

# *Epilogue — Assessing Transition 2001*

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Lessons that are so obvious in this town are never learned and everybody has to reinvent the wheel.

— Leon Panetta, *Running the White House*  
Symposium, Heritage Foundation, 18 November 1999.

Only one person has ever repeated as White House Chief of Staff. Given this simple historical fact and the propensity of a new president's team to arrive in town bearing the triple curses of arrogance, adrenalin, and naiveté, managing to govern can easily become a matter of on-the-job training. Assuring the smooth transfer of authority in spite of these probabilities prompted the former White House Chiefs of Staff to convene. They wanted to make a public record of those lessons they knew would make the job easier. At the Forum, they did not know who would receive their advice. As it turned out, several of the former Chiefs would play a prominent role in the transition and new government. That particular day in 2000, however, they only wanted to make that person's transition as smooth and as effective as they could.

The mystery disappeared the morning of 2 November 2000, when Andrew H. Card, Jr., went to work knowing that in a very few weeks he would likely lead a team into the nerve center.<sup>9</sup> Though he did not know

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<sup>9</sup> Actually, Card did not know about his selection until after breakfast with Governor Bush. The candidate and his transition planners thought they had offered Card the job a week earlier. Calling him at his Massachusetts home on 28 October 2000, Governor Bush had told Card to get ready to take on the "big one." The Governor had also used this language before the Republican

who would join him, Secretary Card worked with several advantages that day. First, he had a head start, and with it, one objective of the Baker Institute convocation of former Chiefs of Staff had come to fruition – to lay the foundation for early planning *during* the presidential campaign. Though the next few weeks would present an extraordinary tableau of political crisis, behind those scenes Card's White House transition would progress methodically incorporating the lessons other Chiefs of Staff had offered.

Andrew Card had two other advantages that first morning. To begin, he had his own experiences, including positions both inside and outside of the White House. From the outside, he had served as political operative for Candidate George H. W. Bush, as a member of President Bush's Cabinet, and then as a private lobbyist for General Motors. From the inside, no one else possessed more experience working in the White House. Hired originally by James A. Baker, III during the Reagan "troika," Card had worked, by his count, in eight White House operations.<sup>10</sup> Thus, he possessed an extraordinarily learned view on the nature and demands of White House operations.<sup>11</sup>

Second, Card had George W. Bush. The former Chiefs of Staff had convened in Washington to invest their substantial and collective reputations in publicly underscoring the respectability of and need for early

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convention, when he had told Card to "keep his dance card open for the 'big one'." Convinced that Governor Bush had asked him to direct the transition, Card then left for a two-day briefing with Clay Johnson in Austin and with former President Bush in Houston before flying on to meet with the Governor on the campaign trail in Florida. Not until the end of Thursday's breakfast, did Card conclude that the Governor had actually asked him to consider serving as the White House Chief of Staff. For his part, Clay Johnson had simply assumed that Card understood what the Governor intended and had never broached the subject specifically during their briefing. Interview with Andrew J. Card, Jr., James A. Baker III Institute White House Transition Project, Terry Sullivan, 7 December 2001, Washington, D. C.

<sup>10</sup> These included the three "Chiefs" of the troika (Baker, Meese, and Deaver), James Baker alone, Donald Regan, Howard Baker, Jr., Kenneth Duberstein, and then John Sununu. Interview of Andrew J. Card, Jr., James A. Baker III Institute White House Transition Project, Terry Sullivan, 10 April 2002, the White House, Washington, D. C.

<sup>11</sup> One might argue that Card had an additional advantage in that the President-elect had designated as transition leader (what Card had thought of as the "Big One") another well seasoned White House veteran and former White House Chief of Staff (and Forum participant) Richard Cheney. Clay Johnson had convinced Governor Bush that the transition would need a unified head and that Cheney should lead the effort. (See Clay Johnson, III, "The 2000-2001 Presidential Transition – Planning, Goals and Reality," *PS – Political Science and Politics*, March 2002). Their plan called for the Cheney/Johnson team to focus on developing the Executive Branch transitions, leaving with Card full responsibility for the White House. That division matched arrangements in the George H. W. Bush transition (see Interview with Andrew Card, White House 2001 Project, White House Interview Program, Martha J. Kumar, 25 May 1999, Cambridge, Massachusetts).

planning. By their collective appearance, they hoped the country would understand that it no longer could afford presidential candidates, or media, or voters who thought such planning presumptuous. Beginning in the spring of 1999, Governor Bush reorganized his staff, moving his then Chief of Staff Joe Albaugh into the campaign as director and Clay Johnson, III from Appointments Director to Chief of Staff. Governor Bush then charged Johnson to “develop a plan for what we should do after we win.” A year later with the primary season behind him and the prospects of the general campaign settling in, Candidate Bush worried about their planning effort finding its way into the campaign coverage. Having thought through this problem for almost a year, Johnson responded by stressing the necessity of the task. “It has to happen,” he recalls telling the Governor, “We just have to figure out the best way to spin it. It’s irresponsible not to be doing this.” Persuaded and committed to his earlier decision, Candidate Bush took Johnson’s advice. Thus, the former Chiefs of Staff reached a second of their goals when, only a few days after the Forum and bolstered by Johnson’s own argument, the Bush for President senior campaign staff approved Clay Johnson’s program, setting out eight goals for their presidential transition still five months in the future, *if* at all.<sup>12</sup>

This essay assesses the 2001 transition to the George W. Bush White House. It identifies six transition goals organized around the two operational dilemmas introduced earlier. Using materials from interviews with the principals and corroborating analysis, it evaluates how well the Bush White House organized itself to realize these goals. It concludes that on balance, the 2001 transition set records, clearly besting previous transitions despite the obvious challenges set before it. Its success clearly stems from its advanced preparations. And the essay concludes with three suggestions for bolstering future planning efforts so to make effective transitions a hallmark of governing from the American nerve center.

## **TWO OPERATIONAL DILEMMAS, SIX TRANSITION STANDARDS**

Despite the extraordinary public attention paid them, presidential transitions have no roadmap. This section identifies in detail six milestones

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<sup>12</sup> Interview with Clay Johnson, James A. Baker III Institute White House Transition Project, Terry Sullivan, 26 September 2002, Washington, D. C.

for a successful transition. These standards revolve around discipline and effectiveness, the two operational dilemmas facing a Chief of Staff.

### **SOURCES OF STANDARDS**

During the presidential election of 2000, two parallel efforts tried to identify what constituted a good presidential transition. As indicated earlier, the Bush for President campaign developed a set of guidelines. And a number of scholarly groups, including the Baker Institute, concentrated on devising transition objectives. The evaluation to follow draws on both these efforts as did the two efforts themselves collaborated with each other.<sup>13</sup>

#### ***The Bush Transition Plan***

Long before the election had become hopelessly muddled, both campaigns began transition planning. For the most part, the Al Gore for President campaign focused its efforts on identifying policy options available to the new administration. Presumably, their planners had already settled on maintaining the basic Clinton White House operation.<sup>14</sup> The George W. Bush for President transition planners, on the other hand, spent considerable time developing information about operations. Their efforts culminated in the eight goals adopted in June of 2000<sup>15</sup>:

1. Clearly communicate that we are aggressively preparing to govern, that we are operating without hubris or triumphant partisanship, that we are experienced and not neophytes, that we are ethical, and that we understand that President-elect is not the President until noon on January 20.
2. Select the senior White House staff and an organizational structure and decision-making process by mid-December.
3. Select the Cabinet secretaries by Christmas and have them briefed and ready for confirmation hearings by

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<sup>13</sup> For example, the Baker Institute's White House Transition Project, the White House 2001 Project, and the Brookings Institution's Presidential Appointee Initiative, among other scholarly efforts, contributed to Clay Johnson's planning effort as they did to efforts taking place at the Al Gore for President campaign.

<sup>14</sup> For example, most of the transition planners (like Roy Neel) had substantial experience with the Clinton operation, especially under Leon Panetta, Erskine Bowles, and John Podesta.

<sup>15</sup> Clay Johnson, III, "The 2000-2001 Presidential Transition – Planning, Goals and Reality," *PS – Political Science and Politics*, March 2002

- January 8. Also, have in place by Inauguration Day an organization capable of identifying, clearing, and nominating 165 or more people by April 30, which is as many as any recent administration has sent to the Senate by the 100th day.
4. Summarize all Cabinet department priorities, issues, and facts, and the campaign promises related to each, in order to prepare the new secretaries for assuming responsibility for their departments.
  5. Prepare to proactively reach out to Congress, supporters, trade associations, well-wishers, and job seekers in order to show our interest in them and to connect with them in a manner and according to a timetable that was of our choosing.
  6. Develop a preliminary 20-day, 100-day, and 180-day schedule for the President to guide the initial focus for his energies and time.
  7. Prepare to present the new Administration's proposed budget changes by mid-February.
  8. Review the executive order and regulatory issues requiring immediate attention by the new Administration.

While many of them addressed the whole administration (e. g., reviewing executive orders, a new budget), some of these goals focused directly on White House transition responsibilities.<sup>16</sup>

### *Scholarly Research*

Paralleling these efforts and preceding them by almost a year, several scholarly organizations developed information on effective transitions and White House operations.<sup>17</sup> For example, based on its extensive interviews with previous staffers, including former Chiefs of Staff, the White House

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<sup>16</sup> By the time the Governor had asked Card to serve as Chief of Staff, the transition planning team had not circulated these goals. Card, in fact, had not seen them until a year later. Interview with Andrew J. Card, Jr. James A. Baker III Institute White House Transition Project, Terry Sullivan, 10 April 2002, the White House, Washington, D. C.

<sup>17</sup> Besides the White House 2001 Project, these other institutions included the Brookings Institution, the James A. Baker III Institute, American Enterprise Institute, Kennedy School of Government, Burns Academy of Leadership, Cato Institute, Heritage Foundation, and Center for the Study of the Presidency.

2001 Project developed a planning document, *Meeting the Freight Train Head On*,<sup>18</sup> which identified five goals for a successful presidential transition. These included: concentrating on the personnel process, avoiding counter-productive commitments, focusing on selecting the White House staff first, learning from predecessors, and developing a strategic agenda.

The White House 2001 Project developed briefing materials emphasizing a number of transition themes. Their interviews underscored Dick Cheney's assessment:

...the process of moving paper in and out of the Oval Office, who gets involved in the meetings, who does the President listen to, who gets a chance to talk to him before he makes a decision is absolutely critical. It has to be managed in such a way that it has integrity.<sup>19</sup>

They emphasized the importance of "orchestrating" decision opportunities in order to maximize the President's time.<sup>20</sup>

Table 1 combines and summarizes these transition goals and organizes them in relation to the operational dilemmas Chiefs of Staff must face. Wherever possible, footnotes identify specific sources.

