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# Presidential Transitions

## From Politics to Practice

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## George Bush: A Friendly Takeover?

### **Recognizing the Task at Hand: Preelection Efforts**

George Bush's transition to the presidency in 1988 offers a somewhat different challenge than the cases of Carter, Reagan, and Clinton. This was a "friendly takeover" by a vice president who had served the outgoing administration for eight years, and so Bush was presumably in a much better position to take the reins of power. Bush's prepresidential career also was of potential benefit: he had spent most of his political life inside the Washington Beltway, and he did not face the difficult range of adjustments that the others had to in coming from Atlanta, Sacramento, and Little Rock. This was no political outsider and local entourage arriving at the White House steps. But as we shall see, the preparation for the Bush presidency resembled those of Carter and Reagan, and it would face some of the same tests. The decisions made and actions taken, in turn, would carry over into his presidency.

Like Jimmy Carter and Ronald Reagan, Bush began to think about his transition to the presidency well before the November election. Indeed, he began the process almost a year before the actual transition was to take place, an all-time record. In late 1987, Chase Untermeyer, a longtime Bush associate,<sup>1</sup> approached the vice president with a proposal to begin planning for a possible Bush presidency. Untermeyer posed the idea to George W. Bush, the vice president's son, at a Christmas party at the Bush home. George W. immediately informed his father, and by the end of the party the vice president told Untermeyer that it "was a little early to think of such things but that he would contact me later to discuss it."

In January 1988, Bush met with Untermeyer and told him he wanted him to conduct the project. They discussed the broad outlines, but Bush cautioned that he did not want any work undertaken until it was clear he was going to be the Republican nominee. By April, the presidential nomination was secure, and Bush asked Untermeyer to prepare a memorandum outlining the project, which Untermeyer promptly did. By then, Untermeyer had resigned from the Pentagon and, following a brief trip to South America, returned home to find a copy of a memo from the vice president to his campaign staff. In the memo, Bush, using essentially the same language Untermeyer used in the memo to him, informed staff that Untermeyer would undertake a transition planning project. Untermeyer and Bush again met in Kennebunkport, Maine, over Memorial Day weekend, and Bush gave the final go-ahead.

Through the summer months, Untermeyer worked alone out of his apartment in Washington. Although Bush had agreed to Untermeyer's efforts, he set strict limits on his mandate. Unlike Jack Watson, Untermeyer did not begin drafting an extensive array of memos on the organization of the White House or assemble a staff that would begin to compile policy proposals or develop a broader thematic policy agenda. And unlike Pen James, who in 1980 also had a limited mandate, he did not even put together a team that would begin the process of reviewing positions and commence a personnel process. "My charter was simply to prepare a plan for the transition and for a transition headquarters, but do nothing in the way of personnel," Untermeyer later recalled. "Bush was deeply concerned that such work, when inevitably it became public, might make him appear overconfident and presumptuous." Untermeyer did begin to have conversations about the transition with various people "but otherwise operated under cover."<sup>2</sup>

But public it became just before the Republican convention, when Bush himself told columnist David Broder of Untermeyer's efforts.<sup>3</sup> Untermeyer thought initially that Bush's comment to Broder was an accident, but on reflection he later concluded that Bush "wanted to have a lightning rod apart from the campaign, apart from his own vice presidential office" that would attract office seekers and deflect them away from the business of the campaign. At the same time, Untermeyer also felt that Bush still wanted Untermeyer to run a low-key, one-man office: "George Bush, politician, rather than George Bush, government executive, knew that if there is an alternative center from the campaign where all the goodies are being studied and passed out, that is where those [who] are ambitious and energetic are going to gravitate," rather than to the campaign.<sup>4</sup>

In one of the few media reports of his efforts, Untermeyer acknowledged the limits on his organization mandate: "My charter was firmly set out by George Bush. It is to deal with the structure for making personnel and policy decisions in an orderly way after November 8. I am to come up with a plan for a transition, not to make any job-placement decisions or recommendations, not even to suggest key people for transition team posts."<sup>5</sup>

Unlike Jack Watson's operation, one Bush aide noted, Untermeyer's "planning and what he developed was not really a blueprint that excluded people. Moreover, I don't think [Bush] would have wanted such a system to exist. Chase had been doing some work but very quietly."<sup>6</sup> In the view of J. Bonnie Newman (who would join the transition and later serve in the Bush White House), the effort was "very reflective of George Bush." "He was trying to do this smaller, more quietly, using a rifle rather than shotgun approach, trying to maintain, in the positive sense of the word, some kind of dignified yet reflective control of the process."<sup>7</sup>

From mid-August through the end of October, Untermeyer had five meetings with Bush and his chief campaign strategists, James Baker and Governor John Sununu of New Hampshire, and the group discussed several of Untermeyer's recommendations. According to Untermeyer, "The VP made various decisions after these deliberations, in effect authorizing me to proceed immediately toward their implementation. I cannot overemphasize how valuable these secret pre-election sessions were." One of the decisions made during this time was that Untermeyer would become director of presidential personnel if Bush won the White House.<sup>8</sup>

#### *Help from Some Friends*

In contrast to the more cautious approach prevailing within the Bush camp, the Reagan administration was undertaking a series of steps to prepare for an orderly transfer of power, whether to Bush or Democratic candidate Michael Dukakis. Its efforts in this regard far exceeded those of recent outgoing administrations. In fact, Raymond Fontaine and other representatives of the General Services Administration (GSA) met with representatives of both the Dukakis and Bush campaigns to go over the logistics of the transition and the new rules about public disclosure.<sup>9</sup>

Yet within the Reagan White House, less bipartisan expectations prevailed and preparations were under way in the event of a hoped-for

Bush election. On November 1, 1988, Robert Tuttle, director of the White House personnel office, forwarded a memorandum to Chief of Staff Kenneth Duberstein entitled "Transition Planning." Item 2 of the memo stated, "I have met on approximately a half dozen occasions with Chase Untermeyer for in-depth discussions and have thoroughly briefed him on the operation and organization of Presidential Personnel." (No mention is made of briefings with members of the Dukakis campaign.)

Tuttle goes on to note that he, his associate directors, and Untermeyer's deputy, Ross Starek, have reviewed "in depth the approximately 550 presidential appointments requiring Senate confirmation." "We [Untermeyer and Starek] have given them an appraisal of each position the Bush Administration will have to fill, an outline of the budget and staff requirements for each position, a candidate profile, an appraisal of the incumbent, and an indication of the incumbent's interest in remaining in the position." At the bottom of the memo, Tuttle concludes, underlined, that "this project was done entirely within PPO [Presidential Personnel Office]; no calls were made to the agencies, the incumbents or any other organization to assist in the planning for these meetings."<sup>10</sup>

J. Bonnie Newman, who would shortly use many materials developed by the Reagan White House, found these volumes "very, very helpful." Newman also had access to the personnel descriptions she had worked on as a member of the Reagan personnel office in 1981. In addition, Dick Kinser of the White House developed a helpful how-to guide for personnel, which set out qualities to look for in prospective candidates, interviewing techniques, advice on how to organize personnel work, and other matters relevant to the effective screening of candidates. To have all of this "during the Bush transition really gave us a head start," Newman would later observe.

Chase Untermeyer recalls that his preelection meetings with Tuttle at the White House were "extremely valuable." Half of his sessions with Tuttle and his assistants were lengthy affairs in which they proceeded "department by department, agency by agency, job by job, as to what the various positions and responsibilities were, what kind of people were there now, and candidly assessing who would be good to retain, who would be good to move to another position, or who would be good to terminate."<sup>11</sup>

And the briefing books were extremely useful, according to Untermeyer. "Each book contained the 'authority sheets' for each presidential appointment, with the staffer's experienced judgment as to which

jobs were the most important, the most difficult, the hardest to fill, etc. These books became the hour-by-hour bosom companions of my own personnel staff after the election."<sup>12</sup> Untermeyer would later recall that "none of this was available to my counterpart in the Dukakis campaign, nor could it have been." "In a normal transition of one party to the other, all that would have been delayed until the actual transition, and even then it would have been shared grudgingly at best."<sup>13</sup>

On November 5, three days before the election, John Tuck of Duberstein's staff prepared a memo for the chief of staff outlining ten "checklist" steps to be taken in the coming days. The first item in the report was: "Brief Jim Baker/Craig Fuller by phone on transition plans." Item number two: "Brief the President on Tuesday regarding transition plans" under either a Bush or Dukakis electoral victory. Duberstein also had the White House executive clerk's files scoured for information about past transitions.<sup>14</sup>

Colin Powell, the NSC adviser, also had been preparing for the transition in his area. On November 3, five days before the election, Powell forwarded to Duberstein a report outlining what transition preparation his staff had undertaken. According to Powell, the NSC had prepared a volume of briefing materials on the organization, staffing, and budgeting of the NSC staff, a volume on specific issues likely to come before the NSC during the transition and the first six months of the presidency, and a set of papers surveying what Powell described as the "family jewels": intelligence programs, commitments to foreign governments, and "other matters of special sensitivity."

