

US Secretary of Agriculture Tom Vilsack



Biography

Secretary Vilsack has a strong personal relationship with Hillary Clinton, starting decades before they served in President Obama’s Cabinet together. Vilsack was abandoned at an orphanage in Pittsburg as a baby. Adopted by local parents, he received his BA at Hamilton College and JD at Albany School of Law. After graduating in 1975, he moved to his wife’s home state of Iowa to practice law. In 1987, he was elected Mayor of Mount Pleasant, Iowa, after he was asked to run. In 1992, he ran for Iowa’s State Senate. Six years later, he became the first democratic governor of Iowa in 32 years, serving for two terms. As governor, Vilsack worked to improve early childhood education, expand healthcare, and make Iowa a renewable energy leader. He was named Governor of the Year in 2001 by Biotechnology Industry Organization. In 2005, he signed legislation enabling 80,000 ex-cons to vote. Vilsack was considered by Kerry as a potential VP pick, but was passed over for John Edwards. In 2007, Vilsack ran for a few months in the presidential election before dropping out and backing Clinton. Vilsack is a proponent of corn subsidies, wind generated energy, and farm conservation programs. His commitment to ending global warming was a large factor in Obama selecting him for Secretary of Agriculture in 2008. Vilsack is the last remaining member of Obama’s original cabinet. As Secretary, he pushed to revitalize rural America, protect food stamps, fight obesity, make school lunches healthier, and invest in renewable energy. Vilsack has a relatively unblemished background, however he faced criticism for firing a Georgia USDA official who was falsely accused of making racist statements. He later offered to rehire her, but she turned the job down.

Biography

Currently:
Secretary of Agriculture

Education:
Hamilton College (1972)
Albany School of Law, J.D. (1975)

Family: Christie (wife), two sons

Previous Experience

- Mayor of Mount Pleasant, IA (1987-1992)
- Iowa State Senator (1992-1998)
- Governor of Iowa (1998 – 2006)
- Partner at Dorsey & Whitney LLP
- Distinguished Fellow at Iowa State University’s Biosafety Institute for Genetically Modified Agricultural Products
- Secretary of Agriculture (2009 – Present)

Pence as VP

- **Pro:** Vilsack appeals to white blue color workers and low income whites in rural areas, amongst whom Clinton has low favorability numbers
- **Pro:** Has a strong record as Secretary of Agriculture and is well liked in Washington
- **Pro:** He has a very close relationship with Hillary Clinton
- **Con:** Vilsack has supported the TPP, which Hillary Clinton opposes
- **Con:** He will not excite the populist base that supported Bernie Sanders that Hillary wants to mobilize on her behalf in November

Sources: Kate Pickert, “Secretary of Agriculture: Tom Vilsack,” Time, Dec. 19, 2016; Gabriel Debenedetti and Helena Bottemiller Evich, “Vilsack Stock Rises as Clinton Nears VP Pick,” Politico, July 19, 2016; Catherine Lucey, “Tom Vilsack a Rise from Orphanage to Cabinet Secretary,” Philly Voice, July 20, 2016.