### **DISCIPLINE**

In effect, this operational dilemma pits personnel against process. The operational challenge: how to tap the energy of White House staff without allowing that energy to interfere with the President's decision-making? A disciplined staff depends upon establishing in the transition two important elements – the process through which the President secures a staff and the basic operations necessary to further the President's agenda. This operational dilemma thus produced three identifiable transition goals: selection, balance, and process.

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<sup>18</sup> Martha J. Kumar, George C. Edwards III, James Pfiffner, and Terry Sullivan, *Meeting the Freight Train Head On – Planning for the Transition to Power*, the White House 2001 Project, White House Interview Program, Reports from the White House 2001 Project, number 2, (18 August 2000). See also Alvin S. Felzenberg, editor, *The Keys to a Successful Presidency*, Washington: Heritage Foundation, 2000, especially Chapter 1. See also Charles Jones, *Passages to the Presidency*, Washington: Brookings Institution, 1999.

<sup>19</sup> Interview with Richard Cheney, White House 2001 Project, White House Interview Program, Martha J. Kumar, 29 July 1999, Dallas, Texas.

<sup>20</sup> Similar points about managing the President's time to avoid poor decisions also found in Charles O. Jones, 1998, *Passages to the Presidency: From Campaigning to Governing*, Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution.

**Table 1. Transition Challenges, Goals, and Standards**

<b>Transition Challenge: Specific Goals/Standards</b>	
<b>Discipline:</b>	The transition should build and then reflect a balance between initiative and orchestration, creativity and control. The goals include:
	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. <b>Personnel.</b> Create an effective personnel system.               <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a) Overcome the challenge of scale and scrutiny.</li> <li>b) Finalize the critical White House staff by mid-December (day 38), including: Chief of Staff, Director OMB, National Security Advisor, Personnel Director, Legislative Affairs Director, White House Counsel, Press Secretary.</li> <li>c) Finalize the Cabinet by Christmas (day 47).</li> <li>d) Filling out the administration by nominating 165 policy positions in the government by 30 April 2001.</li> </ol> </li> <li>2. <b>Balance.</b> Develop a balanced White House staff.               <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a) Balance out the requirements of Washington experience and knowing the President-elect.</li> <li>b) Maintain the “professional” staff by avoiding campaign commitments to reduce White House staff.</li> </ol> </li> <li>3. <b>Process.</b> Develop a White House decision-making system that affords the staff input yet facilitates timely presidential decisions.               <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a) By early December, begin using a staff process similar to one suitable for White House use.</li> <li>b) Insure participation by staff &amp; Cabinet in decision-making.</li> <li>c) Develop and enforce a process for orchestrating decisions.</li> </ol> </li> </ol>
<b>Effectiveness:</b>	The transition should establish a capacity for handling the President’s routine decision-making and project the President’s ability into the future.
	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>4. <b>Focus.</b> Maintain focus on the President’s agenda.               <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a) Develop a 100/180 day plan.</li> <li>b) Use the plan to structure the President’s schedule.</li> <li>c) Use the plan to deflect supporters from alternative agendas.</li> </ol> </li> <li>5. <b>Crisis.</b> Maintain a capacity for crisis management.</li> <li>6. <b>Planning.</b> Think into the future.               <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a) Develop a senior planning group.</li> <li>b) Maintain that planning function.</li> <li>c) Plan for presidential rhythms and for governing.</li> </ol> </li> </ol>

### *Selection*

In talking with the White House Interview Program about successful transitions, former Chief of Staff (and Forum participant) Richard Cheney underscored the significance of personnel:<sup>21</sup>

You don't have an administration until you staff up – until you go out and you hire people to fill those key slots, recruit a Cabinet, [and] fill all those Cabinet posts. There are obviously several thousand appointed positions that the President has to fill and if he doesn't fill them or if he accepts whoever was there when he arrived in those positions or if he selects bad people, his administration is not going to be successful.

Establishing a selection process presents a number of challenges for a President-elect's team. This section underscores four: scale, staffing, Cabinet, and government.

*Scale.* Above all else, the transition personnel system must have the capacity to simultaneously process the large number of incoming applications while locating and recruiting short lists of candidates. The challenge seems apparent: as part of the Governor's Office, for example, the Texas appointments unit maintained a database of potential nominees similar to what they would need in the transition. As the country's second largest State, the Texas operation represents something as close to the "big leagues" as governing gets among the States. That database carried around 15,000 names. According to those who have gone through it before, in the twenty-four hour period following election day, the transition can expect as many as 10,000 applications.<sup>22</sup> In one day, then, the new operation would receive almost the total Texas volume. By the end of the truncated presidential transition, the George W. Bush White House system actually carried some 60,000 applications – *four* times their previous experience!

One former White House assistant experienced in personnel work further that scale could further complicate the process by simply multiplying problems: "People are so paranoid and so atavistic during this period. It's as if there's one lifeboat left and everyone's trying to get on it... People just go crazy."<sup>23</sup> And craziness tends to reinforce itself. Former Bush

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<sup>21</sup> Interview with Richard Cheney, White House 2001 Project, White House Interview Program, Martha J. Kumar, 29 July 1999, Dallas, Texas.

<sup>22</sup> Interview with Pendleton James, White House 2001 Project, White House Interview Program, Martha J. Kumar, Washington, D. C.

<sup>23</sup> Interview with Constance Horner, White House 2001 Project, White House Interview Program, Martha J. Kumar, 23 March 1999, Washington D. C.



White House Personnel Director, Chase Untermeyer, describe the problem by noting that once potential nominees lose touch with the White House, they begin calling to check on progress. Then returning *their* calls becomes part of the growing burden on the personnel staff. Missed phone calls generate more phone inquiries and the list of confused applicants grows exponentially over time.<sup>24</sup> Scale turns on itself magnifying the difficulties.

**Staffing.** Picking the White House staff early has a special impact on the administration's transition. Fulfilling that goal makes it easier to accomplish other goals, e.g., setting national economic policy or selecting the Cabinet. For that reason, and upon reflection, President Clinton's first Chief of Staff, Mr. McLarty, told his fellow Chiefs of Staff that the early decision to postpone staffing the Clinton White House until they had selected most of the Cabinet "was a mistake" [see page 21]. While the Bush transition standards established goals for selecting both White House staff and the Cabinet, they also set the final date for staff nine days earlier than the target for completing the Cabinet. They thus underscored the fact to which Mr. McLarty alluded: a successful transition depends upon settling the White House staff early. The Bush Transition set as a goal finalizing the White House staff by "mid-December."

**Cabinet.** As Dick Cheney points out, staffing the White House represents the beginning of process, while staffing the Cabinet represents the beginnings of policy. Every candidate and President-elect lauds the notion of "Cabinet government" not as recognition of teamwork, no President ever imagines "collegial leadership" in the administration. Instead, the notion of Cabinet government finds its perennial appeal in the recognition of two pragmatic realities. First, the scope of American government stretches well beyond the interests or commitments of any elected leader. And, second, no White House ever takes the time to worry beyond policy decisions into the arcane arts of implementation. Yet, every President recognizes the inevitable reality of both these things. In the Cabinet, the President places ultimate responsibility for scope and implementation. Establishing the outlines of that Cabinet early in the transition sets the course on many relevant but not priority issues. For their transition, the Bush campaign set "Christmas" as the deadline for finalizing their Cabinet appointments, leaving the newly selected Secretary-designates a comfortable three weeks to prepare themselves for governing.

**Policy Government.** If the Cabinet constitutes the Administration's collective "management," providing the aggregate mechanism for coping

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<sup>24</sup> Chase Untermeyer, quoted in Felzenberg, *Keys to a Successful Presidency*.

with complexity in day-to-day policy implementation, then the “policy government” constitutes the legs on which that management stands. The Bush campaign planners identified a set of policy makers in agencies critical to pushing the President’s agenda. As an objective, they set the 100-day mark as the critical milestone for nominating these personnel.

### *Balance*

The Chiefs of Staff noted the often surprising differences between running for office and governing [see page 21]. Running against an opponent takes a set of habits different from those required to govern with that same opponent. In their minds, then, resolving the tension between finding positions for key campaign workers and bringing in those who have had distinguished Washington careers becomes a critical transitional balancing act. Those with an appreciation for the candidate and the campaign play a critical role in the White House since fundamentally the President’s assistants hold political jobs. They “keep the flame,” remembering the commitments that got them elected. They also have a critical perspective on the President’s style. Clay Johnson recalls that after the election, he would help new staff interpret the President-elect’s intentions based on his long association with the man. For example, in remembering Andrew Card’s transition, Mr. Johnson recalled that:<sup>25</sup>

[Card] asked some questions when he first came in that somebody that had worked around him [Bush] a long time wouldn’t have had to ask. Andy would say, “The President-elect wants this to be done.... That’s not a good idea.”

We’d say, “Okay, that’s what he wants done, but if you have a good idea, go back and say, ‘But, au contraire.’ He doesn’t want you to just rubber-stamp what he says if you have another idea.”

“I know that he said that,” Andy would reply, “but does he really mean it?”

“Yes,” I’d say, “he really does mean that.”

While the personal staff knows the President, others understand the Washington experience. They provide the critical perspectives necessary to restructure campaign attitudes and routines into governing habits. While the Washington hands spend their transition wondering how literally they should take the new President, the President’s closest associates spend a good deal of their time wondering how to get things done in Washington. One close Bush associate characterized his most common transition

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<sup>25</sup> Interview with Clay Johnson, James A. Baker III Institute White House Transition Project, Terry Sullivan, 26 September 2002, Washington, D. C.

statement as, “That *can't* be the way that it is done! Is it?” Clearly, presidents need both kinds of experiences: a balance between specialties.

The “professional staff” of the White House offers another, distinctive expertise, one often overlooked by a new administration.<sup>26</sup> Secretary Card noted that a new White House has “an expectation that anyone who worked in the White House was there because of politics when the truth is the [professional staff] were not.” He pointed out that the Clinton transition “pull[ed] the plug on a lot of those people and it took them some time to get back up to speed and it also invited distrust.”<sup>27</sup> Many of the former Chiefs of Staff agreed with Card’s assessment. James A. Baker, III recalled during the Forum that Secretaries Rumsfeld and Cheney had both recommended to him that in the Reagan transition he should “...keep those people, don’t think about moving them around, don’t worry about their politics; they’re basically apolitical; they know their jobs...” [see page 22].