Powell reported that there had already been contact with the (yet to be elected) Bush camp. At the request of Bob Kimmitt of the vice president's staff, material had been compiled on the diplomatic meetings held by Reagan, Carter, and Nixon during their first year in office. The material was provided "some weeks ago for informal planning purposes."<sup>15</sup>

### Organizing a Transition: The Postelection Effort

#### *A Team Bush Could Trust*

The postelection transition benefited from two developments: first, it was quickly up and running; second, its personnel were longtime Bush associates. Although Untermeyer's efforts had been restricted in scope, the Bush transition was in full stride one day after the election. In fact, on election night Untermeyer handed Bush a twenty-page memorandum

that asked him to make a series of decisions. One of them was to establish a significantly smaller transition operation—numbering fewer than a hundred people—even though five hundred staff positions had been prepared for at transition headquarters.<sup>16</sup> Although Untermeyer's estimate was off a bit—225 persons were ultimately to serve on the transition staff—the “friendly takeover” was clearly a much leaner operation compared to the 1,500 involved in the Reagan transition eight years before.

At his first press conference, on the day after the election, Bush unveiled the key people who would head his transition. While Untermeyer's mandate may have been limited, Bush had clearly been thinking beforehand about what his transition would look like. Craig Fuller, his vice presidential chief of staff, and Robert Teeter, his pollster and campaign strategist, would serve as codirectors of his transition. Two deputy directors were also announced: Untermeyer would continue to head the personnel operation, and C. Boyden Gray—Bush's legal counsel as vice president—would serve as legal counsel for the transition. In fact, Bush also announced that Untermeyer and Gray had been tapped to serve in corresponding positions on the White House staff: Untermeyer as director of presidential personnel, Gray at the helm of the White House legal counsel's office. Their appointments not only brought two friends on board; the offices they would hold were crucial to the appointments process and gave them a head start.

Bush set the record in making the earliest postelection White House staff appointments—one day. Rounding out the announcements was the appointment of Sheila Tate, Bush's campaign press secretary, as transition press secretary. No mention was made, however, as to whether she would occupy the position after the inauguration.<sup>17</sup> Not one to be boxed in by any formal organization, Bush also indicated that Jim Baker would serve as an adviser on “key aspects” of the transition, further sign of Baker's influence within the Bush inner circle.<sup>18</sup>

All of the appointees, with the exception of Tate, were longtime associates of Bush and not just campaign veterans. All were generally regarded as moderates; Fuller, Tate, Teeter, and even Untermeyer (who once reported for the *Houston Chronicle*) had prior experience in the news media. As Bonnie Newman would later recollect, a close connection with Bush was pervasive among those involved in the transition: “Most of us were known quantities to the president-elect, and I think he wanted to keep the process small, within a group he could trust.”<sup>19</sup>

The choice of Fuller and Teeter alleviated some of the tension that had developed in previous transitions—most notably Carter's—between the campaign staff and those with the political-governmental experience that would likely land them a White House position. As David Bates explains: “Fuller had come from the vice president's office and Teeter had come from the campaign, so you had one guy representing more the governance side and the other guy representing more the campaign. I don't think the campaign felt left out. I think there was a real nice melding.”<sup>20</sup>

By now Fuller and Teeter had officially opened the transition office in Washington and held a brief sidewalk news conference. Fuller said that they were preparing a list of three to five names for each major appointment and that there was no timetable for the announcements. Teeter noted that the vice president wanted not only to look at a list of names but also “to examine some of the criteria and some of the issues that will be facing each of those departments, so that he can consider people in that context.”<sup>21</sup>

Two days later, Fuller and Teeter again briefed the press, emphasizing once more that Bush would play an active role in the process. Both indicated that they would meet with Bush daily to review names for top positions. According to Teeter, the process was designed to help Bush feel “totally familiar with the issues facing these departments [so that] he knows exactly what kinds of people he wants.” Fuller signaled, as Bush had at his first press conference, that the transition would seek fresh faces: “[We are] actively seeking and recruiting people to come in the government who may not have served before.”<sup>22</sup> While friendly, the transition was a takeover nonetheless, and few Reagan appointees were likely to keep their positions.<sup>23</sup>

Not surprisingly, Bush and his aides reached out to core Bush supporters. Early on, a special group had been put together, headed by son George W. Bush, to ensure that those who had demonstrated political loyalty would be considered for positions.<sup>24</sup> According to one member, “We were to make sure that old supporters didn't get left out, didn't get forgotten about.”<sup>25</sup> J. Bonnie Newman, who was working under Untermeyer at the time, recalls that she would receive coded resumes from George W. as well as from Jim Baker and Robert Mosbacher. But the operation was quite informal and in no way resembled Reagan's Kitchen Cabinet, which “literally came right into town and set up a separate office.”<sup>26</sup>

Meetings were also held with Bush campaign workers and Republican party leaders in every state, and fifty “recruiters” were identified

to come up with the fresh faces.<sup>27</sup> Bush and his advisers also announced that three top-level transition aides had been specifically charged with the recruitment of blacks, Hispanics, and women.<sup>28</sup> Bush was especially concerned with increasing the number of female appointments, and he reportedly telephoned Untermeyer on several occasions asking him, "Where are the women?"<sup>29</sup> Yet a strong personal connection to George Bush was the most valuable currency.

While the Bush transition made efforts (or at least publicized a desire) to search far afield for personnel, the large teams that Reagan dispatched to the agencies and departments eight years earlier were not mustered. In fact, several top aides felt that the information-gathering activities of the Reagan transition teams were unnecessary. On November 15, Fuller told the press that "volunteers will serve, but we are not going to send large teams of people around town." Boyden Gray called the Reagan teams a "waste of time and money."<sup>30</sup> Even before the election, while speaking at Harvard on October 23, Richard Darman observed that the 1,500-person Reagan transition in 1980, particularly with its extensive array of teams, did not operate all that effectively: "If there has been a more colossal waste, I'm not aware of it."<sup>31</sup>

Instead, the Bush transition relied on the good graces—and perhaps career concerns—of incumbent Reagan officials by having Ken Duberstein, Reagan's chief of staff, send a memo to each department and agency head on November 21, requesting the kind of information that the Reagan teams had assembled on their own. The memo requested a response by November 25, and Jim Pinkerton, director of the transition's policy planning office, was to be contacted should questions arise.<sup>32</sup>

Although Bush was running a leaner transition with respect to the advice and information gathered for incoming secretaries, this did not mean they were operating in a data vacuum. "Voluminous books have been written for appointees to read. And in case they don't, face-to-face briefings are held on the same transition subjects. A formal briefing with transition representatives is the first scheduled meeting of a newly designated secretary," one press report observed. "They were handed a thick sheaf of single-page instructions on transition behavior, from parking spaces to the costs of inaugural tickets. They were given inch-thick black binders containing information about their new jobs or departments, and guidance on what Bush promised during the campaign about the areas under their jurisdiction."<sup>33</sup>

## Filling the Cabinet

### *A Cabinet of Friends*

Bush lost little time in filling most of his top-level appointments, and it would culminate in a cabinet that had a high degree of Washington experience as well as close personal connection to Bush. At his first press conference, the day after the election, Bush announced, as predicted, that his friend and alter ego, Jim Baker, was his choice for secretary of state. Two days before the election, over cocktails at the vice president's residence, Bush had asked Baker—"out of the blue," according to Baker—if he would serve assuming Bush won. Baker accepted on the spot.<sup>34</sup>

For other appointments, Bush turned for advice to a small group of his closest advisers, including Baker, Treasury Secretary Nicholas Brady, Sununu, Teeter, Fuller, and Vice President-elect Dan Quayle with Untermeyer serving as rapporteur. Dubbed the Cabinet and Sub-Cabinet Advisory Group (CASAG), they met regularly with Bush to go over potential nominees. According to one of the participants, the sessions were "relaxed." "No one person dominates the discussion and there have not been any knockdown, drag-out fights." In the first meetings few names were discussed; talk focused instead on what role was envisioned for a particular department, what initiatives might be forthcoming, and, in the words of one aide, "more generally about the sort of individuals needed." In subsequent meetings, Teeter would often remind the group of what Bush had said about a particular policy area during the campaign, with the discussion then focusing on who might be likely to best achieve those objectives.

Throughout, Bush was described as an active participant: "He keeps the discussions going, asking questions, saying 'Let's move to this,' or 'Let's move to that.' He is quite involved."<sup>35</sup> Yet at times, Bush was prone to act on his own: the appointments of Baker to the cabinet and John Sununu and Brent Scowcroft to the staff were clearly his decisions and apparently made without much internal debate.

