

TEXT SUMMARY

The **civil service** is the group of public employees who perform the government's administrative work outside the military. Some of the early Presidents gave government jobs to their supporters or friends—a practice called **patronage**. The practice of giving government jobs, as well as favors, as political rewards is called the **spoils system**.

The spoils system resulted in inefficiency and corruption. Attempts to reform it began in 1881 after a disappointed office-seeker killed President James Garfield. Congress soon passed the Civil Service Act of 1883, also called the Pendleton Act, which laid the foundation for the present federal civil service system. Its main purpose was to make merit the only basis for hiring federal workers.

Today most federal employees are hired through a competitive process. They are also paid and promoted based on written evaluations from their superiors. The Office of Personnel Management, an independent agency, tests and hires most federal workers. It keeps **registers**, or lists of qualified applicants. Another independent agency, the Merit Systems Protection Board, enforces the merit principle in the federal bureaucracy. It is **bipartisan**, or made up of members from both major parties.

Civil servants must follow certain rules. Several laws and regulations place restrictions on their political activities. For example, while civil servants may be active members of a political party, they may not run in elections for that party.

THE BIG IDEA

Most of the people who work for the Federal Government are members of the civil service and are hired and promoted based on their job performance.

GRAPHIC SUMMARY: *The Reform of the Civil Service*

Before Civil Service Legislation

Government officials give jobs and favors to friends and supporters, creating an inefficient and corrupt system of government.

After Civil Service Legislation

Government workers are hired based on examinations, and promotions are given based on merit. The competitive nature of this system allows for higher quality work.

Today, the vast majority of civil servants are hired and promoted based on their job performance, not party membership or personal relationships.

REVIEW QUESTIONS

1. What is the civil service?

2. **Diagram Skills** How are government workers hired today?