### *Process*

A White House staff without an orderly decision-making process threatens the President’s policy agenda by undermining smooth operations. No one can appreciate that fact more than the White House Chief of Staff. Indeed, as Congressman Panetta pointed out during the Forum, sometimes only the Chief of Staff understands the necessity for this operational requirement. James A. Baker, III summarized the problem: “You have to make sure you have an orderly system, that you have a system that’s fair. Otherwise, you start the leaking in the press one against the other.”<sup>28</sup> Many of the former Chiefs agreed that how you organize presidential decisions leads ultimately to less internal conflict, fewer internal disputes leaking into the public arena, and more candid and therefore effective advice.

## **EFFECTIVENESS**

This element of a transition pits the ability of the White House to handle issues in the present while projecting the President’s agenda into the future. It entails three challenges: focus, crisis, and planning.

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<sup>26</sup> As Bradley Patterson points out, all of the White House staff serve at the President’s pleasure. Hence, the White House has no professional staff. Only tradition identifies these staff as separated from the President’s completely political appointments.

<sup>27</sup> Interview with Andrew Card, White House 2001 Project, White House Interview Program, Martha J. Kumar, 25 May 1999, Cambridge, Massachusetts.

<sup>28</sup> Interview with James A. Baker, III, White House 2001 Project, White House Interview Program, Martha J. Kumar and Terry Sullivan, 16 November 1999, Houston, Texas.

### *Focus*

The presidential transition offers a wonderful opportunity for an administration to realize its policy agenda. “The early months are so important,” observed David Gergen, a senior official in both Democratic and Republican White Houses. “[T]hat’s when you have the most authority, but that’s when you also have the least capacity for making the right decisions.”<sup>29</sup> While they become familiar with the new President, the public and even political opponents willingly grant the administration some running room. “There is a coming together after an election that is a natural and wonderful impulse in America,” observed James Cicconi, former White House Staff Secretary.<sup>30</sup>

Using that running room, however, requires advanced planning that accomplishes two objectives. First, the administration must use the transition time to “schedule backwards:” identifying presidential objectives and building into their governing activities the time necessary to fully articulate the policy initiatives those objectives imply. Setting a transition plan in place and scheduling backwards then clarifies what kind of preparation the new administration’s goals require. For example, a week before the Clinton team arrived at the White House, one of the President-elect’s key advisors George Stephanopoulos asked the Office of Management and Budget to prepare a new presidential budget, by altering the budget document waiting for release from the previous administration. He wanted the new presidential budget made public on Monday, five days following President Clinton’s inauguration. OMB staff responded that while they did not oppose making the requested changes, they simply could not meet the schedule. “It wasn’t that if they stretched real hard,” recalls a Clinton White House staffer familiar with the negotiations:

...they could get it, although that was sort of the first thing everybody in the White House [thought]... [Y]ou can’t share [changes] with the agencies, manage the process... so it ticks and ties and put it all back into the computers, print the appendices. You couldn’t do all of that in a week. I think we settled ultimately on something like the twenty-first of February. It was three weeks and it was a stretch.

While campaigns work on instant schedules and rapid responses, policy making must withstand the intense scrutiny and organized opposition that

<sup>29</sup> Interview with David Gergen, White House 2001 Project, Martha Kumar, 24 June 1997, Washington, D.C.

<sup>30</sup> Interview with James Cicconi, Philip Brady, and Andrew Card, Martha J. Kumar, 19 September 1997, Washington, D.C. quoted in Martha J. Kumar, “Feasibility Study for the Pew Charitable Trusts.”

governing involves. The former obliges far-flung coordination as well as sophisticated presentation. It involves the persistence of the long-distance runner, not the power of the sprinter.

Second, the new administration must maintain a policy focus on what it has in mind, often in spite of sophisticated pressures to the contrary. A new administration comes to Washington as just the latest entrant into what the permanent community of interests and decision-makers sees as a continuous parade. The public has certified the administration’s authority, but the Washington community has designs on the uses of that authority. And, they have had more experience pursuing *their* goals than has the new President’s team in pursuing its. The former Chiefs of Staff agreed that maintaining an effective pursuit of the administration’s policy goals constitutes one of the transition’s critical challenges. Often, accomplishing this goal depends as much on avoiding the entreaties of friends as it does side-stepping the traps set by opponents.

For this reason, many of the former Chiefs of Staff recommended a technique pioneered by the Reagan transition. Under the guidance of Reagan pollster, Richard Wirthlin and based on a detailed historical study directed by David Gergen, the transition team developed a plan outlining their initial daily activities.<sup>31</sup> The Gergen study surveyed transitions in six major categories: constitutional, foreign affairs, domestic affairs, domestic appearances, press and media appearances, and miscellaneous.<sup>32</sup> Using this plan afforded the Reagan White House a clear set of activities designed to support their immediate focus on economic recovery and regulatory reform.

<sup>31</sup> Gergen’s study covered the daily activities of the previous five transitions: Roosevelt, Eisenhower, Kennedy, Nixon, and Carter. Each study produced a calendar of actions and activities for the first 100 days of each administration. Gergen then compiled these data into a general memo on five areas of activities: David Gergen, Report entitled “Study on Presidential Activities,” Papers of James A. Baker, III, Rice University Archives.

<sup>32</sup> The following table disaggregates the six categories in the Gergen study into specific measures:

Constitutional*	Meetings on Policy		Appearances before Groups		
	Foreign	Domestic	Domestic	Press	Misc
Commander in Chief	Diplomatic visits	Cabinet	Travel	1 <sup>st</sup> press conference	Gestures
Reprieves granted	Missions sent	Congressional	Vacations	Press conferences	Scandals
State of Union	Travel	Justices	Speeches	Media Speeches	
Convene Congress		Governors			
Treaties signed		Mayors			
		Political party			
		Agencies			
		Interests			
		Presidents			

\*Note, though, that “Convene Congress” occurred only once (FDR).

While these plans resembled a campaign plan, with daily messages and activities projected through the first weeks of the administration, the overall effort clarified their objectives and gave them a convenient reference point from which to “refocus” the agendas of friends and foe alike.

### *Crisis*

The former Chiefs of Staff had a great deal to say about the challenges of crisis management. That would make sense, since a full one-third of them came to office in the midst of a crisis and many others experienced one. Most of them agreed with Mack McLarty who emphasized that a White House must “try to segment [a crisis] and separate it as much as you possibly can and isolate it.”<sup>33</sup> Additionally, the former Chiefs of Staff agreed with Howard Baker, Jr. that in a crisis, the White House staff must get the President onto a vigorous schedule in order to restore the administration’s momentum for governing [see page 42ff].

### *Planning*

Speaking to the White House 2001 Project and reflecting on his previous experiences with seven White House operations, Secretary Card specifically identified the lack of forward planning on the President’s behalf as a critical weakness:<sup>34</sup>

We tried [to plan for the long range]. We tried and tried and tried. We tried to have a sense of historic events or a political calendar or a congressional calendar. We desperately tried to have a vision to what we were doing. We failed, in my opinion....

Other former Chiefs of Staff have also found that the pressures of the present undermine planning. Note, for example, James A. Baker’s reflections on the lack of planning after the initial Reagan transition plan expired: “...you really are putting out fires and you’re a lot more ‘reactive’ than you are ‘proactive’ and that’s just the nature of the beast.”<sup>35</sup>

Of course, establishing an intention to plan and designating staff does not assure planning. Handling the day-to-day action, “reactive” management, usually demands all the attention of the senior staff, often

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<sup>33</sup> Interview with Thomas F. McLarty, White House 2001 Project, White House Interview Program, Martha J. Kumar, 16 November 1999, Washington, D. C.

<sup>34</sup> Interview with Andrew J. Card, Jr., White House 2001 Project, Martha Kumar, Cambridge, Massachusetts, 25 May 1999

<sup>35</sup> Interview with James A. Baker, III, White House 2001 Project, Martha Kumar and Terry Sullivan, 16 November 1999, Houston, Texas.

relegating the planning function to junior assistants. Plans made by assistants often get short shrift from principals when considered in the heat of decision-making.<sup>36</sup> To accomplish effective planning, then, the White House must establish a high-level staff group, composed of senior advisors.

As Secretary Card noted, White House strategic planning has two central elements: historic events and political timetables (including the congressional schedule). Historic events include those special initiatives that the White House understands to define their administration. Such initiatives may surface in the President's State of the Union address and stretch through the spring into the summer. Then, the congressional calendar tends to take over Washington. Late in the Spring, the Congress begins to focus on the budget with its first Congressional Budget Resolution leading to consideration of the general authorization legislation. While the President's schedule tends to focus on foreign policy commitments during these authorization/summer months, both schedules reorient themselves as the Congress begins consideration of its appropriation bills. Simultaneously, the Executive Branch considerations of the next fiscal year's budget requests and the organizing work for the President's State of the Union speech begins to build to a climax near the end of the congressional session. Without serious reflection on what Martha J. Kumar calls these "rhythms of the President's year," a White House abdicates some of its control over the agenda. Then, "time" makes presidential decisions. Thinking into the future, then, provides a White House counterweight to the inevitable leverage of congressional routines. Hence, White House planning should take into account these presidential rhythms.

Using congressional routine as a foil for planning, however, does not represent the goal of White House plans. Instead, as Secretary Card notes, planning must create a vision of direction. Given the press of reactive management, pushing the White House horizon ahead one week often constitutes a serious achievement. Yet, serious and effective planning requires projecting the Administration's horizon to months ahead. The farther their horizon projects, though, the more complicated and unpredictable the interactions and the less attractive planning becomes for senior staff inundated with more pressing demands. Elections, of course,

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<sup>36</sup>In a common campaign experience among Democrats, the candidate assigns relatively junior staff to transition planning only to have senior advisors jettison them after the election. To avoid that common experience, the White House 2001 Project and the Baker Institute's Transition Project recommended directly attaching transition planning function to the campaign's highest leadership.

represent convenient temporal horizons punctuated at two-year intervals. Yet, given their contradictory requirements, planning for elections gainsays planning for governing. The nature of planning, then, becomes an inherently interesting and charged process with no well-established conventional wisdom.

## ASSESSING THE BUSH TRANSITION

When it comes to governing, intentions and performance often diverge.

This section evaluates the George W. Bush transition, comparing its performance against the six common transition goals identified earlier using the measures that these goals might suggest. Ultimately, of course, this assessment does not evaluate the Bush Administration's policy achievements. The President's effectiveness, translating operations into presidential "success" or "impact," remains a subject for retrospective judgments with the aid of considerably more evidence than currently available. The former Chiefs of Staff agreed, however, that without effective operations, no administration could succeed even assessed against its own objectives.