On November 15, Bush announced that he would retain Nicholas Brady at Treasury and, a week later, that Attorney General Richard Thornburgh and Education Secretary Lauro Cavazos would be continuing in the Bush cabinet.<sup>36</sup> In the ensuing weeks other Bush friends and associates were named: Robert Mosbacher for the Commerce Department, Carla Hills as U.S. trade representative (a position with cabinet

rank), and Clayton Yeutter for Agriculture.<sup>37</sup> One former and one outgoing member of the House of Representatives—Edward Derwinski at Veterans Affairs (a newly created cabinet department) and Manuel Lujan at Interior—were tapped; Samuel Skinner, a former federal prosecutor and Chicago transportation executive, was selected as secretary of transportation; and Elizabeth Dole, former head of Transportation under Reagan and the wife of Kansas Senator Bob Dole, was named secretary of labor. On December 19, the appointment of Congressman Jack Kemp as secretary of HUD was announced by Bush.<sup>38</sup>

Two other appointments were also settled at this time; both generated some controversy. The first was Louis Sullivan, who was named head of HHS. Sullivan, an African American and president of Morehouse College School of Medicine, aroused controversy from antiabortion groups who charged that Sullivan was soft in his positions and was not fully committed to the prolife cause. However, Fuller and Teeter met with Sullivan in late December and were satisfied that his views were consistent with those of the president-elect. The second controversial nomination was not so easily sidestepped.

#### *Potential Trouble: The Tower Nomination*

It had been rumored as early as mid-November that former Texas Senator John Tower would get the nod for defense secretary. But his possible nomination generated controversies within and outside Bush's inner circle. One point of contention was prolonged negotiation with the transition team over control of subcabinet appointments. On November 23, the *Washington Post* reported that "more than a week ago, Tower was told by a close Bush associate that he could name the three service secretaries—for the Army, Navy and Air Force—but that Bush would select the No. 2 Pentagon appointee, the deputy secretary of defense, and the two undersecretaries who direct acquisition and administer defense policy issues." Bush aides were concerned that Tower would fill all the defense slots with his wide circle of friends and associates in the defense field, thus making the department less responsive to the White House. In his memoirs, however, Tower indicates that the story "overstated the situation to a considerable degree," but he adds this caveat: "In discussing my views on the way I would organize the Pentagon's leadership structure, I made it clear that I intended to recruit several former Senate committee aides and staff members."<sup>39</sup>

Tower's reputation (as a member and former chairman of the Senate Armed Services Committee) of not being fully committed to the

reforms proposed by the Packard Commission, particularly in the area of procurement reform, was another source of controversy. As well, a letter sent by the ranking members of the committee, Georgia's Sam Nunn and Virginia's John Warner, stressing that they would particularly scrutinize the qualifications of Pentagon nominees, caused further concern.<sup>40</sup> Fuller and Teeter were reported to have urged Bush to look at corporate executives who might be more capable at achieving management reforms at the Pentagon.<sup>41</sup> In his memoirs, Tower notes that Teeter in particular preferred a manager at the Pentagon and "seemed to be the one who was pushing the idea the hardest."<sup>42</sup> Tower also notes that Treasury Secretary Brady, who had served a brief interim stint in the Senate, "apparently did warn the president-elect's top advisers that it would not be as easy as everyone thought."<sup>43</sup>

Tower's nomination was also delayed due to allegations of improper personal conduct (based on evidence presented in his recent divorce case), as well as concerns about his lobbying activities after leaving the Senate. But Bush and his advisers decided to go ahead, and on December 16, following the completion of what Bush termed an "extensive" FBI investigation, the Tower nomination was announced.<sup>44</sup>

During the campaign, Bush had signaled that he would be his own president with "new faces" and "wholesale change." Yet only three appointments hailed from outside the Beltway. Even more important, almost all the cabinet members had close personal and political associations with Bush (Baker, Mosbacher, Brady, Tower), had worked in his campaign (Skinner), were well known from their service in Congress (Kemp, Derwinski, Lujan), or had served in various capacities along with Bush in prior Republican administrations (Elizabeth Dole, Yeutter, Cavazos, Watkins). Sullivan could even claim a strong link to both George and Barbara Bush: he first met George at a dedication of a new building on the Morehouse campus in 1982, traveled with both of them on a state visit to Africa, and appointed Barbara (whom he had introduced at the Republican convention) to his medical school's board of trustees. Neither Reagan nor Carter had been so closely linked in one way or another to such a large number of their appointees.

On January 12, Bush held his first meeting with the cabinet-designates. He encouraged them to "think big," "be frank," and "fight hard" for their positions but also to support the president once a decision was made—not voice their disagreement publicly. Bush warned them to adhere to the "highest ethical standards" and cautioned them that he didn't like the "kiss and tell" books that had proliferated in the Reagan years.<sup>45</sup>



### *Subcabinet Appointments*

In filling subcabinet positions, Bush and his aides sought to establish what Untermeyer termed a “cooperative” relationship.<sup>46</sup> While the transition staff prepared lists of candidates for top positions, they were “suggestions” or “strong suggestions.” “Nobody is trying to cram guys down secretaries’ throats,” said one Bush aide.<sup>47</sup>

Two incoming cabinet members were exempted from the system: Jim Baker and Nicholas Brady. The State Department transition team that Jim Baker assembled only days after the election—Bob Zoellick, Margaret Tutweiler, Dennis Ross, and Robert Kimmitt—filled that department at its highest levels.<sup>48</sup> By mid-February, as the approval process dragged on, several cabinet secretaries were reported to have bypassed Untermeyer’s system: “Some have gone straight to Bush for decisions; some have bypassed the wait for White House personnel paper work; some have gone to congressional Republicans to ask them to pressure the White House to move.”<sup>49</sup>

Yet while Bush may have permitted them greater leeway to select their own senior associates, he and the transition operation retained control over lower-level appointments. The latter was similar to the efforts of the Reagan transition—but with a difference: Bush was less concerned with ideological purity than with getting jobs for Bush supporters.<sup>50</sup>

The Bush transition faced a particular difficulty that the Carter, Reagan, and Clinton transitions did not: since it was a “friendly” rather than a “hostile” takeover, some Reagan administration incumbents might have thought they would remain in the new administration, despite the fact that Reagan had ordered their resignations. As Andrew Card recalls, “I think hostile takeovers may be easier. In a friendly takeover you have all of your friends who believe that nothing has changed and they are going to keep their jobs. The reality is that the new president will put in his people. So we did have some tension that was less than constructive.”<sup>51</sup>

But the Bush transition also had some advantages. Many of those involved in the Bush transition had prior White House experience that was especially useful in fully understanding the positions and personnel under consideration. As J. Bonnie Newman notes, “Familiarity with the system is very helpful.” The government “plum book isn’t good enough”; it “doesn’t tell you anything about the real responsibilities of a position and what qualities you might be looking for.” Newman recalls that she, Untermeyer, Boyden Gray, and Andrew Card, in screening prospective candidates, would have several informal discussions

where they would “get into organizational roles” as well as discussing the qualifications of prospective candidates. “So many of us had previously worked together and were known to one another that it was easy to have informal discussions. . . . There was a trust level, a familiarity that existed among the group that benefited those kinds of conversations.”<sup>52</sup>

Once selections had been made, the Bush operation also benefited from close cooperation with the Reagan White House in navigating through the increasingly dense and complicated array of disclosure forms and clearance procedures. According to Newman, “They really provided us with a road map, which streamlined the process. Boyden must have worked really closely with them because he had ready to go, hot off the press, a lot of memoranda providing guidance and instructions regarding the various clearance procedures. . . . We had all of the necessary forms ready.” Gray’s office was able to inform prospective appointees about the ethics requirements and disclosure forms, “so if anyone wanted to screen themselves out early and not have to reveal all of that very detailed information, there should not have been any misunderstandings.”<sup>53</sup>

### *The Bush Cabinet and Presidential Decisionmaking*

As the appointment process unfolded, Bush and his advisers made several decisions that would affect the organization and the role of the cabinet in his decisionmaking. One set concerned which of the non-departmental appointees would be given cabinet rank. Bush decided that OMB Director Darman and Trade Representative Hills would hold the rank, as had been the case under Reagan. But in early December, it was announced that Bush had decided not to give the UN ambassador (a position Bush once held) cabinet rank, as had been the case previously; the director of the CIA (another position that Bush had held) would not have cabinet rank. According to one account, “Bush’s decision, conveyed recently to subordinates, reflects his preference that the two posts be less visible in internal policy-making debates.” Bush was especially concerned that “the CIA should not attempt to influence policy as was the case with the late director William J. Casey.”<sup>54</sup>

