

Twenty-Seventh Congress

Mar. 31, 1841-Mar. 3, 1843

Administration of William Henry Harrison/ Administration of John Tyler*

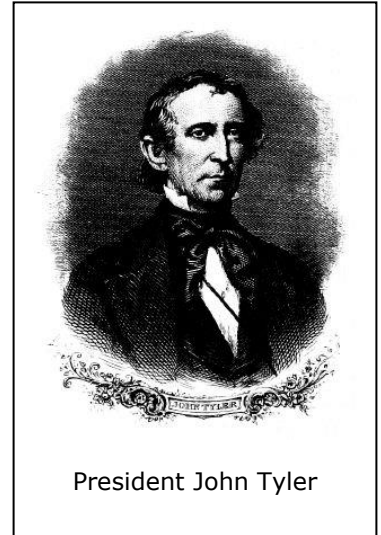
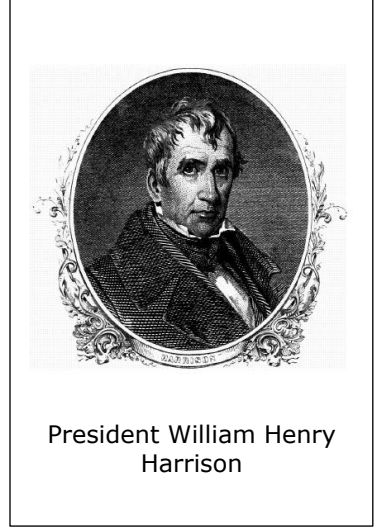
*William Henry Harrison died of pneumonia on Apr. 4, 1841, just 31 days after taking office. Harrison's Vice President, John Tyler, succeeded him becoming the 10th President of the U.S.

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Historical Background

The Presidential campaign of 1840 leading up to the 27th Congress played an important role in the political debates and policies which would come to dominate the next two years. During the election the First Independent Treasury Act, enacted during the 26th Congress, came under attack by the Whig party as a dangerous economic experiment associated with the financial disasters of the Van Buren Administration. When the 27th Congress convened, repealing the Act fulfilled an important promise of the William Henry Harrison campaign. Sadly, President Harrison would not live to see that promise fulfilled. Barely a month after his inauguration, President Harrison succumbed to pneumonia and his elected Vice President, John Tyler, became the first Vice President to succeed to the Presidency prior to the completion of his predecessor's term.

However, Tyler proved to be a stubbornly independent Whig President, vetoing several key initiatives central to the party's national platform. After repealing the First Independent Treasury Act, the Whig leadership proceeded with their plan to enact an alternative to an independent treasury: authorizing a new national bank that would serve as the depository for Federal government funds. Tyler had not supported the Second Bank of the United States, which dissolved when then President Andrew Jackson vetoed a bill to renew its charter and still doubted whether the establishment of a national bank was good policy.



For many in the party, most especially Kentucky Senator Henry Clay, the establishment of a new national bank was a critical step toward economic recovery and the turmoil associated with the Presidency of Martin Van Buren. President Tyler vetoed the first national bank bill passed by the Congress, with the suggestion that Congress hammer out a compromise version he could then support. Though Clay and his allies in the party indicated their willingness to work out a compromise acceptable to the President, the ambitious Senator had designs on leadership of the party and had no real intention of acceding to the President's demands. The second national bank bill passed by the Congress failed to satisfy Tyler's chief reservations and was again vetoed. The veto of the second bank bill infuriated many in his party and led to the resignation of Tyler's entire cabinet, except for Secretary of State Daniel Webster. Tyler's intransigence on the bank issue and other significant policy areas created an opening for the ambitious Senator Clay to challenge President Tyler for leadership of the party and, ultimately, for the Presidency.