### GOAL 1. CREATE AN EFFECTIVE PERSONNEL PROCESS

Recall this goal presents four separate standards: *scale*, *White House first*, *then Cabinet*, and *then the core governing group*.

*A Note on Data.* Analyzing the transition personnel goals employs two separate sources of data. First, it relies on official announcements of nominations. Note that administrations never make clear to the public when they *decide* on the selection of key people. Instead, the outside world can only observe the *announcement* of these appointments. For these announcements, the *Washington Post* and *The New York Times* became the journals of record. For sub-Cabinet policy positions, the analysis relied on the date of nomination as reported by the Brookings Institution's Presidential Appointee Initiative, which tracked and reported appointment data on the Bush administration. Second, the assessment of staff balance, in particular Goal 2-a), relies on data collected by Martha J. Kumar and published in her study, "Establishing a White House."<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>37</sup> See Martha J. Kumar, "Establishing a White House and its Staff Operations," *PS – Politics and Political Science*, March 2002.



### *Handling Scale*

To handle scale, the Bush planners focused on candidate assessment. In particular, early in the transition planning and well in advance of their convention, they decided on new technologies for handling the staggering flow of applicants. The Clinton transition team had pioneered a “labor intensive” plan, recruiting 40 professional head-hunters working as volunteers and backed up by a sizable support staff. These volunteers, 125 in all, recruited and then vetted candidates relying on a record-keeping system that depended on scanning hard copy resumes. That operation did not translate into the White House, as the relatively sizable transition staff shrank precipitously to the number permitted in the presidency. In addition, relying on the untried technology of transforming optical images into text, the Clinton team fell hopelessly behind, at one point in the transition, simply throwing out 3,000 applications sitting in its backlog in a frustrated effort to “catch up.”

The Bush team opted for a capital-intensive plan requiring applicants to enter resumes on a website which automatically fed the transition’s database. This approach reduced the need for a large transition staff (“It got us out of the data entry business,” Clay Johnson noted), relying instead on a staff similar in size to what they would have in office. This system easily accumulated applications without managing its growth. The system also allowed the staff to consider applicants without references to patrons or references. In some instances, the White House filled some positions by simply searching for appropriate candidates from those applications that had “come in over the transom.” This electronic and capital-intensive approach had produced a database of around seventy thousand entries by the end of the transition. As such, it constitutes a genuinely effective effort at addressing scale.<sup>38</sup>

### *White House*

Table 2 reports results on finalizing the White House staff by day 38 – Goal 1-b). The table compares the Bush transition personnel announcements to the average for announcement dates for the previous four presidential transitions. The table reports comparisons on two groups of staff: “critical” and “core.” Consider “critical” White House staff those positions identified in the White House 2001 Project’s study *Meeting the*

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<sup>38</sup> Interview with Clay Johnson, James A. Baker III Institute White House Transition Project, Terry Sullivan, 26 September 2002, Washington, D. C.

**Freight Train Head On.** Define the “core” staff as the critical staff plus the Director of the White House Office of Management and Administration, the Staff Secretary, and the Director of Communications.

As indicated in the table, the Bush transition missed its initial goal, which in this case would have occurred a mere three days after the conclusion of the contested Florida election. Their performance overshot that objective by about seven days. On the other hand, they announced their White House staff a full eleven days earlier than the typical presidential transition.

**Table 2. Announcement of White House Staff, in days after election**

Type of White House Position Office	Administration(s) Averages		Differences from Previous Administrations			
	Previous	Bush	Bush	Improvement	GOP	DEM
Critical Staff	68.8	58.0	-10.8	16%	65	72.5
Chief of Staff	19.3	10.0	-9.3			
National Security Advisor	39.8	40.0	0.2			
Director OMB	29.8	45.0	15.2			
Legislative Affairs	57.8	58.0 <sup>39</sup>	0.2			
Personnel	40.5	52.0	11.5			
Counsel	58.0	40.0	-18.0			
Press Secretary	42.0	51.0	9.0			
Core Staff	68.8	62.0	-6.8	10%	65	72.5

*Source:* Compiled by author from Lexis/Nexus, *Washington Post, New York Times*.

Since the opportunity for completing the staff has a lower bound, at zero days, and an upper bound, say at the 100 days mark, we can assess performance in terms of “efficiency” or how well the 2001 transition “improved” on the previous record of transitions, adjusted for these upper and lower bounds.<sup>40</sup> Thus, we can conclude from the data that the 2001 transition *improved* on the previous experiences by +16% for the critical staff and +10% for the core staff. Using the normal standard for what constitutes

<sup>39</sup> On 29 November 2000, the transition announced that David Gribben would head congressional relations. Around Christmas, however, Mr. Gribben became sidelined with a painful eye problem (See Judy Sarosohn, “Calio Likely to Join Bush Team as Lobbyist,” *Washington Post*, page A19, January 4, 2001.). On 4 January 2001, the Bush team announced his replacement, Nicholas Calio. We consider the position open until 1/04/01.

<sup>40</sup> The analysis relies on the standard measure of efficiency: the “lambda” statistic.

a “significant” improvement ( $\geq 10\%$ ), the 2001 transition made significant improvements over the average despite their hampered beginnings.

They also appeared as successful when considering the core staff. The Bush transition came in more than six days earlier than the average. Indeed, their experience constitutes the second quickest transition (the first Bush administration at day 44). The average administration finalized its staff around day 69, with Republicans a slight bit earlier on average than Democrats. Governor Bush’s decision to invest in transition planning clearly paid dividends in staff readiness.

### *Cabinet*

Table 3 summarizes the transition’s experience with its Cabinet goal – Goal 1-c): announcing the Cabinet by 24 December 2000 (“Christmas Day,” or day 47). Again the figures detail the differences between the Bush transition personnel announcements and the average for the previous presidential transitions. These data cover appointments of two separate groups: the “core” Cabinet and the “full” Cabinet.

**Table 3. Announcement of Cabinet, in days after election**

Type of Cabinet Position Office	Administration(s) Averages		Differences from Other Administrations			
	Previous	Bush	Total	Improvement	GOP	DEM
Core	45.3	51.0	5.7	–4%	41	50
Defense	43.5	51.0	7.5			
State	31.0	39.0	8.0			
Treasury	30.8	43.0	12.3			
Justice	37.3	45.0	7.7			
Commerce	38.0	43.0	5.0			
Full	57.5	56.0	–1.5	3%	64	51

*Source:* Compiled by author from *The Washington Post*, *The New York Times*, and others.

As the table suggests, the Bush transition did a remarkable job of making Cabinet appointments in a timely manner. Even though they missed their Christmas goal, they fell short of that goal by a mere nine days despite the truncated transition. And, while their core Cabinet announcements trailed the average, they *completed* the entire Cabinet two days earlier than the average presidential transition. The loss and gains of efficiency for selecting the core and full Cabinet, respectively, appear modest for the Bush transition at around  $\pm 3\%$ . The Bush final Cabinet announcement (at day 56) lay between the typical Democratic completion date of day 51 and the

standard Republican completion date of day 64. Thus, despite the hurdles presented by the unusual circumstances, the Bush transition did better than any previous Republican transition and only slightly worse than those transitions which admittedly focused exclusively on Cabinet recruitment.

### *Policy Leadership*

The details of this goal appear somewhat elusive. In setting it, the Bush transition planners clearly wanted to underscore the importance of quickly filling out the government's policy-making apparatus. The standard they set for themselves seems to refer to merely getting as many nominations out the door as any previous administration had. However, the target they selected (168 appointments) does come very close a specific definition of the policy leadership. The evaluation here will first evaluate the simple motivation of filling a record number of positions and then evaluate their performance against two definitions of the policy leadership.

Considering the first interpretation of their goal – large numbers – their record seems reasonable. By 30 April 2001, the Bush White House had nominated 180 positions. Around 40 of those nominations, however, came from “holdovers” asked to remain at their posts.<sup>41</sup> Without these appointments, the administration would not have reached its simple goal of a large number of appointments.

Consider a different definition, though, one focusing on the “coverage” of these nominations. For the purposes of that assessment, the following standard will define a critical policy-making position as listed in the 1996 *Plum Book*.<sup>42</sup>

- a. *Appointment Type*: Policy-making positions require Senate confirmation, i.e., they have a “PAS” classification,
- b. *Pay Plan and Grade*: Policy-making positions carry an Executive classification, i.e., listed as “EX,” and a pay grade of at least Level III.

The two standards encompass the leadership of all Cabinet departments, all independent regulatory agencies (e.g., the Federal Reserve), and all

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<sup>41</sup> Of these, the administration asked 21 Inspectors General to remain, six of the senior leadership at the Central Intelligence Agency, and ten of the leadership at State.

<sup>42</sup> This document, a joint publication of the Congress and the Office of Personnel Management, lists non-competitive government positions. The analysis relies on the *1996 Plum Book* because the Bush transition planners did not receive the 2000 versions until after the election (see below). The *1996 Plum Book* describes some 8,125 positions in the Executive Branch subject in some circumstances to “non-competitive” appointment.

independent agencies delivering services (e.g., the Agency for International Development). Using these two criteria, PAS EX-I/III, generates a list of about 170 positions, very close to the 168 in the transition goal. Eliminating from that list appointments with statutory tenures that did not expire until after the 30 April deadline, the number then pares to 137 appointments. So, in effect, setting as the goal filling out the policy-making apparatus of the government effectively focuses on filling 137 specific positions before 30 April 2001.<sup>43</sup>

Table 4 summarizes the Bush White House experience filling out the policy leadership. The administration filled 68 of those positions by its

**Table 4. Filling Appointments**

Objective	Positions		
	Potential	Filed n	%
Ex I/III	170	—	—
w/o term mandates	137	68	50
“Big Four” Cabinet	58	47	81

deadline, or about one-half of this goal. The table also presents an alternative target that reflects some later thinking in the White House. In interviews with Professor Martha J. Kumar, White House staff familiar with the transition indicated that after Florida,

they adjusted their goal, settling on a different strategy for handling appointments than the broader ambition identified in June. This new strategy emphasized the selection of “central positions” in each Cabinet agency. They would then leave filling the positions below these to the Department principals once confirmed. Using this “Big Four” strategy, the Bush White House supposed that it could balance its need for control with its Cabinet’s interest in delegation.<sup>44</sup> Taking that goal instead of the one adopted earlier for the transition, the number of positions to fill drops to 58.<sup>45</sup> Clearly, the Bush administration did a better job with this more limited goal. It filled 81% of those Big Four positions by the 100<sup>th</sup> day.