Bush’s new drug czar, former Education Secretary William Bennett, also would not be formally designated a member of the cabinet. Bush announced Bennett’s appointment at the same January 12 ceremony where Watkins was also introduced, and Bennett had said he was looking forward to working with “my colleagues in the cabinet.” But



the lack of cabinet rank apparently came as a surprise to Bennett, who learned about it after he was not invited to the first official meeting of the cabinet after inauguration day. Bennett's position as director of the Office of National Drug Control Policy had been recently established by Congress as part of the EOP in order to raise the visibility of the drug issue and bring organizational stability to what had been an informal arrangement; Bennett's salary, moreover, was deliberately set by Congress at the level of a cabinet member. When the issue became public in late January, the White House press office noted that "the president's preference was to limit the number of cabinet members. . . . Secretary Bennett will attend cabinet meetings as appropriate."<sup>55</sup>

Bush and his advisers also decided to continue with the cabinet-council system that had been established in the Reagan presidency. But instead of creating the five (at one point, seven) councils in Reagan's first term, the two-council arrangement—one for domestic policy, the other for economic policy—used in the second Reagan term was followed. Furthermore, the attorney general (Thornburgh) and the treasury secretary (Brady) were placed in charge of each of the councils. Both, of course, were veterans of the Reagan cabinet. According to Andrew Card, the placement of Thornburgh and Brady as heads of each of the councils continued assignments that had developed in Reagan's second term. At the start of Reagan's second term, Attorney General Edwin Meese had been put in charge of the newly combined domestic council, and when Thornburgh replaced Meese at the Justice Department he took over that assignment as well. Since "Thornburgh was a holdover from the Reagan administration, he wanted to keep that role. And the same with Nicholas Brady."

Card remembers that there had even been some discussion of whether two councils were needed or just one and that even Bush himself may have "favored just the domestic council." But a decision was made to continue with the two councils.<sup>56</sup>

Another decision made at the time was that the councils—particularly their staffs—would be placed under the direction of the secretary to the cabinet (David Bates) rather than the White House domestic policy operation. This was an important but little-noticed change that had been made during Reagan's second term, and Bush continued the practice. According to David Bates, "There was some discussion about the pros and cons of that, but Andy [Card] and Governor Sununu decided to leave it under the cabinet secretary."

In Bates's view, there was not much difference in the way the councils operated from what had gone on under Reagan: "It was pretty

similar to the system we inherited." Bates discussed his new position with both Sununu and Bush, and in thinking about what changes he might make once he was in office, he recalls that he just wanted to "continue with the model that had worked effectively toward the end of Reagan's term. I thought that had worked pretty well and wanted to continue on with that." Bates also benefited from the close network of prior association among Bush's top aides: "I had worked for Craig Fuller [who had been secretary to the cabinet in Reagan's first term], so I had a sense of how it worked." Bates also conferred with Reagan's outgoing cabinet secretary, Nancy Risque.<sup>57</sup> But Andrew Card recalls that Bates wanted his office to have a stronger role in the policy process than had been the case in Reagan's second term: "He had been a party to a relatively weak cabinet affairs office in the Reagan administration and he did not want it to be weak in the Bush administration."<sup>58</sup> The potential problem with the setup was the fact that cabinet affairs had a relatively small staff, while the domestic policy shop was much larger. For the arrangement to work, Bates would need to establish a good working relationship with the person selected to lead the domestic policy operation, a post that had yet to be filled.

### Crafting a Policy Agenda

#### *The Beginnings of an Agenda—or Missed Opportunities?*

As we have seen under Carter and Reagan, the transition period is important not just for getting a team in place; it is also the time to translate campaign promises into policy priorities and begin to establish a legislative agenda. In Bush's case, this was especially necessary, as the campaign was comparably devoid of policy specifics, relying instead on the vagaries of "a thousand points of light," "a kinder, gentler nation," and "no new taxes" and such specifics as requiring the pledging of allegiance, banning the burning of the American flag, and enacting tougher laws to deal with the likes of Willie Horton.

#### *Foreign Policy Comes First*

Early efforts were made in the area of foreign policy, where Bush had clearer commitments and great personal interest. As Andrew Card recalls, Bush "was very active with Brent Scowcroft and Jim Baker getting up to speed as secretary of state. Brent Scowcroft is a seasoned

national security person, and the president had latent interest in those areas. So there was a lot that went on in the foreign policy side.”<sup>59</sup>

On December 7, 1988, Bush met with Reagan and Soviet Premier Mikhail Gorbachev at Governors Island in New York Harbor, following the latter’s address to the United Nations. The day after the meeting, Bush reports that he sat down with Scowcroft at the vice president’s residence in Washington, and “I told him I wanted to come up with something dramatic to move the relationship with Moscow forward,” “something bold and dramatic.” In Scowcroft’s view, one goal was to loosen Moscow’s grip on Eastern Europe; the other was ongoing arms-control talks. According to Scowcroft, “I thought these were opportunities for dramatic cuts to not only strengthen strategic stability but also to reduce the conventional forces Moscow relied on to control Eastern Europe.” Bush recognized that “I came into office with a vision of the world I wanted to see, but I had no fixed ‘ten-point plan.’ Brent would more than make up for my failings. . . . He fit the bill perfectly. He was someone who would hit the ground running.”<sup>60</sup>

The other principal member of the foreign policy team, Jim Baker, had by December moved his office from transition headquarters to a suite of rooms in the State Department. During the transition, Baker “talked to every ex-president and most ex-secretaries of state.” “I spent November 1988 through January 1989 assiduously studying the issues,” Baker reports, and “I sat through a briefing by every sitting undersecretary and assistant secretary of state and many prospective ones.” Baker’s immediate staff prepared strategy papers on a range of issues. While recognizing that “the central focus of my job initially had to be U.S.-Soviet relations,” Baker began to take steps during the transition to forge a bipartisan solution to the crisis in Central America, especially by gaining congressional assent to a plan for extending humanitarian aid to the contras in Nicaragua for one year. “I knew we had to find a way to get Central America behind us if we were to be able to deal aggressively with the decline of Soviet power. . . . Without doubt, it was my first priority.” Bush and Baker had agreed to get Central America off the political agenda by no longer asking for military assistance.

Baker was instrumental in arranging Bush’s meeting with President Carlos Salinas of Mexico at a Houston air force base, thereby setting the stage for what would become the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA). During the transition, Bush and Baker also wanted to change the tone of foreign policy in their dealings with Capitol Hill: “As we discussed foreign policy plans during the transition,

the President made it clear that he wanted to move away from the politics of confrontation between the executive and legislative branches.”<sup>61</sup>

Another foreign policy problem that Bush began to tackle during the transition concerned Latin American debt. Bush convened a working group composed of Baker, Brady, Scowcroft, Darman, and Federal Reserve Chairman Alan Greenspan. Together they developed what came to be known as the Brady Plan for restructuring the region’s increasingly mounting debts. The plan, which Brady presented in March, provided for U.S., International Monetary Fund, and World Bank resources to provide collateral backing the debt. While parts of the plan were controversial, it came at no cost to the U.S. Treasury and was instrumental in reviving economic stability, if not growth, in the nations affected.<sup>62</sup>

#### *Budgets and Taxes*

The most important policy area where work was well under way during the transition concerned the budget, particularly what strategy the new administration would take in tackling mounting deficits.<sup>63</sup> Bush faced not only the traditional expectation of putting his imprint on the budget that had been under preparation by the OMB. Doing so by mid-February, he also faced a triple-whammy. As Richard Darman would later note, first, spending was running about 22 percent of gross domestic product (GDP) while revenues were running at 19 percent, hence deficits continued to loom large; second, without significant reductions the automatic cuts set by Gramm-Rudman-Hollings would require reductions in areas, such as defense, that ran against the new administration’s priorities; and, third, most of the easy cuts had already been made in the Reagan years. Neither would a flexible freeze—that is, freezing total spending (with some adjustment for inflation) while flexibly increasing or decreasing particular programs—work, at least as Darman saw it.<sup>64</sup>

Throughout December and January, Darman worked to craft a solution. He met with congressional leaders and members of the bipartisan National Economic Commission that had been created in 1987 to address the budget deficit. He received input from former presidents Ford and Carter (both of whom thought tax increases were necessary) and was even the recipient of advice from Richard Nixon, who, in Darman’s words, “neatly straddled the no-new-taxes problem.” “I don’t know whether the flexible freeze will work,” Nixon told him. “If it doesn’t, then, and only then, is it appropriate to debate a tax increase.”

In a later fax to Bush, Nixon would reiterate his two-step approach, adding “to roll over on [Bush’s well-known “read my lips” pledge] would guarantee oblivion.”<sup>65</sup>

Starting on December 4, Darman commenced an internal review process and met with Bush, Quayle, Brady, Baker, Teeter, and Sununu on a regular basis. “Slowly but surely, I did what the campaign staff had been unable to do. . . . I forced the group to focus on the hard budget realities.”<sup>66</sup> The group met several times over subsequent weeks, and something of a consensus emerged: the administration would fashion a budget that contained limited revisions, frame the revisions in terms of a flexible freeze, propose no new taxes, and encourage bipartisan cooperation “in order to help the *Congress* reach agreement on a budget resolution.”<sup>67</sup> While setting fiscal and budgetary parameters, the burden to cut specific programs was kicked into Congress’s court.