In September 1841, Whigs in Congress expelled Tyler from the party, deepening the rift between the governing party in the Congress and the executive they needed to sign the legislation they approved. The crisis deepened in 1842 as Tyler continued to confidently wield his veto power, this time vetoing efforts to overhaul the nation's tariffs regime to forestall a looming revenue shortfall. Early that year Kentucky Senator Henry Clay resigned his office with the intention of seeking the Whig nomination for the Presidential campaign of 1844. Meanwhile, Whigs in the House who considered Tyler's vetoes to be an unconstitutional abrogation of legislative authority, initiated impeachment proceedings against Tyler. Though Congressional Whigs viewed impeachment as wholly justifiable, they knew they were unlikely to generate the two-thirds majorities needed for impeachment and conviction and therefore stopped short of explicitly recommending impeachment. Though Congress was able to pass a compromise Tariff of 1842 that the President signed into law, the conflict with Tyler consumed Congressional Whigs, who were able to accomplish little else that year. Opposition Democrats exploited the impasse, winning control of the House in the midterm election of 1842.

Sources:

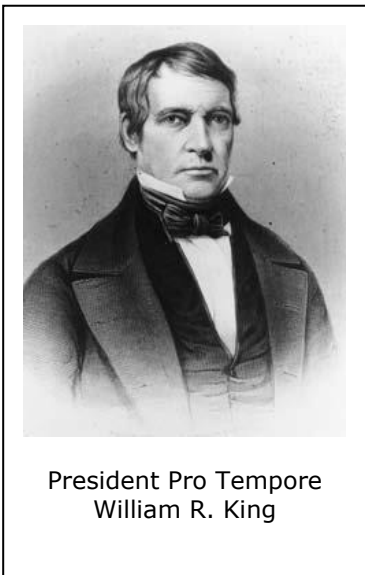
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House	Senate
Majority Party: Whigs (142 seats)	Majority Party: Whigs (29 seats)
Minority Party: Democrats (98 seats)	Minority Party: Democrats (22 seats)
Other Parties: Independent (1 seat) Independent Democrats (1 seat)	Other Parties: None
Speaker of the House: John White	President Pro Tempore: William R. King; Samuel Southard; Willie P. Mangum



War or Peace?

Though the U.S. was largely at peace during the 27th Congress, policymakers were beginning to reconceive the nation's military philosophy at a time when westward expansion was preparing to move into high gear. In his first address before Congress, President Tyler echoed former President James Monroe's advocacy for maintaining a suitable permanent military in peace time. Tyler explained, "the policy [. . .] of preserving a regularly organized staff sufficient for the command of a large military force, should the necessity for one arise, is founded as well in economy as in true wisdom."

The dynamics of westward expansion in this period were deeply intertwined with the issue of slavery, which was driving the country toward sectional conflict. Southerners broadly supported efforts to expand white settlement in the western territories as they viewed it as an opportunity to expand the territories in which slavery was permitted and thereby increasing the influence of slaveholding states in the Congress. For this reason, northerners and abolitionists were skeptical of the push westward, seeing it as a ploy on the part of the southern states to forestall efforts at abolition by stacking the legislative deck.

Second Seminole War

President Tyler was further able to end a conflict that had involved the three previous administrations: The Second Seminole War. Subsequent to acquiring Florida from Spain, the Federal government was under pressure by settlers there to remove the various confederations of Native American tribes, collectively referred to as Seminoles, living in the territory. In 1835 conflict arose when members of the Seminoles refused to be relocated under the Treaty of Payne's Landing, arguing they have been forced to sign. Growing costs of the prolonged conflict prompted President Tyler in May 1842 to propose a new strategy, stating, "the Indian mode of warfare, their dispersed condition, very smallness in number, increase the difficulty of finding them." He decreased troop numbers and gave greater control to the commanding officers in the Florida territory, eventually claiming victory in August of 1842. More than 10,000 active duty service members saw action, along with the 30,000 militia and volunteers, at a cost of \$30-40 million. The Army accumulated 1400 deaths, mostly from disease, with 320 killed in action. Native-American forces totaled 1,400, with no more than two hundred and forty in the waning days of 1841.

Dorr Rebellion

Elsewhere, in May 1842, Rhode Island's government still functioned with a constitutional structure established in 1663. Unlike elsewhere in the country, white male suffrage in Rhode Island was severely limited. Reformers organized an extralegal constitutional convention, followed by a legal one authorized by the legitimate government. Asked by both sides to intervene, President Tyler helped to defuse the crisis. He declined to send the army to Rhode Island, urged compromise by the two parties, and called upon the rebels to disperse. After a brief skirmish, the rebellion subsided.