<sup>43</sup> Excluding Cabinet Secretaries and EX-I personnel already covered pares the number to 122.

<sup>44</sup> See Martha J. Kumar, “Establishing a White House Staff and its Operations,” in Martha J. Kumar and Terry Sullivan, editors, *The White House World: Transitions, Organization, and Office Operations*, College Station: Texas A&M Press, 2003. Clay Johnson recalled that George Shultz had encouraged them to establish such a connection between the White House and the Cabinet. Interview with Clay Johnson, James A. Baker III Institute, White House Transition Project, Terry Sullivan, 26 September 2002, Washington, D. C.

<sup>45</sup> In most Cabinet Departments the press secretary does not occupy a PAS position. Hence, the PAI database did not track them. Where the Cabinet department had an Assistant Secretary for Public Affairs, the data included that position.

Unfortunately, no similar statistics exist for previous administrations with which to compare this performance.

*Summary*

Without considering the truncated transition, the Bush White House made remarkable progress towards meeting the personnel requirements of the transition. It set records in filling out its White House staff and Cabinet. And under some (but not all) measures it made seemingly significant progress in filling the central policy-making positions in government.

**GOAL 2. A BALANCED STAFF**

This general transition goal set two standards: a *balanced* staff and *protecting the “professional” White House staff.*

*Balance of Expertise*

While no comparisons exist with other administrations, some data allow for examining the Bush balance in absolute terms. Table 5 outlines the experience of 33 key White House staff identified by Martha J. Kumar.<sup>46</sup> It divides relevant experience into five categories ranging from purely personal to purely Washington.

**Table 5. Expertise of Top Staff**

With Expertise	Base of Knowledge				
	Campaign	Personal	Policy	White House	Purely DC
Number	20	19	11	12	15
Percent	61%	58%	33%	36%	45%
Overlaps	15			8	
	4				

*Source:* Adapted from Kumar, “Establishing a White House Staff,” *op. cit.*, Chart 1.

The first two categories in the table, “personal” (knowledge of the President, his work habits *etc.*) and “campaign” (work in the presidential campaign) constitute important attributes of a about 60% of these critical White House staff. By contrast, knowledge of the White House or of policy substance constitutes an attribute of only around 40% of the staff. Thus, the staff seems weighted towards campaign and personal associations with the President, seeming to repeat James A. Baker’s observation at the Forum that, “When you are replacing an

<sup>46</sup> Kumar, *op cit.*

administration of the other party, you look to the campaign more often to get the people that are going to come into the White House” [see page 22].

Looking at the overlap between knowledge bases affords a sense of staff balance. For example, of those with campaign experience, only one-quarter also have some policy specific experience, while three-quarters had some prior personal association with Governor Bush. By comparison, those with campaign experience who have had prior White House staff experience amounts to a very small number, seven, a bit more than 20%. Those with prior White House experience but having no campaign or personal association with the President-elect constitute those staff recruited by the Chief of Staff to round out the new team’s experience base. These specialized and balancing appointments focused on critical operational elements, including congressional relations and White House administration. In general, “Washington hands” (those with either prior White House or Washington experience) played a critical role in the transition. White House staff with only personal experience reported they found their instincts did not jibe with the routines of the Capitol and without the special advice of the Washington staff they would have taken serious missteps.

One additional element of this balance seems worth noting. Only four of the 33 staff had extensive experience in all of the critical categories discussed here (campaign, personal, White House, Washington): Card, Josh Bolton, Joseph Hagin, and Lawrence Lindsey. These four, three in the Chief of Staff’s office, constitute the overlapping core between all of the various forms of knowledge necessary for a smooth White House transition. They constitute the hub in the governing wheel.

### *Professional Staff*

As part of their strategies for defending themselves from charges of promising “big spending government,” Democratic candidates have promised to shrink their White House staffs. Typical among these Democratic candidates, both Jimmy Carter and Bill Clinton promised to reduce the White House staff by 25%. Once in office, of course, the reality of maintaining the President’s advisors in office means that in order to make good on this promise the new President must reduce the professional staff supporting operations. Reductions among these staff have generally undermined the White House’s ability to function. “Frankly,” noted Roy Neel, “the only [people] who cared about that [promise] in 1992 were a handful that populate the House Government Operations Committee *on*

*the other side.* It never made any sense to do that. They're designed to get you some press but... they come back to haunt you."<sup>47</sup>

Unlike Al Gore, candidate Bush did not promise to reduce the White House staff during the campaign. As a result, Secretary Card saw little need to change the staffing patterns already in place among the professional staff.

### *Summary*

On this transition measure, the George W. Bush White House performed well. The transition produced a staff with a good mix between the needed White House specialties. Some of that balance derives directly from recruitment of nine people outside of the Governor's campaign group. In addition, the Bush campaign and then transition maintained a solid foundation of professional support in the White House.

### **GOAL 3. A DISCIPLINED PROCESS**

This goal rested on two objectives: *early experience* with disciplined decision-making and *balanced access and orchestration*.

### *Experience*

Maintaining discipline requires experience with White House proportions. The Bush for President senior staff determined to build a working White House operation before they had to bear the responsibilities of governing. Adopting such a system early, Clay Johnson thought, would give them the experience many of them would need. He thought practice would act as a good antidote to the scrutiny they would all receive once in office. Card independently determined to begin a senior staff schedule to mirror the early morning White House schedule. According to Johnson, the "White House" senior staff began meeting the 12<sup>th</sup> of December in a regular, daily ritual involving an early morning, thirty minute senior staff meeting much like those they regularly attend in the White House.<sup>48</sup> The transition had met this goal.

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<sup>47</sup> Interview with Roy Neel, White House 2001 Project, White House Interview Program, Martha J. Kumar, 15 June 1999, Washington, D. C. [emphasis added].

<sup>48</sup> Interview with Clay Johnson, James A. Baker III Institute White House Transition Project, Terry Sullivan, 26 September 2002, Washington, D. C. Interview with Andrew J. Card, Jr., James A. Baker III Institute, White House Transition Project, Terry Sullivan, 10 April 2002, The White House, Washington, D. C.



### *Access and Timing*

The former Chiefs of Staff appreciated that the contrasting pressures for individual accomplishment and orderly decisions constitute the two poles in a well-run White House. Evaluating the degree to which such a balance exists can prove difficult since any White House naturally prefers to avoid such scrutiny. However, the imbalances created when these two sides of discipline collide rather than coexist generates signs visible from afar. When White House staff begin to feel excluded from decision-making or the balance between their interests and those of an effective process shifts, they begin venting their frustrations extramurally. They participate in news stories acting as “insiders” or as “unnamed sources,” often airing disagreements to the outside world but more importantly simply conveying their alternative foci. Thus, measuring the number of stories relying on such anonymous “White House sources” constitutes one crude measure of such imbalance or lack of focus.

Table 6 summarizes stories printed in the two major newspapers most often used for Washington communications (*The New York Times* and *The Washington Post*). Observations occur during three standard periods of an administration: the first 100 days, the first 180 days, and the first year. The table divides unnamed sources into two categories: those inside the “White House” and those inside the “Administration.” As the table makes very clear, the George W. Bush White House maintained an historic level of focus during their entire first year. While a new administration might have as many as 18 stories on average during its first year, members of the Bush White House did not participate in a single story. “The people who control the channels of communication have their egos carefully under control,” notes former speech writer, David Frum. “They have fewer psychodramas than any staff since the invention of staff.” In discussing this aspect of their administration (the lack of “psychodrama”), Karl Rove described the situation in terms that clearly reflect their attention to focus. He noted that among Bush’s senior advisors when advocating “...a perspective diametrically opposed to the point of view of the person on the sofa across from [you],” the senior staff knows that they will “...link arms and go on, and be certain that your losing view won’t appear in the paper.”<sup>49</sup>

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<sup>49</sup> Richar Brookhiser, “The Mind of George W. Bush,” *The Atlantic Monthly*, 291,3(April 2003):55-69.

Three elements seem to stand out in avoiding the internal disputes of previous administrations. As expected each of these keys to process reinforce the importance of orderly (even orchestrated) decision-making.

**Table 6. Sources in Stories by tenure**

Administration	Days	Quotes unnamed source in			
		White House	Administration		
Carter	100	7	12		
	180	8	20		
	365	15	38		
Reagan	100	18	28		
	180	25	41		
	365	36	80		
Bush, GHW	100	2	27		
	180	5	36		
	365	7	66		
Clinton	100	4	13		
	180	8	21		
	365	14	33		
		<i>Previous Administrations</i>			
		<i>avg</i>	<i>avg</i>		
Bush, GW	100	0	7.8	5	20.0
	180	0	11.5	10	29.5
	365	0	18.0	11	54.3

*Source:* Compiled by author from Lexis/Nexis searches.

First, Chief of Staff Card divided White House management between two Deputy Chiefs of Staff, one managing policy and one managing “mechanics.” Pioneered by Thomas McLarty in the second year of the Clinton administration as an attempt to rein in Clinton’s chaotic and often esoteric decision-making process, the division of responsibilities between two deputies allows for a more rigorous attention to the orchestration of decisions by concentrating the distracting

responsibilities for mechanics into a separate office. Freed to coordinate with the Staff Secretary the Chief of Staff and his chief Deputy for Policy can spend more time on assuring the process. While the use of this division did not take hold in the Clinton administration until the Chief of Staff changed, Card’s emphasis on this approach has undergirded the integrity of that process.

Second, Card highlighted the work of their Staff Secretary whose diligence has reassured presidential advisors and Cabinet that the process will not exclude their views from proper consideration. Harriet Miers focuses incessantly on assuring balance, Card says: “That’s one view, where’s the other?” Or ‘this looks like it was written by Larry Lindsey, I want to make sure Glen Hubbard has a chance to see it.’”<sup>50</sup>

<sup>50</sup> Interview with Andrew J. Card, Jr., James A. Baker III Institute, White House Transition Project, Terry Sullivan, 10 April 2002, The White House, Washington, D. C.

