all legal issues pertaining to the president and the White House.[[1]](#endnote-1) |
| Position Overview | The counsel to the president is a key member of the White House senior staff, responsible for advising the president in his official capacity on legal issues.[[2]](#endnote-2) |
| Compensation | $176,461 in 2016[[3]](#endnote-3) |
| Position Reports to | Reports to the president through the White House chief of staff |
| **RESPONSIBILITIES** |
| Management Scope | There are about 40 people in the Office of the Counsel to the President. In recent history the office has tended to start with approximately 15 lawyers and grow over time as the complexity of legal issues facing the president expands. Generally, the office consists of one or two deputy counsels, a varying number of associate and assistant counsels, a special counsel when a “short-term crisis issue” arises, a senior counsel and various support staff. The counsel to the president also manages the ethics counsel. |
| Primary Responsibilities | * Advises on presidential powers and defense of presidential constitutional prerogatives, including but not limited to: executive privilege, presidential disability and succession.
* Serves as an advisor *on* the presidency as an institution, not as the president’s personal lawyer
* Makes recommendations regarding editing and clearing presidential statements and speeches
* Writes executive orders
* Oversees and participates in presidential nominations and appointments to executive and judicial branches (supervises the vetting and clearance process, prepares nominee for confirmation hearing)
* Advises on presidential actions relating to the legislative process
* Advises on ethical questions, including but not limited to: educating staffers on ethics of rules and records management, and monitoring adherence (for the whole administration, establishes guidelines at start of administration)
* Monitors and handles department, agency and White House staff contacts with the Department of Justice
* Reviews all investigations and associated proceedings that focus on the White House
* Advises on matters relating to the president’s exercise of his war powers
* Advises on proposed invocations of executive privilege[[4]](#endnote-4)
* Does all preparatory work on Supreme Court nominees
* Liaises with Office of Legal Counsel in the Department of Justice
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| Strategic Goals and Priorities | [Depends on the policy priorities of the administration] |
| **REQUIREMENTS AND COMPETENCIES** |
| Requirements | * Deep proven experience as a legal advisor in sensitive and politically charged situations
* Well-informed about presidential policy, with ability to balance sound legal reasoning with policy considerations
* Ready access to information and knowledge on how and where to get it, as well as who has it[[5]](#endnote-5)
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| Competencies | * Ability to master a broad range of material with cross currents of legal, political and constitutional issues
* Comfortable with crisis management—working in unpredictable crisis situations with incomplete facts and able to meet quick deadlines for advice and action
* Ability to maintain good relations with the office of legal counsel and others
* Established personal and professional reputation and strength to direct the president—including the ability to tell the president when not to do things he is considering and to explain the reasons why[[6]](#endnote-6)
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| **PAST APPOINTEES** |
| Warren “Neil” Eggleston (2014 to 2017) - Partner, Kirkland & Ellis; Associate Counsel, White House[[7]](#endnote-7) |
| Kathy Ruemmler (2011 to 2014) - Principal Associate Deputy Attorney General, Department of Justice; Assistant United States Attorney, Department of Justice; Deputy Director, Enron Task Force[[8]](#endnote-8) |
| Bob Bauer (2010 to 2011) – Partner, Perkins Coie[[9]](#endnote-9) |

# Endnotes

This position description was created with the help of Martha Kumar from the White House Transition Project, which provides information to a new White House staff about their individual offices thereby streamlining the process of transition from one administration to the next.

1. <https://www.whitehouse.gov/participate/internships/departments#WHC> [↑](#endnote-ref-1)
2. Romney Readiness Project position description [↑](#endnote-ref-2)
3. <https://www.whitehouse.gov/21stcenturygov/tools/salaries> [↑](#endnote-ref-3)
4. Romney Readiness Project position description [↑](#endnote-ref-4)
5. Romney Readiness Project position description [↑](#endnote-ref-5)
6. Romney Readiness Project position description [↑](#endnote-ref-6)
7. <http://www.politico.com/story/2014/04/w-neil-eggleston-white-house-counsel-105869> [↑](#endnote-ref-7)
8. <https://www.lw.com/people/kathrynruemmler> [↑](#endnote-ref-8)
9. <https://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/statement-president-obama-greg-craig-and-bob-bauer> [↑](#endnote-ref-9)