

**John Catron to Andrew Jackson, December 9, 1844,  
from Correspondence of Andrew Jackson. Edited by  
John Spencer Bassett.**

class=MsoNormal>JUSTICE CATRON TO JACKSON.

Washington, December 9, 1844.

My dear Sir, I have been here a week and of course have heard many speculations in regard to the formation of the new Cabinet of Gov. Polk. On this subject I have no knowledge, nor do I wish to have any, as a denial in case I had would be difficult. Mr. Blair on Saturday said to me he thought entirely new men, exclusive of all such as had any aspirations to the Succession, should be selected. Of this idea I have considered somewhat, and come to a contrary conclusion. The people of this country will not be satisfied, unless they have faith, (founded on previously formed opinion,) in those who administer the Government. To names 0361 337 filling the widest space, all popular Governments have been driven; the strength of a Cabinet consists in reputation for ability, as much as in the actual ability of its members. I have come to the conclusion therefore, that our friend's Cabinet should consist of the great leaders up to some four, or more. And it seems to me the Tariff question can best be compromised, and be gotten on with, by such an organization. It is the great stumbling-block: not that I think it presents the extreme difficulties, some of our northern friends think it does. Down to the 35th degree (Virginia excepted), there will not be much trouble in an adjustment; but to attain it, the South must be dealt with openly, frankly, and as fairly, as can be done in the face of a large northern majority, standing firmly up to quite higher protection than the South will be content to allow. By commanding leaders in the Cabinet, this compromise can be made, with more success it seems to me, than in any other mode. If such a cabinet can agree on the first message of Gov. Polk great difficulties will be removed; such an agreement will

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command the House, in all probability; and not so much is to be apprehended from the Senate, on a Tariff bill.

Mr. Blair obviously apprehends much heartburning would arise if aspirants to the presidency were in the Cabinet. In this I differ, to a material extent. No Cabinet officer can intrigue for the presidency without easy detection; and if he runs the hazard of being turned out, for the attempt of seeking popularity, as he ought to be, the course will be too palpably weak for adoption. A rejected Secretary, is a ruined man, for more than four years with his party, in this aspect. Such is all experience. Hence the Presdt. has the matter in his own keeping, if he rigorously takes in hand his own administration and decidedly leads. Furthermore: Intrigues for the presidency create too much Jealousy, resentment and resistance, to have much promise of fruition in them; one entirely aside from them, has a far better chance before a convention of a party. The nominations of Gnl. Harrison by the Whigs, and of Gov. Polk by the Democrats, is a fearful warning to every thinking man equal to the station, that modest retirement creates fewer enmities than any other course, and that the absence of electioneering is the best. Few men in the U.S. have ever been more exempt from this than Mr. Van Buren; Still the anxiety of his friends for years before the convention met at Baltimore injured his prospects.

I do not think Gov. Polk should come to any decisive conclusion as to men, before he reaches here, and looks well over the ground after due consideration, at this place.

These ideas are of course crude, because I am no politician, and only say to you, what occurs to my mind as proper, for your own consideration, in as much as I differ with others on this important subject. . . .

[ Indorsement: ] Judge Catron not answered. His conclusions, I cannot agree with. No aspirant for the succession ought to form one of the Cabinet. A.J.