Third, Card underscores his emphasis on both initiation and orchestration. He regularly makes clear that staff and critical administration officials can expect to get their views before the President. Since the principal temptation to shirk discipline stems from a growing sense of exclusion, Card emphasizes that Cabinet and advisors have guaranteed access to the President whenever they *need* that attention to their advice. At the same time, he makes clear that “needing and wanting” to see the President do not constitute the same thing. After all, Card notes, “there are an infinite number of great ideas in Washington, and nearly an infinite number of people willing to give those ideas to the President, so what you have to do is decide what the President needs to have and then find a way to fit it into a day in such a way that he has an ability to make a sound decision.”<sup>51</sup>

This system has antecedents in other administrations. Card’s approach resembles the system with which he began his White House service during the Reagan administration. That system guaranteed access to Cabinet officers through a post office box for the President’s exclusive use along with an accompanying guarantee that any Cabinet officer could get access to the President with twenty-four hours notice. The earlier Bush White House, where Card also worked, maintained a similar box for guaranteed Cabinet access. Former Clinton Chief of Staff John Podesta emphasized how such a system made

...key decision-makers both in the Cabinet and in the White House feel like they have access to the President and that they’re part of the team and that if they have a strong view, it’s being represented and is not getting shut out by some filter....

Podesta went on to note that if the system fails these key actors, then the White House would “end up with just a lot of cranky people who are going to act out in destructive ways. White Houses have died on that basis.”<sup>52</sup>

While similar in approach to others, the decision system Card has created works partly because so many of the critical White House staff positions have fallen to individuals long associated with the President and with little independent Washington experience: “They’ve had a longer relationship with George Bush than others have had with a President,”

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<sup>51</sup> Interview with Andrew J. Card, Jr., James A. Baker III Institute, White House Transition Project, Terry Sullivan, 10 April 2002, The White House, Washington, D. C.

<sup>52</sup> Interview with John Podesta, James A. Baker III Institute White House Transition Project, Terry Sullivan, 26 September 2001, Washington, D. C.

Card notes.<sup>53</sup> That balance has made for a keener identification with the President's interests by comparison with independent or external agendas and a stronger sense of confidence in the President's trust. To some extent, then, this transition result may rest on the unusual expertise of the Bush White House. Given that the President can find only a limited number of potential staff with similar close associations, the Chief of Staff will likely face a problem reinventing this extraordinary discipline as the initial staff retires and a newer staff arrives without these unique associations.

### *Summary*

The Bush staff established a decision process that served them well throughout the transition. Practiced and honed after the election decision, White House routines allowed advisors and Cabinet a sense of access without sacrificing the discipline of orchestrated policy-making.

### **GOAL 4. FOCUSED AGENDA**

This goal suggested three measures: the development of *a detailed transition plan*, using that plan to *schedule the administration's initial activities* and policy, and using the plan to *deflect alternative agenda strategies*, including those of political allies.

### *Developing a Plan*

While Andy Card focused on planning White House operations, chief political strategist Karl Rove began developing a governing plan. Like Card's activities, Rove's research proceeded parallel to the Florida legal efforts. Unlike Card's activities that depended heavily on his White House experiences, Rove's planning began with a search for information about what to expect using previous transitions. Using the Gergen system, Rove assigned six staff members each to research the first 100 days of a previous transition.<sup>54</sup> Their research phase concluded 8 December 2000, four days before the final Supreme Court decision. Their preliminary plan went to the President-elect on 15 December 2000, only three days after the senior staff began meeting with their "practice" White House routine. By the first week of January 2001, the transition team had drafted a detailed plan for the first weeks, a less detailed plan through March, and a general plan

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<sup>53</sup> Interview with Andrew J. Card, Jr., James A. Baker III Institute, White House Transition Project, Terry Sullivan, 10 April 2002, The White House, Washington, D. C.

<sup>54</sup> The two programs overlapped in the Kennedy, Nixon, and Carter transitions, with Gergen covering Truman and Roosevelt and Rove covering Reagan, Bush ('41), and Clinton.

through the August congressional recess. This increasing generality allowed White House planners to elaborate plans as they became more familiar with governing.

Rove's research team populated a "matrix" of indicators, from which they developed a sense of "what were [the previous transitions] attempting to do?" Their study developed data on a range of activities from the average number of press conferences to the number of policy initiatives. "We looked at that matrix," remembers Rove, "and where there were differences we tried to figure out what they were trying to do." The matrix also gave them a sense of what to expect, the "normal and ordinary traffic" cutting into the President's time, and what kind of time they needed to prepare what they planned on doing. In a sense, then, they tried to construct an image of presidential activities.<sup>55</sup>

Table 7 presents data consistent with the matrix employed by Rove's planners. It summarizes those topics Rove researched, utilizing data from three sources. The first data derive from statistics reported by Mr. Rove (\*). The remaining matrix elements ("NC") derive from data collected by the author from the same sources. Wherever his summaries made comparisons possible, these second data appear consistent with those results. The table also reports data from these sources for the 2001 Bush transition. And it reports data from the original Gergen study ("G").<sup>56</sup>

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<sup>55</sup> Gergen's study covered 25 activities in 6 groups [see note 36]. Rove's list included: foreign/domestic travel, days off, major initiatives, Executive Orders, messages to Congress, national TV appearances, news conferences, joint session speeches, and congressional, NGO, or Cabinet meetings. Interview with Karl Rove, James A. Baker III Institute, White House Transition Project, Terry Sullivan, 12 December 2002, Washington, D. C.

<sup>56</sup>Sources: *Congressional Record*, *Public Papers of the President*, the *Code of Federal Regulations*, the *Weekly Compilation of Presidential Documents*, and LexisNexis. Data for Gergen come from its detailed Appendix, see David Gergen, Report entitled "Study on Presidential Activities," Papers of James A. Baker, III, Rice University Archives.

**Table 7. Comparative Statistics on Presidential Transitions**

Study	Transition	Major Policies		Executive Orders		Messages to Congress		Joint Session Speech		Meeting with Groups						Press Conferences		Television or other Media		Presidential Travel						
		R <sup>•</sup>	NC	R <sup>•</sup>	NC	R <sup>•</sup>	NC	NC	G <sup>°</sup>	Congressional		Cabinet		Interests		NC	G <sup>°</sup>	NC	G <sup>°</sup>	Foreign		Domestic		Time off		
										NC	G <sup>°</sup>	NC	G <sup>°</sup>	NC	G <sup>°</sup>					NC	G <sup>°</sup>	NC	G <sup>°</sup>	NC	G <sup>°</sup>	NC
Gergen	Roosevelt										10		30		2		20		3		0		0		0	
	Eisenhower			20		11	11				9		14		3		7		10		0		0		2	
	Rove	Kennedy	8		23		19	19	2		3	3	2	2	4	4	10	10	7	7	0	0	1	2	0	2
		Nixon	7		15		19	19	1		10	15	15	15	5	4	5	6	1	0	1	0	2	3	13	7
		Carter	9		16		18	18	2		26	7	15	15	37	12	6	6	3	4	0	0	3	4	7	4
		Reagan	8		18		5	8	3		37		17		35		2		1		0		2		8	
		GHWBush	10		11		13	7	2		16		4		27		11		0		1		11		9	
		Clinton	4		13		10	7	3		26		4		27		13		15		1		10		3	
average	7.7		16.6		14.1	12.7	2.2		26.3		10.0		31.5		7.8		4.5		0.5		4.8		6.7			
error	2.1		4.1		4.3	5.7	0.8		8.6		7.0		5.3		4.2		5.7		0.5		4.4		4.6			
	GWBush	4		12		6		2		11		4		28		5		16		2		22		4		

\* \*

Sources: • Rove statistics.

° Compiled by author from Gergen's tables.

All remaining statistics, independently compiled by author from: *the Congressional Record*, *Public Papers of the President*, and *Weekly Compilation of Presidential Documents*. All statistics on George W. Bush taken from the *Weekly Compilation*.

\* Indicates statistically significant difference.

### *Starting Policy*

On matters of policy, the matrix has some interesting patterns to reveal. “When you look at [policy],” Rove argues, two clear groups of presidents stand out in the matrix: “...some presidents come into office with an agenda that they want to pursue in a pretty aggressive fashion. Other presidents come in as ‘transitional presidencies,’” i.e., those preserving the on-going agenda. In addition, the planners learned from their own analysis that the transition needed to connect its campaign rhetoric directly to the use of the President’s discretion, focusing presidential initiatives on central campaign elements. “We looked at what was it that they established in the campaign,” Rove notes, “and how did that carry through to the opening scene, if you will?” This section assesses the degree to which the transition plan outlined a policy start linked to the campaign agenda.

The use of this planning information resulted in not only the creation of a strategic plan, the subject of the first measure in this section, but it orchestrated an unprecedented outpouring of initiatives in the earliest stages of the transition. Though they did not adopt a wide array of initiatives, exactly half the average for the three previous Republican transitions, the Bush White House produced *all* of its four major policy messages to Congress by the first week of February, or ending at day 19. By comparison, President Clinton, did not produce his first major message (economic) until day 29, a full ten days after the entire Bush agenda had gone to Congress. Two other major proposals on economic stimulus and national service did not appear until around day 89. President GHW Bush, who campaigned as “the education president,” did not produce a message to Congress on education until day 86. And Ronald Reagan, the recognized champion of a focused transition, did not report on his economic package until day 29, again a full ten days after the entire Bush agenda had gone out to the Congress. Clearly, Rove’s planning had established a connection between the campaign themes and the action agenda of the administration. That plan had prepared them to satisfy the second measure of transition success in this area, using their plans to promote policy.

### *Maintaining a Focus*

The Bush Administration’s plan faced three typical challenges that tested their commitment to their own agenda. The first occasion involved the campaign finance proposals of Senator John McCain (R-AZ) whose insurgency in the Republican primaries for a while had threatened

Governor Bush's presidential hopes. A second incidence involved a managed-care proposal from a broad-based coalition of House and Senate members.<sup>57</sup> Both of these proposals diverted attention from the administration's top priority proposals for a tax cut and education reform. Karl Rove worked hard behind the scenes, according to reports, to postpone the health care and election reform agendas in order to maintain attention on the administration's top priorities. On both, the Administration managed to maintain their single-minded focus on their plans with assistance from a cooperative Republican congressional party leadership.

On a third issue, the administration faced allies in the private sector determined to take advantage of the President's tax cut initiative. According to reports in March of 2001, dozens of trade organizations and corporations with their own lobbies had instigated a plan to secure favorable tax treatments under the umbrella of tax reform sponsored by the Administration. Along with all of the senior members of the President's team including efforts by Vice-President Cheney and White House Chief of Staff Andrew Card, Karl Rove worked "aggressively" to convince these organizations to abandon their own plans and "get with the [Bush] program."<sup>58</sup>

On a separate tact, the administration became its own worst opponent causing it to wrestle with its own agenda. After the House had passed the President's highest priority tax cut at day 48. Almost immediately after this initial legislative success, the White House took a series of actions on the environment, beginning on day 52, that disrupted public focus on the President's own agenda. These actions included reversing a campaign promise on carbon dioxide emissions, junking the Kyoto Accords on Global Warming, and initiating a fiasco over the mandatory review of arsenic standards in drinking water. On each of these issues, a considerable amount of notoriety ensued diverting attention from the administration's tax cut efforts in the Senate.