The matter of what to do about taxes was particularly vexing. While Brady and Teeter thought that the tax increases proposed by the bipartisan commission would provide political cover for Bush to abandon his “read my lips” pledge, Baker felt that option was not feasible in the first year. Bush was inclined to go along with Baker. On December 21, prior to a meeting with the group, Bush invited Darman to share lunch. Darman raised the key issues: he could produce a budget that might get by in the first year, but it was going to be near impossible, with the Democrats controlling Congress, to craft a program of long-term deficit reduction without some concession on taxes. Bush responded with something like the Nixon two-step: “Only if it’s after we have tried our best.”<sup>68</sup> The groundwork had been laid: Bush would “muddle through” in his first year, with the “big fix” to come—if needed—in the second.<sup>69</sup> It was a decision that would lead to the 1990 budget agreement and have repercussions on Bush’s chances for reelection.

### *Domestic Policy*

In contrast to the budget, other areas of domestic policy lagged during the transition. “As for the traditional cabinet departments,” Andrew Card notes, “I did not find a lot of policy deliberation. . . . The most active practical area of debate was over the personnel who would head these departments and agencies.” Some discussion of issues did take place, but it was largely as a reactive effort to stave off the efforts of incumbent Reagan officials to stay in their positions. Some of them, Card

remembers, “started to feed a policy decision as a red herring as to why they should not be asked to leave. . . . That generally triggered some kind of policy planning session—if we tell that person he is going to be replaced and he is the champion of X policy, is he going to claim we are not interested in X policy? We better do something to show we are in favor of X policy even though we are going to replace this person. Mostly department people; but a little bit at the White House, too.”<sup>70</sup>

Jim Pinkerton’s assignment to direct policy planning during the transition might have been another place where domestic issues could begin to percolate. But according to Pinkerton, while it was “a great title, a great office . . . I don’t recall doing a lot of policy planning. I recall doing a lot of ‘Thank you for your position paper on this.’ ‘Thank you for your agenda.’ ‘Thank you for this, thank you for that.’” “Most of the time it was just gathering paper [from] people who had been involved in the campaign and/or people who wanted to be involved in the administration. . . . It was more of a paper-gathering function, meeting-holding and paper-gathering.”

Pinkerton and his staff did put together a book containing all of Bush’s campaign promises, organized both by issue and time frame. Pinkerton also “helped a little on the inaugural speech, but only a little.” “I met Arnold Schwarzenegger and helped him get launched on being the chairman of the President’s Council on Physical Fitness, probably the most productive thing I did during that two-month period.”

The wrangling over Bob Teeter’s role in the new administration and the delay until almost mid-January in appointing Roger Porter to head the domestic policy staff also contributed to the problem. “Somewhere in there, Roger Porter got hired to be the director of policy,” Pinkerton recalls, “but I don’t remember him being in Washington much before Bush got inaugurated. He was the policy guy.”<sup>71</sup>

### *Building Bridges*

For his part, George Bush sought at least to convey the image of a president-elect who took domestic issues seriously. He held well-publicized meetings with erstwhile rivals Senator Bob Dole and Michael Dukakis, breakfasted with Senate Democratic Leader George Mitchell, and attended a dinner honoring Jack Kemp sponsored by the Heritage Foundation and the Institute for Free Enterprise Development. As part of his effort to be more inclusive, Bush had lunch with Jesse Jackson on November 30, convened a meeting with sixty African American Republicans on December 8, and met with Benjamin Hooks, director of the

National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, on December 9.

Efforts were made to depict a more congenial, relaxed Bush. He was photographed fishing, dining in a Chinese restaurant in a Washington suburb, mailing a silver foot to Texas Governor Ann Richards,<sup>72</sup> and showing reporters around his home in Kennebunkport. The Bushes and Quayles even went to the movies (*My Stepmother Is an Alien* was the feature that night).

Like the Reagans eight years before, the Bushes were attentive to the contributions that social events at the White House might make to political success. In the second week of January, Susan Porter Rose of Barbara Bush's staff forwarded to the president-elect and future First Lady a memo on the social activities that had been undertaken in the Nixon, Ford, Carter, and Reagan presidencies during their first ninety days of office. The memo had been requested by the president-elect.<sup>73</sup>

One area where attempts were made to show a substantive commitment concerned the environment. Here, C. Boyden Gray took the lead and met on at least four occasions with representatives of six environmental groups. According to one account, "They discussed issues they could agree on (specifically, improving energy efficiency and reducing vehicles' carbon monoxide emissions)" as well as "suggestions for Republican environmentalists who might grace Bush's transition and administration."<sup>74</sup> On November 30, Bush himself convened a breakfast meeting with the group. At least for the moment the efforts paid off: after the meeting one participant told the press, "We will be on his team now."<sup>75</sup>

### Shaping the White House Staff

Like Reagan eight years earlier, Bush recognized that the organization of his White House staff—particularly the appointment of a chief of staff—would be an early priority of his transition. John Sununu would later tell reporters that Bush had discussed the possibility of his appointment as early as two weeks before election day.<sup>76</sup> The day before the election, Bush recorded in his own diary that he discussed announcing Sununu's appointment as chief of staff with Jim Baker, "but that will come later."<sup>77</sup> In fact, Bush did not announce Sununu's appointment until November 17.

### Rebuilding the Troika?

In the intervening days, there was considerable jockeying among Bush's top aides about how the responsibilities of the chief of staff would be defined, what top-level positions others would occupy, and even whether the choice of Sununu was a *fait accompli*. Sununu personally entered the fray. The day after the election, he held a press conference in Concord, New Hampshire, and stated he was not interested in serving as secretary of education or energy, perhaps forestalling any last-minute effort to shunt him off into a cabinet position (though Sununu did say he might be open to a White House position).

While Bush traveled to Florida for a short vacation, Baker and the other top transition officials met, and one of the first items on their agenda was an examination of how the top level of the Bush White House would be organized. Baker favored bringing all three—Fuller, Teeter, and Sununu—into top positions, replicating to a great degree the troika of Reagan's first term.<sup>78</sup> Fuller would handle the day-to-day decisionmaking process, Teeter would continue in his role as strategic planner, and Sununu would oversee domestic policy, perhaps serving as senior counselor to the president, much as Meese had done during Reagan's first term. According to the *Washington Post*, it was felt that this division of responsibilities would play to the respective strengths of each: Fuller, "known for his effort to impose discipline on Bush decisions and for creating a staff system that operates smoothly"; Teeter, "known for his professorial manner and skilled approach to public opinion and policy issues" as well as his "longstanding ties to Bush and Republicans on Capitol Hill"; and Sununu, "known for his quick grasp of policy issues and his ebullient self-confidence in articulating his views." The arrangement would also avoid, it was reported, perceived weaknesses with each: Fuller "at times had bumpy relations with old-timers in the Bush entourage and he is not a trained political strategist"; Teeter was "not regarded as the most efficient manager"; and Sununu lacked Washington experience.<sup>79</sup>

But Baker's efforts did not come to fruition. According to reports, Fuller and Teeter were opposed to making Sununu chief of staff. Fuller, who had served four years as Bush's vice presidential chief of staff and, earlier, as secretary to the cabinet in the Reagan White House, was reluctant to serve under Sununu in a deputy position. Sununu, for his part, was reported to be reluctant to come to Washington if Fuller got the senior position. According to one Bush aide, there was considerable

“tension” and “jockeying” over the proposed arrangement; Fuller was described by one friend as fighting hard for the chief-of-staff job and was “not a happy camper.”<sup>80</sup>

On November 14, Sununu flew to Florida to meet with the vacationing president-elect, and reports surfaced that Bush was leaning toward Sununu. Media accounts of the process indicated that many in the Bush entourage were not happy with Sununu and that he was viewed as a risky choice. Among the worries expressed were whether he could impose discipline on Bush and keep him focused on his principal policy objectives, whether he was able to delegate authority, whether he could work well with members of the Bush inner circle, and particularly whether he could curb his pronounced ego and aggressive nature. They would not prove to be unfounded concerns.