President Pro Tempore
Samuel Southard



President Pro Tempore
Willie P. Mangum

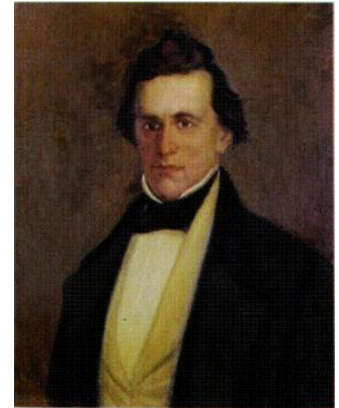
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Speaker of the House
John White

Economic Trends and Conditions

Whig leaders sought the reestablishment of the National Bank. Based on the assumption that because the Harrison-Tyler ticket had an easy victory and because Whigs had gained majorities in the House and Senate, the party believed the public had embraced the party's economic policy. However, President Tyler had opposed the reestablishment of a true national bank and proposed the creation of a central bank in Washington, D.C., that could set up branches in other states only with the permission of the respective state legislatures. Whigs in Congress insisted upon a charter for a National Bank in which directors could establish branches in any state. Congress sent the legislation to the President, but he vetoed the bill ten days later.

Responding to the President's efforts to reach a compromise, Congressional Whigs made some, albeit superficial concessions in drafting a second version of the national bank bill. They renamed and recast the bank bill as the Fiscal Corporation Act, in deference to Tyler's views, but authorized the fiscal corporation to create branches in any state, more power than the president would concede. Tyler vetoed the second bank bill and within days, five of the cabinet's six members resigned, with only Secretary of State Daniel Webster remaining at his post. After the presidential vetoes, Whig congressmen ousted Tyler from their party, denouncing him for usurping the powers of Congress.

Moreover, President Tyler faced a nearly empty treasury when the regular session of Congress opened in December 1841. He urged Congress to increase tariffs and proposed an end to the practice of distributing the proceeds of public land sales to the states and apply those revenues to a budgetary deficit. Congressional Whigs twice passed legislation increasing tariffs while maintaining distribution, which Tyler summarily vetoed. Whig leaders, fearful of voter retribution for government bankruptcy, uncoupled the issues and passed both bills. Tyler quickly signed the Tariff of 1842, but vetoed the distribution bill.

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Major Treaties

Webster-Ashburton Treaty. Defined the boundary between Maine and Canada and settled minor boundary disputes with the British provinces over the northeast boundary of the United States. Concluded August 9, 1842. Approved by the Senate August 20, 1842. ([8 Stat. 572](#))

Sources:

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Landmark U.S. Supreme Court Decisions

Swift v. Tyson, concluded state court decisions were not laws within the meaning of certain statutes and though entitled to respect, were not binding on federal judges, except with regard to matters of a local nature, in contrast to questions of general commercial law which answers were independent not on decisions of the local tribunals, but in general principles and doctrines of commercial jurisprudence, 41 U.S. 1 (1842)

Prigg v. Pennsylvania, concluded that federal law was superior, but that states could not be compelled to enforce federal laws, 41 U.S. 539 (1842)

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Costello, George A. and Johnny H. Killian. [Constitution of the United States of America. Analysis and Interpretation](#). CRS, Library of Congress, Jan. 1, 1996. 103rd Congress, 1st Session, S. Doc. 103-6 (Y1.1/3:103-6). ProQuest Congressional, 14152 S.doc.6

1841 Events

- **Jan. 26:** British sovereignty is proclaimed over the Chinese port of Hong Kong
- **Feb. 18-Mar. 11:** [First ongoing filibuster in the Senate takes place over ousting the Senate printers](#)
- **Mar. 4:** [Martin Van Buren is succeeded as President of the United States by William Henry Harrison](#)
- **Mar. 9:** *United States v. The Amistad* - [the Supreme Court rules in favor of the Africans stating they had been taken into slavery illegally](#)