### *Summary*

Using the details Rove's transition research developed, the Bush transition team gleaned a number of informative lessons. Those lessons, in

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<sup>57</sup> See Bennett Roth and Karen Masterson, "Coalition Unveils Managed-care Bill, Bush Aide Looks to Derail Measure," *The Houston Chronicle*, 7 February 2001, Section A, Page 1.

<sup>58</sup> See Dan Morgan, "Business Backs Bush Tax Cut; Under Pressure, Groups Agree to Defer Push for Wider Relief," *The Washington Post*, 4 March 2001, A Section, page A01.



turned, informed their plans, which proved dramatically useful. That research drove the preparation of the President's early schedule and the presentation of his policy agenda in record time. It further established a foundation for focusing their attention away from those "friendly" distractions presented by the Washington policy community and towards more time expended on the President's agenda. If, as Secretary Baker argued at the beginning of the Forum, the White House has no other objective to governing than policy, the Bush transition made excellent progress towards that objective.

### **GOAL 5. A CAPACITY FOR CRISIS**

This goal established one clear objective: maintaining *a flexible decision process*.

The transition, itself, did not present a crisis of the size contemplated under this goal. While most administrations face an early test over one of their Cabinet appointments, the Bush White House had little in the way of that kind of distraction. Subsequent events in the late transitional period, however, made it clear how the Bush White House approaches crises. In early April 2001, for example, the President faced a confrontation with China over a mid-air collision in international air space involving an American intelligence aircraft and a Chinese fighter jet. A few months later, in early September 2001, an assault on American soil by international terrorists also challenged the administration's decision-making process. In both the Chinese crisis and the 9/11 attack, the Bush White House appears to have adopted one common approach – creating a crisis management team thereby relieving everyone else of crisis responsibilities. "Walling off" the crisis in this fashion, the former Chiefs of Staff agreed, represents the best approach to maintaining functions.

In the Chinese crisis, the administration set up a policy-making group including, from the White House, the National Security Advisor and Chief of Staff and Senior Counselor for Communications. The creation of a Homeland Security Office inside the White House and assignment to it of the crisis walled off the 9/11 crisis, leaving a separate group in charge of managing the issue and freeing the rest of the staff to concentrate on their normal responsibilities. As a clear indicator that the White House has employed this strategy, senior Bush aide Karl Rove played no role in the Chinese crisis and Karen Hughes (while on the staff) and Mr. Rove did not participate in the "war crisis" group. Instead, the presence of the crisis team

left them to concentrate on their own responsibilities for message and long-term, political planning.<sup>59</sup>

### *Summary*

Although most administrations face an early distraction during the appointments process, the transition posed no significant challenges in this regard. Moreover, subsequent international crises have demonstrated the administration's capacity to maintain its White House operations through the recommended strategy of walling off the crisis with a special management group. In sum, then, the 2001 transition presented a text-book case, one rarely matched by other transitions.

## **GOAL 6. THINK INTO THE FUTURE**

This goal results in three objectives: identifying *a senior planning group*, *maintaining a planning function*, and focusing on *the rhythms of governing*.

### *Senior Planning Group*

Given the Bush team's proclivities to begin early and to reflect on previous experiences, it seems reasonable to expect that the new White House would place a degree of emphasis on what Card called "forward planning." The Bush White House has utilized a number of planning groups designed to fill this previous deficiency, three of which occupy central roles. First, Card organized a mid-level management group, termed the "Conspiracy of the Deputies," a long-range planning group of Deputies from all the White House operational offices. Second, the Bush White House reactivated the Nixon/Reagan era Office of Strategic Initiatives, run by Barry Jackson, a staff group designed to facilitate the strategic planning functions of a third group dubbed the "Strategy Group" (proving that even Republicans watch *Saturday Night Live*).<sup>60</sup>

This emphasis on planning has two effects. First, it fills an obvious gap Secretary Card underscored as present in every modern White House. "By involving what is a larger than normal group of people," Mr. Rove hopes,

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<sup>59</sup> See Mile Allen and Allen Sipress, "Attacks Refocus on How to Fight Terrorism," *The Washington Post*, 26 September 2001, Section A, page 3 and David Balz, "Bush's Political Guru Finds Himself on Periphery," *The Washington Post*, 31 October 2001, Section A, page 3.

<sup>60</sup> Though Karl Rove clearly winces at the term's use, others in the White House refer openly to the silly title. An additional group – Card designated it the "Karen and Karl meeting" – created in the operational shake-up following 9/11 – brought Card and the other two senior counselors together with the President for what Card described as "mid-range" planning. The involvement of the President in this kind of group seems like a hallmark of the Bush management style.

“we’ll be pulling the best talents in the White House into planning. The object is to have a strategic framework...brought down to each office by the participants. Everybody in the White House has a role in long-term planning.”<sup>61</sup> In effect, then, every operational group also has a serious responsibility in planning White House long-term strategy as well as facing everyday operational problems. As a result, the planning staff does not spend time looking for operational responsibilities that would substitute for planning.

Second, involvement by the broad-range of offices in the planning process reinforces the critical impression that everyone on the senior staff plays a role in the President’s decision-making. For example, in addition to Rove, the Strategy group originally included domestic policy adviser Margaret LaMontagne, then economic adviser Lawrence B. Lindsey, national security adviser Condoleezza Rice, Card and his deputy, Joshua Bolten, then communications director Karen P. Hughes, communications specialists Margaret Tutwiler and Mary Matalin, staff secretary Harriet Miers, and the administration’s then top legislative lobbyist Nicholas Calio. Under Rove’s supervision, the Strategy group met weekly in the Eisenhower Building to discuss and brainstorm out new initiatives and plans for the President’s budget in FY2003 and the off-year election campaign in 2002 and the eventual re-election campaign in 2004. The creation of these three groups, then, satisfies this first planning requirement.

### *Maintain the Planning Function*

Given the attention focused on daily operations, every White House has a difficult time maintaining a planning function, other than the standard unit maintaining the President’s schedule. The Bush White House has maintained a dedicated planning function through its time in office. The development of the “Karen and Karl” group and its successor illustrates further their evolving planning operations under the Chief of Staff. This weekly planning session with senior advisors and the President developed from “new time” carved out of the President’s schedule by the staff’s “maturing experience.” Given the additional time squeezed from the President’s schedule, Card thought it important to invest a good portion of that surplus in further advancing planning. In effect, then, the White House continues to develop its planning activities, elaborating them and

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<sup>61</sup> See Dona Milbank, “Serious ‘Strategy’; As Rove Launches Elaborate Political Effort, Some See a Nascent Clintonian ‘War Room’,” *The Washington Post*, 22 April 2001, Section A, page A01.

dedicating a continuing and growing portion of the President’s time to the subject.

*Apply Rhythms to Governing*

Lastly, the President’s schedule must consider the Washington community. Both Card and Rove indicated their constant attention in planning to the normal routines of the congressional schedule, especially to the federal budget cycle. They considered the signposts in the President’s schedule as opportunities for communicating with the public, to establish their public agenda by their advanced preparations.

As one interesting implication of this planning for the congressional rhythms, Mr. Rove notes that planning allowed them to react to the normal schedule and bend it to their advantage. They believe attention to these rhythms afforded them advantage on those issues most central to their policy agenda, for example. In particular, they believe that attention to these rhythms helped them move their initial tax cut, the center of their policy agenda, through the congressional agenda faster than normal.

Table 8 summarizes data on this claim about planning. It reports the completion of administration initiatives during the first year in office for

**Table 8. Completion of Major Initiatives**

Transition	Day of completion, first year		All Major Initiatives		
	Tax Cut	Bush Improved	days	number	%
<b>GWBush</b>	<b>107</b>		<b>218</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>40</b>
Previous	137	22%	133	15	62
Clinton	172		142	10	57
GHWBush	—		205	13	43
Reagan	167		145	5	100
Carter	105		94	18	53
Nixon	105		116	19	44
Kennedy	—		98	19	72
Regime					
Unified	139	21%	111	15	61
Divided	136	24%	155	11	62

Source: Compiled by author. *The Congressional Record, Public Papers of the President, and Weekly Compilation of Presidential Documents.*

favor tax cuts, and therefore speedy consideration would not appear unusual. While this criticism seems appealing, the data do not support its

the 2001 transition and for the previous six transitions. It compares the Bush experience on its tax initiative as well as other major initiatives, those set out in presidential messages to Congress. The data supports Mr. Rove’s conclusion that detailed planning moved their tax cut through the Congress with alacrity. Of course, some administration critics point out that politicians generally

premise. The record of other administrations proposing tax cuts makes clear that these policies do not always carry immediate and overwhelming support. By comparison with previous transitions, for example, the Congress completed work on the Bush tax cut a month sooner than the average (an improvement efficiency rating of 22%), including a month improvement over the typical unified government. Of particular note, the Bush tax cut moved through Congress a whopping sixty days faster than the previous supply-side tax cut during the Reagan administration.

That experience with planning did not carry over to the administration's other policy initiatives, though. For example, consider initiatives completed by Congress during the first year of administrations. Here, the George W. Bush record, at 40%, represents the least responsive rate among the previous transitions. President Carter's experience, often cited as the exemplar of poor agenda formation, for example, scored six percentage points higher than did the 2001 transition. Presidents Reagan and Kennedy hold the records for divided and unified completion rates, respectively. Given the numbers of initiatives set out in congressional messages (see Table 7), the 2001 transition record does not illustrate the virtues of a focused agenda, even though they quite clearly employed one (see column on "number of items" in the table).<sup>62</sup>

### *Summary*

Much of their experience with long-term planning seems to have benefited the 2001 transition. The Bush transition moved through the presentation of their agenda faster than any previous transition. And they made remarkable progress in ushering their highest priority initiative, their tax cut, through the Congressional process. Yet, the overall agenda did not fare well. Some of that lack-luster performance traces to the transfer of the majority leadership from the President's party in the summer of 1981 as well as the 9/11 crisis, both likely to have abnormally lengthened their record of completion.

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<sup>62</sup> In addition, recall that the Bush administration mishandled a number of regulatory matters during their initial transition period, including a recurring bout with regulations on arsenic in urban water supplies. These stumbles, however, originated in the Clinton administration and apparently as on-going issues that they had held in reserve presuming that a newly elected Al Gore would prefer to settle them on his own terms. The election outcome short-circuited those plans and left the regulations for the Bush administration to discover as pending.