To his credit, Bush was not prone to let the matter slide or unduly permit bickering among his aides, as Carter had done under similar circumstances in 1976. “I’d like to make the decision soon,” he told reporters on November 15, “because that person can start working towards staffing the whole White House for what will be a very important beginning.”<sup>81</sup>

Bush was not happy with the idea of a “troika.” In fact, according to the *New York Times*, Bush was “alarmed by reports that he was considering a troika.” Further, Bush was “enraged by the notion that some associates wanted a less assertive chief of staff to make sure that there was no rival” to Jim Baker and Richard Darman, should the latter become OMB director. “What is clear about the incident, some Bush associates said, is that it shows Mr. Bush will operate with a firm hand, despite the loyalty he feels for some aides.”<sup>82</sup>

As Andrew Card later recalled, while “there certainly were Jim Baker, Bob Teeter, Craig Fuller discussions that suggested that [a troika] might be something they were looking at,” these talks “did not include the president.” “I received a phone call just a matter of days after the election . . . from Florida that gave me a good indication of what was likely to happen [i.e., that Sununu would get the nod].” Card, who would not be formally named as Sununu’s deputy until December 16, got another call the very next day, asking him to help organize the White House staff: “Even well before John Sununu was announced publicly, I spoke to the president, I spoke to John Sununu, and I started along with Ed Rogers, who was close to Lee Atwater but knew John Sununu.”<sup>83</sup> Rogers would soon join Card as one of Sununu’s two deputies.

Furthermore, although Fuller might have had Baker in his corner, the efforts on Fuller’s behalf might also have run up against the opposition

of another Bush intimate, Boyden Gray. According to one report, “It was widely known in the campaign that Mr. Fuller and Mr. Gray did not get along and that Mr. Fuller sought to force Mr. Gray out. In the end, Mr. Gray stayed and Mr. Fuller went.”<sup>84</sup>

#### *Sununu as Chief of Staff, Further Negotiations*

On November 17, nine days after the election, Bush announced the appointment of Sununu as chief of staff. While the president-elect might have been willing to let the opposition to Sununu among his inner circle run its course, he was neither dissuaded from his choice, nor did he unduly delay announcing what had apparently been his decision all along. Bush clearly wanted Sununu—and it was Sununu he got.

Bush particularly valued Sununu’s political stature: “You want someone who’s run for sheriff,” Bush stated at the press conference announcing Sununu’s appointment. Bush also noted that “I decided to send a signal that I have a strong chief of staff who in my view will be able to work with the Congress and the various strong secretaries that we will have in the Cabinet departments.”

Responding to a press question about his own “combative personality and hot temper,” Sununu told the assembled reporters, “I’m a pussycat.” He went on later to note that “I have two responsibilities. One is to be an honest broker and present the views on the various sides of the issue, and if—after I fulfill that—then have an opportunity to indicate my recommendations.” But that should not come “until after all the options have been presented, until all parties have had a chance to present their views on it. It’s the only fair way to allow the person on whose desk the buck really does stop to make the best decisions.” Sununu also laid down an interesting challenge to reporters: “I suspect that the way I’ll measure my success is that after a few years of George Bush—as seen as having a great presidency—people [will] wonder who the chief of staff was—struggle hard to remember his name.”<sup>85</sup>

But the selection of Sununu also meant that Fuller would depart once the transition was over, an outcome that was announced that same day. Bush likely delayed the Sununu announcement because he wanted, if possible, to find a position for Fuller (a cabinet post, most likely), then announce the two appointments at once.<sup>86</sup>

As for Teeter, reports continued in November and December that Bush wanted him to serve as Sununu’s deputy but also with the title “counselor to the president.” And Teeter had an extended discussion with Bush about the position on December 15. Teeter, one transition

official said, would have “an ideas mandate,” with Sununu in charge of the “operations mandate.”<sup>87</sup>

While Sununu was willing to have Teeter serve as one of his deputies, Teeter envisioned broader responsibilities, including counselor to the president—the title that Ed Meese had been given under Reagan—thus making him more of an equal to Sununu. “The Sununu deputy thing [was] a problem,” according to one transition official. “He envision[ed] himself at the same level as Sununu.” Teeter also wanted to have direct access to Bush, which Sununu was reported to have opposed.<sup>88</sup> (Only three people were, in the end, to have direct, independent access to President Bush: Sununu, NSC Adviser Scowcroft, and press secretary Marlin Fitzwater). Finally, like Meese, Teeter wanted to have cabinet rank, which proved to be a particular sticking point in the negotiations.<sup>89</sup>

On January 9, Teeter announced that he would not be joining the new administration, and he cited concerns about moving his family to Washington (a reason one transition member also noted in an interview with me). According to the *Washington Post*, however, differences with Sununu over his position remained the real impediment: “A source close to Sununu said that he does not intend to have a deputy overseeing policy development and communication, areas that Teeter was to handle, and he believes he can oversee all aspects of White House operations without another deputy.” The newspaper concluded that this left Sununu “the unrivaled center of White House staff operations.”<sup>90</sup>

As negotiations with Teeter dragged on, Sununu did not neglect to think about how his own role as chief of staff would be defined and how a Bush White House might be structured. In an interview with Maureen Dowd of the *New York Times*, Sununu said, “I’m trying to take the basic structure of the last three or four White Houses and digest them”; “I really think George Bush’s style is different from Ronald Reagan’s or Jimmy Carter’s or even as far back as Dwight Eisenhower’s that I want to try and tailor the structure to suit his particular style of working”; “Am I to be visible or invisible? I prefer to be invisible for a while. But if he wants me to be visible that’s his choice. The level of detail he wants presented to him he will determine. The frequency of meetings that he wants to frequent.”<sup>91</sup>

But in other interviews with reporters, Sununu indicated a more aggressive style as chief of staff. In an interview with the *Boston Globe* in early December, he described himself as a “strong doorkeeper,” deeply interested in domestic policy, and he indicated that he would take the lead in setting the day’s agenda at the White House. He also

said he would be a “tough critic” of Darman and would review budget proposals before they reached the president.<sup>92</sup> When other media picked up on the story, Sununu backpedaled on his statements, saying that Bush will determine the structure of the White House and that it will serve the president’s needs, not Sununu’s.<sup>93</sup>

But behind the scenes, Sununu labored to put his imprint on the White House staff. The failed negotiations with Teeter would have repercussions later on, as the communications strategy and the public selling of the Bush presidency came to occupy a lesser position in the staff system. There would be no high-level man like Mike Deaver in this administration; neither would there be an Ed Meese-type of figure, with cabinet rank and counselor status, to push a Bush policy agenda at the highest (other than Sununu) levels.<sup>94</sup>

#### *A Different Approach at the NSC*

As with the appointment of his chief of staff, Bush took an active and direct role in the appointment of his other major in-house policy adviser—the NSC assistant. On November 23, six days after the Sununu announcement and a bit more than two weeks after election day, Bush announced that Brent Scowcroft would serve in the post, a position he had held under Gerald Ford.

Scowcroft had been an important and influential adviser to Bush for some time and was, in Bush’s words, “a trusted friend.” Scowcroft’s appointment brought several other strengths. His closeness to Bush fit the president-elect’s hope that the NSC adviser could provide his views “unvarnished” (as Bush phrased it at the press conference) and enjoy direct and frequent access to the Oval Office. At the same time, his earlier stint in the job indicated that he would be no Henry Kissinger but rather an “honest broker” (again, Bush’s words) who would be a fair manager, particularly in calming the waters among the various participants in the process. According to one report, Bush especially wanted to avoid the “friction and gridlock between cabinet members that characterized the Reagan years.”<sup>95</sup>

While Bush stated at the press conference announcing Scowcroft’s appointment that he saw little need for changes in NSC staff operations, Scowcroft’s experience in the post, as well as his more recent assignment as one of the three principal members of the Tower Commission investigation of Iran-contra, indicated that he could make any necessary changes in a unit that had been much troubled during the Reagan years. At the very least, there would no revolving door at the



top. Scowcroft promised stability compared to the seven NSC assistants who had occupied the job during the eight years of the Reagan presidency.

According to press reports, Scowcroft's appointment was a "deliberate surprise." Sununu had been informed of his appointment but did not "know the announcement was to be made so quickly, the sources said." The fact that Sununu was out of the loop might have been a signal that Sununu's responsibilities would not extend into the area of national security, as Meese's did eight years earlier.

In announcing Scowcroft's appointment, Bush implicitly indicated that as president he would be more involved in foreign and national security policymaking than his predecessor. He told reporters that he planned to "personally read" the daily intelligence briefing every morning and that he expected Scowcroft to keep him fully abreast of developing events even during the night. "Shake me and wake me," were Bush's instructions. As well, Scowcroft would have, according to Bush, "direct access, day and night."

In his memoirs (jointly written with Scowcroft), Bush recalls that he had toyed with the idea of appointing him to the CIA or as secretary of defense. But the more Bush thought about it, the more he recognized that Scowcroft was the "perfect honest broker I wanted. He would not try to run over the heads of cabinet members or cut them off from contact with the president, yet I also knew he would give me his own experienced views on whatever problems might arise." But Bush also realized that Scowcroft's appointment would indicate that the NSC staff still counted: it would "send a signal to my cabinet and to outside observers that the NSC's function was to be critical in the decision-making process."<sup>96</sup> Although not explicitly saying it, Bush recognized that Scowcroft would provide an able and skilled counterweight to Baker at State and (at the time) Tower at Defense.