- **Apr. 4:** [President William H Harrison dies of pneumonia after just one month in office; Vice President John Tyler succeeds him becoming the tenth president of the U.S.](#)
- **May:** *Second Seminole War* – [Col. William Jenkins Worth takes command of the Army forces in Florida](#)
- **May 1:** [The first emigrant wagon train leave Independence, Missouri for California](#)
- **May 3:** New Zealand becomes a British colony
- **July 13:** By the Convention of the Straits, the European powers guarantee Ottoman independence and the Dardanelles and Bosphorus are closed to warships of all nations in peacetime (thus nullifying the 1833 Treaty of Unkiar-Skelessi)
- **Aug. 13:** [Whig controlled Congress repeals the Independent Treasury Act](#)
- **Aug. 16:** [President Tyler vetoes the creation of a new National Bank causing Whig party members to 'riot' in front of the White House](#)
- **Aug. 30:** Robert Peel becomes prime minister in Britain after the Conservative victory in the General Election caused the Whig government of Lord Melbourne to resign
- **Sept. 9:** [Tyler's second veto of a bill to create the Bank of the United States enrages Henry Clay and the Whig party, leading to mass cabinet resignations two days later](#)
- **Nov.:** *United States v. The Amistad* - Freed African survivors of the slave ship Amistad returned to Sierra Leone, Africa

1842 Events

- **Jan. 23:** Most of General William Elphinstone's British forces are massacred by Afghan troops at Gandalak, Afghanistan, in the First Afghan War
- **Mar.:** The Massachusetts State Supreme Court issues a ruling that makes strikes and unions legal in the U.S.
- **Apr. 12:** The Mutual Life Insurance Company of New York receives the first charter granted to a life insurance firm in the United States
- **June 13:** [Charles Wilkes returns from an Oregon Territory expedition with an optimistic description of its settlement potential](#)
- **Aug. 9:** [Webster-Ashburton Treaty is signed resolving the border dispute between Maine and New Brunswick](#)
- **Aug. 14th:** *Second Seminole War* – [Worth proclaims the Second Seminole War over with only a few hundred Seminoles remaining in Florida](#)
- **Aug. 29:** [By the Treaty of Nanjing, which ended the First Opium War between Britain and China, Canton, Shanghai, and other Chinese ports are opened to Britain](#)
- **Oct. 10:** The First Anglo-Afghan War ends in British defeat after the massacre of over 3,000 British and Indian troops
- **Nov. 22:** Mount St Helen's in Washington state erupts beginning 15 years of intermittent eruptions
- **Dec. 7:** [President Tyler's annual message to Congress extends the Monroe Doctrine to Hawaii](#)

Sources:

["A treaty, to settle and define the boundaries between the territories of the United States and the possessions of her Britannic Majesty in North America; for the final suppression of the African slave trade; and for the giving up of criminals, fugitives from justice, in certain cases. August 9, 1842."](#) (8 Stat. 572; Aug. 9, 1842). ProQuest Congressional

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Hale, Horatio. [U.S. exploring expedition during years 1838-1842, under command of Charles Wilkes. U.S.N.: Vol. VI \[...\]](#). C. Sherman, Jan. 1, 1846. (N1.8:W65/7). ProQuest Congressional, N108-8.7

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[President elect](#). House. Feb. 12, 1841. 26th Congress, 2nd Session, H.rp.165. ProQuest Congressional, 388 H.rp.165

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Tyler, John. [Promotes Col. Worth to commander of Florida Army](#). General Orders, 1841 No. 29, May 20, 1841. 27th Congress. ProQuest Congressional, 1841-54-3

Tyler, John. [Schooner Amistad. Message from the President of the United States \[...\] on the subject of the schooner "Amistad."](#) Committee on Foreign Affairs, House, Feb. 27, 1843. 27th Congress, 3rd Session, H.doc.191. ProQuest Congressional, 422 H.doc.191

Webster, Daniel. [Funeral expenses \(With bill no. 31.\) Funeral expenses of William Henry Harrison, late President of the United States](#), Committee on Ways and Means. House, Apr. 4, 1841. H.doc.55. ProQuest Congressional, 392 H.doc.55

Major Acts

Repeal of the Independent Treasury Act. Ordered the removal of all Government funds from the depositories created by order of the Independent Treasury Act of 1840. Approved Aug. 13, 1841. ([5 Stat. 439, Chap. 7](#))

Tariff of 1842. Restored duties to the higher levels effective in 1832, and simultaneously ended the distribution of revenues to the states. Approved Aug. 30, 1842. ([5 Stat. 548, Chap. 270](#))

Sources:

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