## **THE MEASURE OF TRANSITIONS**

The Baker Institute Forum on the White House Chief of Staff set as a goal to bring public attention to the proper conduct of a presidential transition. Each participating former Chief of Staff lent his advice and prestige without regard to partisan possibilities. They had no idea who would win the presidential election yet to come later in 2000. Nor did they consider the possibility that one of their number would eventually become Vice-President of the United States or that someone closely associated with so many of them would soon join their select group. Instead, they participated as an act of public service – hoping to shape planning for and management in the institution that each held in such high regard.

Based on the advice of the Forum and the standards used here, the George W. Bush transition established an exemplar. In discipline, balance, focus, and planning, the Bush White House guided itself through a tumultuous beginning to make a well-orchestrated start. As the comparative data suggests, their achievement constitutes an historic accomplishment.

Of course, every presidential transition does not set out to achieve academic goals, any more than they set out to stumble their way through the first hundred days. That so many have experienced such distress stands as testament to the inherent difficulty of these simultaneously political and civic acts. As human endeavor, managing to govern from the White House, from within the nerve center, has no parallel. No national presidential campaign, no governorship, no global corporation, no other elected Washington position presents its occupants or their staffs with equivalent challenges. For this reason, former presidents become trusted confidants of the incumbent, regardless of their partisan differences, and those who have occupied the management responsibilities for those presidents have become the best available advisors for those who enter the nerve center each day.

### **IMPROVING TRANSITION PREPARATIONS**

Equally important, the transition process, itself, needs more attention. The Bush transition team achieved a great deal based on their advance preparations. Yet, the planning apparatus of the Bush transition seems feeble by comparison to the task. The public deserves better, especially when they can easily get better. Two examples taken from the hallmark accomplishments of the Bush transition illustrate the need for a stronger transition effort.

*Targeting personnel.* Setting and meeting personnel goals constitutes one of the highest accomplishments of the Bush transition. That success rested on two elements. First, the planners committed their early efforts to identifying positions not nominees. In doing so, they focused on identifying those positions that set policy. To identify positions, they relied on the so-called “Plum Book,” a joint effort of the Congress and Office of Personnel Management listing “currently” non-competitive positions. Currently, though these two agencies do not release their listing until after the election. That schedule reflects the troublesome assumption that the President-elect’s team does not need to know about the government’s personnel structure until after the election. The *Plum Book* released at election time in 2000 carried some 8,129 titles. No one can master the shape of these positions in the critical period after election. Instead, the government should complete the *Plum Book* well before the election, presumably during June or July of the election year.<sup>63</sup> Otherwise, the transition planners must rely on the previous publication developed four years earlier. Since many of the policy-making positions will have changed during those four years, reflecting statutory and reorganization changes, the transition planners have a far more difficult task than necessary identifying key personnel.

Given that fact, two recommendations seems worthwhile:

1. The congressional leadership and the President should make certain that they set new policy on the scheduled release of the *Plum Book* moving forward to June its public release.
2. Additionally, the congressional leadership and the President should make certain that the new compilation identifies the critical policy-making positions in the government.

*Planning for Discretion.* While clearly an effective tool for planning, discovering the outlines of presidential activities should not constitute such a mystery. Both of the most successful transitions of the past six decades have devoted a good deal of effort (as indicated in Table 7) at assaying what a President must do on a routine basis and, by substitution, what discretion a President might have available. They have made valiant efforts to project an idea of the possible and these ideas have guided their advance

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<sup>63</sup> Some legislative proposals have set the time for release of the *Plum Book* at the close of the national party conventions. While an improvement on the current timing, the proposed release could come earlier without harm. The government need only make the document available and allow the candidate’s planners to work from it whenever they plan to, even if that schedule begins long before their party’s convention. Often by June the parties through their primaries have already selected their presumptive candidates and transition planning has begun in earnest, as happened with the Bush for President planners.

preparations. Unfortunately, they have based their judgments on the most rudimentary information. Meanwhile, the National Archives and its partners among the Secret Service, the presidential appointments office, and the White House Ushers maintain the best information for such planning: a minute-by-minute log of the President's activities. They have done so since Dwight Eisenhower's administration. And while this information could provide invaluable insights into these two critical questions (responsibilities and discretion), transition planners have had no access to it.

**Table 9. Comparisons between Information Sources**

Transition Source		Meetings with						Press Conferences	Television or other media		Travel					
		Congressional		Cabinet		Interests					Foreign		Domestic		Time off	
		NC	G°	NC	G°	NC	G°				NC	G°	NC	G°	NC	G°
Kennedy	Reported	3		2		4		10		7		0	1	2	0	2
	Actual •	50		5		28		10		6		0	2		11	
Carter	Reported	26	7	15	37	12		6		3	4	0	3	4	7	4
	Actual •	74		15		69		6		8		0	3		9	

Sources: • Actual figures compiled from National Archives, Presidential Appointments Logs, John F. Kennedy Presidential Library and Jimmy Carter Presidential Library.  
 ° Compiled by author from Gergen's tables.  
 All remaining statistics, independently compiled by author from: *the Congressional Record*, *Public Papers of the President*, and *Weekly Compilation of Presidential Documents*. All statistics on George W. Bush taken from the *Weekly Compilation*.

Table 9 reports a comparison between those public data sources used by the planners reported earlier in Table 7 and the actual figures derived from two recently available presidential appointments logs, one made available by the John Kennedy Library and one made available by the Jimmy Carter Library. The table makes obvious that on some kinds of questions, the public data typically employed by planners produces satisfactory estimates of transition activities. These include those activities which the National Archives itself makes a special effort to enumerate (e.g., Presidential news conferences<sup>64</sup>) and those that generate a certain amount of press coverage (e.g., presidential foreign travel). Note, though that among the three measures used in the travel category, estimating the amount of time the President takes off appears a difficult task without the use of the appointments logs. For Kennedy, the Gergen and Rove studies, missed the

<sup>64</sup> See Martha J. Kumar, "Does This Constitute a Press Conference? Defining and Tabulating Modern Presidential Press Conferences," *Presidential Studies Quarterly*, (forthcoming 2003).



mark considerably. For Carter, the best estimate, using the *Presidential Papers* series and cross-checking it with LexisNexis still missed the President's down time by a factor of almost 30%.

Modern methods of newsgathering have improved greatly their coverage of the President's Cabinet meetings. While they missed a considerable percentage of Kennedy's, they reported accurately the number of Carter Cabinet meetings. For obvious reasons, though, normally public sources did a miserable job of estimating the amount of meetings the President took. The table reports two key types, those with congressional leaders and those with interest groups, both representative of central presidential responsibilities in policy-making. The numbers for congressional contacts seem particularly troublesome given the likely conclusions planners might draw about how much time the President normally invests in legislative activities. Here the number cited for actual contacts only notes contacts with congressional leaders (partisan and committee leaders) and only those in which the President's meeting took at least six minutes. Given the valuable nature of presidential time, the latter standard excludes a substantial number of encounters with the congressional leadership in which the President *briefly* makes a specific request or obtains a specific piece of information or settles a specific strategic issue. Thus, even the numbers reported here present a conservative view of how much time a president typically invests in each of these activities.

And these very conservative estimates of actual time suggest that planners have developed a disastrously low approximation of presidential activity. For example, the estimates for Kennedy interactions with congressional leaders missed the actual figures by a factor of 1,567%. Quite obviously, the public reports on Kennedy do a miserable job of capturing his involvement with legislative affairs. But even for Jimmy Carter, typically thought to have paid little attention to congressional politics,<sup>65</sup> the estimates underrepresented his involvement by around 200%. Given the fact that Carter had a daily, morning briefing on congressional relations, which other presidents have not had, and which did not normally get noted in public accounts of the President's schedule, these underestimates perpetuate into the planning function misleading public images of Carter's legislative activity. And that image of the Presidency, as less engaged in legislative affairs, does a disservice to those who want to know the "normal" demands on a president's time. Indeed, it reinforces further the belief that properly appreciating scale in the nerve center represents the single most

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<sup>65</sup> See Thomas P. O'Neill, 1987, *Man of the House*, New York: Random House.

important issue for transition planners. *Even the most conscientious and motivated researchers will miss the actual record by a very large amount.*

Similarly, though less inaccurate than for legislative affairs, the data on interest group contact probably would give planners a better picture of these activities as well. On both presidents covered in these comparisons, the amount of error ranges in the hundreds of percent off (about 700% for Kennedy and 200% for Carter). The error in estimates did manage to get the relative proportions of meetings correctly, more legislative meetings than interest group meetings. Since these differences probably reflect the fact that responsibilities and duties squeeze the amount of time left for coalition maintenance, some useful information about demands gets conveyed even though the studies miss the details.

The details, though, often tell the most important stories. For example, the differences in legislative and interest group contact probably suggests that these responsibilities then fall to the White House staff under its Chief, thus emphasizing more the role of the president's staff. Or these data may suggest that typically interest groups simply get ignored more than we imagine, implying in turn that their causes get conveyed more through the media than through personal contact with the White House. In any case, the general view of the President as more engaged with interests appears a dangerous exaggeration.

And these data do not begin to address the questions raised earlier about administrative, diplomatic, and partisan responsibilities. We simply have no estimate of how much of the President's time these responsibilities consume and without them, we cannot (nor can any planner) estimate properly how to preserve the President's discretionary commitments.

No one has an interest, either partisan or otherwise, in keeping this useful information from a potential new President's team. To the contrary, everyone has a common interest in making it easier to understand the challenges before any new team will face. Proper transition planning should move beyond the current practices of "guesstimating" using what now appears as sadly inadequate public data. Instead, transition planners should incorporate more accurate and thereby more suggestive data.

As such, it seems reasonable to recommend the following:

3. The President should instruct the Archivist of the United States collaborate with outside experts in preparing a detailed and scientific analysis of past presidents' schedules during their transition periods from inauguration through the first 180 days.

Though White Houses work for policy goals and not academic ones, the civic milestones set out here represent objective standards with which to

assess governing. The information requirements proposed here represent objective needs with which to support governing. Both also represent solid advice from those who have borne the burdens. To the extent that all Americans, partisans and academics, have a stake in a successful transfer of power and responsibility, these standards deserve further attention. When the government has met these objectives and provided this information, the advice of the former Chiefs of Staff will have fully reached those who enter the nerve center. And as they eloquently demonstrated by their collective voice, that constitutes a service to us all.