#### *Further Staff Appointments: Familiarity and Experience*

As he had with Sununu and Scowcroft, Bush took a direct role in selecting the third person who would play a major role in his administration and have direct access to the Oval Office: press secretary. On November 28, Bush announced (again, it was the president-elect who did the announcing) that Reagan press secretary Marlin Fitzwater would continue in that position. Like Scowcroft, Fitzwater brought obvious expertise by continuing to serve in a position he already held, and he was a known and loyal commodity, having served a stint as Bush's vice

presidential press secretary before returning to the West Wing in 1987 following Larry Speakes's departure.

As Fitzwater recounts in his memoirs, he had assumed the job would go to Sheila Tate, who had been press secretary during the campaign and was serving in that capacity during the transition. But Bush and Craig Fuller were concerned that her relations with the press had deteriorated. According to Fitzwater, "The press had turned on Sheila during the campaign. They accused her of never being available to them for questioning and for spending too much time in the cushioned embrace of the presidential entourage."<sup>97</sup> Tate may also have been concerned about the reports she was hearing that some in the Bush inner circle thought she was unqualified to be the first female press secretary and preempted the criticism by taking herself out of the running for a job she may not have wanted in the first place. According to one person familiar with Tate's thinking, "If you don't really want the job then why should you let people make you feel bad about yourself?"<sup>98</sup> Even in the usually civil Bush camp, the knives might sometimes flash.

During this period, Bush also settled on the key members of his White House economic team. Again, Bush personally unveiled his choices to the press. On November 21, he announced the appointment of Richard Darman as OMB director<sup>99</sup> and Stanford economist Michael Boskin as chair of the CEA. On December 6, Carla Hills, the first woman appointed to a high-level position, was presented as his choice to head the Office of U.S. Trade Representative. Both Darman's and Hills's positions would continue to hold cabinet rank.

By mid-December, the appointments of the remainder of the top White House positions were nearing completion. Although press reports indicated that "Bush's choices are mostly unknowns" and "not Washington insiders," indeed most had past associations with Bush and several had served in the Reagan administration.<sup>100</sup>

On December 16, Andrew Card, David Bates, J. Bonnie Newman and James Cicconi were named as assistants to the president. Card, who also would serve as Sununu's deputy, had been active in the 1980 and 1988 Bush campaigns, had been a member of the Massachusetts legislature, and was a candidate for governor in 1982. Card also served as director of the intergovernmental affairs office and in the political affairs office in the Reagan White House. David Bates, who was placed in charge of cabinet affairs, had been a friend of son Jeb Bush and, after law school, became George Bush's personal assistant. During the Reagan administration, Bates served in subcabinet positions in the Commerce and Treasury Departments, then rejoined the Bush vice



presidential staff as an assistant to Craig Fuller. During the 1988 campaign, Bates had been one of the "gang of six" top advisers to Bush, along with Teeter, Roger Ailes, Mosbacher, Fuller, and Atwater.

Jim Cicconi was designated as staff secretary. He had worked on James Baker's losing 1978 campaign for Texas attorney general and as an aide to Texas Governor William Clements. When Baker became chief of staff in 1981, Cicconi joined his staff as one of his deputies. Cicconi then returned to private law practice (at Robert Strauss's law firm) but was brought back during the campaign to help craft (along with Sununu) the 1988 Republican platform and then to serve as issues director for Dan Quayle. As staff secretary, Cicconi was in charge of all the paper flow to and from the Oval Office. In a departure from past practice, Cicconi was also placed in charge of Bush's scheduling, and another Bush associate, Joseph Hagin, directed that operation under Cicconi.

J. Bonnie Newman, who was placed in charge of White House management and administration, had come to know Bush in the late 1970s when he had begun to campaign in her native New Hampshire. Newman was tapped to serve as associate director of White House personnel and as an assistant secretary in the Commerce Department during the first Reagan term, then served a stint as chief of staff to U.S. Senator Judd Gregg of New Hampshire. In 1988 she was brought on board the transition to help out with personnel. Like Card, Newman was also close to John Sununu.

But not all White House slots were filled so smoothly. The transition team had some difficulty with the position of head of the congressional relations office, critical to Bush's lobbying efforts on Capitol Hill. Former Congressman Tom Loeffler, a Texas Republican, was reported to have turned down an offer, and two others were approached but said they were not interested.<sup>101</sup> Finally, on December 22, Frederick D. McClure's appointment as assistant to the president for legislative affairs was made public. McClure, a native Texan and an African American, had worked for Senator John Tower, served in the congressional relations operation during the Reagan years, and had been the Washington lobbyist for Texas Air Corporation.

The same day that McClure's appointment was announced, David F. Demarest was tapped to be assistant to the president for communications. Demarest got his political start at the Republican National Committee and later served as deputy to RNC Chairman William Brock. During the Reagan years, Demarest joined Brock at the Office of U.S. Trade Representative and later at the Labor Department, where Demarest became an assistant secretary for public and intergovernmental

affairs. In July 1988, he was placed in charge of the Bush-Quayle campaign's speechwriting and communications operation. In another change from past practice, Demarest was given jurisdiction over the public liaison staff, and the speechwriting unit was placed under his control.

One position that remained unfilled at the top level was head of domestic and economic policy. On January 11, 1989, Sununu announced that Roger Porter had been asked to serve as assistant to the president for both policy areas. It was Porter's third White House tour: he had served as a special assistant to Gerald Ford and managed the Economic Policy Board; then during the first Reagan term he had been executive secretary of the Cabinet Council on Economic Affairs and director of the Office of Policy Development before returning to his professorship at Harvard's Kennedy School. Porter's appointment was a bit abrupt; he had been slated to serve as a deputy in the Office of U.S. Trade Representative.

That same day, Sununu announced another set of staff appointments. Most followed the pattern of having had previous White House service as well as prior association with George Bush. James Pinkerton was named to serve under Porter as a deputy assistant for policy planning. Pinkerton had worked in the Reagan policy development and political offices, then served as a research director for Bush's pre-campaign political action committee. The new directors of the White House political and public liaison offices were also announced. These had been downgraded to the deputy-assistant level. Bonnie Kilberg, who had served in the legal counsel's office under Ford and was active in Virginia political circles, was placed in charge of public liaison; Jim Wray, a former RNC political operative and national field director of the Bush campaign, was slated to take over political affairs. Wray's appointment suggested that the real center of political affairs in the Bush administration would be in the RNC, where Lee Atwater had been named party chairman. Sununu also announced that longtime aide David Carney would serve as deputy director of the political office.

Other Bush associates found themselves appointed to newly crafted, special-purpose units. C. Gregg Petersmeyer, dubbed the "thousand points of light man," was placed in charge of a new national service unit that was designed to encourage volunteerism, a Bush campaign theme. Petersmeyer, a Colorado oil executive, had been an aide in the Nixon White House and had known Bush for twenty years (even spending a month with him in 1975 while Bush was serving in Beijing). Richard Breeden, who had been on Bush's vice presidential staff and was a partner in Houston's prestigious Baker and Botts law firm, was appointed as

assistant for issues analysis. Breeden would essentially serve in a troubleshooting/special projects role, and he immediately began to work on addressing the savings-and-loan crisis. Stephen Studdert was placed in charge of "special activities." Studdert had served in the Reagan advance office and was given that responsibility under Bush, but he also was placed in charge of Petersmeyer's operation. Studdert would direct the 1989 inauguration and was reputed to have a talent for organizing and staging events.

All told, Bush had assembled a White House team that, unlike his two predecessors, had close links to him. Moreover, given Bush's own career path, many had worked with him in different governmental positions. He was thus able to bring together personal loyalty as well as a degree of Washington expertise, both critical ingredients but often hard to find in one person. There was also a third trait present in many who served in the Bush White House: a kind of low-key, understated personal style. As J. Bonnie Newman explains, both George and Barbara Bush were quite cognizant of the kind of persons they wanted to serve: "Both . . . had been around government in enough different types of positions that they had a very good view of the city, the culture, the good, the bad. They had a real sense of the type of person they wanted. . . . They would be less than tolerant of young staffers that would overexercise their position and rights. They were really looking for an understated White House staff. They didn't want a lot of cowboys." Did that message come directly from George Bush? "I know it did. And Barbara Bush."<sup>102</sup>

Newman especially remembers the appointment, on her own staff, of the person who would handle White House perks and direct White House operations: Rose Zamaria (whom Newman had not met before Bush appointed her). Zamaria had worked for Bush when he was a member of Congress; in Newman's view, Bush knew she "was the kind of no-nonsense person who was not going to be dealing or double-dealing or taking advantage of having that kind of responsibility." Whereas the Carter administration became immobilized over tennis-court privileges, "that didn't happen to us because Rose is Rose and she took care of it, as the president knew she would. . . . George Bush wanted people in positions who could do the job. George Bush wanted a Rose Zamaria who is very tough. He wanted a Rose Zamaria in there whom he knew could say no."<sup>103</sup>

Yet the Bush staff was in no way a preexisting team that had worked together with Bush before he entered the White House, as had been the case in the Reagan administration with Meese, Deaver, William Clark,

Helene von Damm, and Nancy Reynolds. Bush's inner circle had some dyadic links with one another, but their strongest connections were the links—developed at different points in his career—with George Bush. According to one participant, "A team didn't come in here as came into the Reagan White House. . . . There were many different sets of relationships [with George Bush], different kinds over many years."<sup>104</sup> The relative newcomer, it might further be noted, was John Sununu, who had worked closely with Bush only essentially during the 1988 primaries. Sununu's opposite number on the national security side, Brent Scowcroft, was by contrast the "closest soul mate the president had in this particular structure."<sup>105</sup>

#### *Organizational Changes*

With respect to the White House staff, Bush "gave pretty firm direction," Card observes. He was very clear about what "decisionmaking funnels" he wanted reporting to him. Furthermore, he wanted fewer people at the top of the White House organizational pyramid. As Card relates, "He wanted fewer people in the hierarchy in the Bush White House than were in the Reagan White House. He also wanted to leave room for advancement. In government you cannot often give people a promotion that results in more money, so you give them a promotion that results in a better title." Bush also decided that the public liaison unit on the staff would be downgraded to the deputy-assistant level, and it would be structured in three subunits: one for economic groups, one for "constituency" groups, and one for what he called "heritage" (ethnic) groups.<sup>106</sup>

Marlin Fitzwater's recollections of his discussions with Bush about becoming press secretary, especially the kind of access to meetings he would have, are revealing not only about Bush's direct role in the matter but also what it says about his thinking and decisionmaking once in office. In discussing his appointment with Bush, Fitzwater sought to establish the same access to the new president and to meetings that he enjoyed under Reagan. In fact, the vice president had been instrumental in seeing to it that Fitzwater was a participant in every major Reagan meeting. Yet in discussing Fitzwater's role in the new administration, Bush was now a bit reticent. "Do you have any questions?" Bush asked him. "Just the one you advised me to ask when I joined President Reagan," Fitzwater replied. "Will I have access to you, and to all meetings?" Although Bush frowned, he thought it would work out. Fitzwater then asked about NSC meetings, which he attended under Reagan.

"Well I don't know," Bush pondered. "Some of those might not be appropriate." Sensing trouble, Fitzwater pulled back and told Bush, "Let's wait and see how it works out."

In Fitzwater's view, the exchange typified Bush's "penchant for secrecy." "His personality was naturally prone to compartmentalization, which means secrecy. He asked people for advice on their specialty—economics, foreign policy, press, etc.—but seldom held open discussions. This later proved to be a weakness, especially in considering the country's economic conditions. . . . It meant he would never think to invite me to a nonmedia meeting."<sup>107</sup>

Following his appointment as chief of staff, John Sununu took over from Teeter the responsibility of dealing with the White House staff and its organization. As Jim Pinkerton relates, "Whenever Sununu got appointed, at that point it became clear that Sununu was running things. Somewhere along there I realized my reporting funnel now is Sununu and [Sununu deputies] Andy Card and Ed Rogers. Whatever that date was, that's when Pinkerton read the tea leaves power-wise."<sup>108</sup>

Sununu's appointment by November 17 also gave him time to work on White House matters. Although he was still the New Hampshire governor, Sununu commuted regularly between Washington and his home in Salem. By that date, he had already begun to think about his own staff, and his daily schedule shows numerous meetings over the following weeks with some of the persons who would come to occupy staff positions, as well as meetings with outgoing Reagan Chief of Staff Ken Duberstein and Congressman Dick Cheney, who held the same position under Ford.<sup>109</sup> Sununu convened periodic meetings on "White House organization," and he met with several members of Congress. He also participated in the budget working group, was part of the CASAG personnel process, and met with various constituency groups.

Sununu could rely on the able services of deputy Andrew Card. Card was not only close to Bush but also came to know Sununu starting in the early 1970s, when both were involved in politics in their local communities (Card in Massachusetts, Sununu in New Hampshire). "I was picked by both President Bush and John Sununu, and that distinction was relatively unique among the White House staff."<sup>110</sup>

Card's experience served him well. Even before Sununu's appointment (much less Card's) was formally announced, Sununu had asked him to help out. Card quickly began to assemble information useful to planning the new staff system:

I knew where to go in the White House, and I went to the executive clerk's office in the White House and got copies of all of the flow

charts of presidents going back to Eisenhower. Then I drew a list of all of the responsibilities I knew of in the White House from my days there and from talking to policy people and the career staff. And then we just went through, deciding whether or not those responsibilities appropriately rested in the White House and what structure would best serve the president to meet those policies.<sup>111</sup>

Experience and personal ties in the Bush network also helped other top aides both understand and adapt to their new positions. Just as David Bates could go to Craig Fuller for advice about the job of secretary to the cabinet,<sup>112</sup> Jim Cicconi could turn to Richard Darman. In Cicconi's case, since Darman had done "an exceptional job in that position, one of the first things I did was sit down with Dick and get his advice."<sup>113</sup>

But Cicconi, whose position as staff secretary handled "everything going to and from the president," also recounts that some changes were made: "I had slightly different responsibilities than Dick. He had the administrative operation of the White House reporting to him; I did not. But I had scheduling, which he did not have. That had been reporting to Deaver while Darman was in there." Adjustments were especially made to fit George Bush's desired working ways: "But the biggest difference was that we worked for very different presidents who approached the job and their workload differently. Just as he had to adjust to Ronald Reagan in the way Reagan preferred to work, I had to adjust to the way George Bush preferred to work."<sup>114</sup>

A number of the incoming Bush White House staffers could also rely on the good auspices of the Reaganites they were replacing. David Bates had been able to turn to his outgoing counterpart, Nancy Risque. Cicconi could rely not just on Darman but also on Rhett Dawson, as did J. Bonnie Newman, whose duties in White House management also overlapped with Dawson's job as director of White House operations. As head of the transition personnel operation, Untermeyer developed a close relationship with Robert Tuttle, whom Untermeyer was slated to replace after the inauguration, as did Boyden Gray with Arthur Culvahouse, his opposite number in the Reagan White House. The Bush transition also enjoyed good cooperation in assembling information pertinent to the White House staff.<sup>115</sup>

Some organizational changes and parceling of responsibilities were based "on the personalities that came in," according to Andrew Card. Some resulted from job negotiations: "As with any kind of job search, there were some people who said 'I will come and work at the White House, but I want this condition met.' It might be a title, it might be an

added area of responsibility, or it could have been 'I want my office in the West Wing or whatever.'" There were "some suggestions that came from potential employees that were outrageous, some that were reasonable. Some were disruptive to the original flow-chart thinking and some weren't."<sup>116</sup>

Jim Pinkerton's experience in being hired as domestic policy adviser in charge of policy planning is revealing about the informal process of determining positions and responsibilities. According to Pinkerton, one day Jim Cicconi

sat me down and said, "Here's the way it works. There is an assistant to the president, and it won't be you. There will be a deputy assistant, and that will be you. So we will also make you director of OPD." That's the way it usually works. The assistant is theoretically at the president's elbow, sitting there helping him. As a sort of sop they say the deputy assistant is director of the office [of policy development].

But Pinkerton was reluctant to take the position, largely because the person who would be at the assistant-to-the-president level had yet to be named:

I kind of figured since I don't know who it is going to be, don't make me director of the office either, because Mr. Big will get in there and take one look at me and say, "Pinkerton, you're obviously the right guy to run things" or "Pinkerton, you're obviously the wrong guy to run things." In which case I would hate to have the title taken away. So I sort of went for a lateral kind of thing. I said, "Look, we don't know who it is going to be; for better or worse I am sort of a loose guy, a speculative type. Just put me in charge of, give me the title of policy planning. I like the deputy-assistant part, that will be fun, but don't make it for policy development, make it for policy planning. In that way if the guy comes in and doesn't like me, it will be "pretend I don't work for him." That's actually the way it kind of worked."<sup>117</sup>

In sum, as one press report notes, "Through a succession of stylistic touches, [Bush] succeeded, in the month since Election Day, in nearly extinguishing the memory of his ungentlemanly campaign and forging instead a relaxed, spontaneous image."<sup>118</sup>

The president-elect had assembled a cabinet and staff populated with longtime friends, most with a high degree of prior governmental experience. Yet the question remained whether imagery and friendship would translate into policy substance; whether Bush and his associates would be able to establish policies and programs under difficult budgetary

circumstances; and whether Bush's own considerable background and experience would yield the kind of leadership needed for his presidency.

\* \* \*

In many respects, the 1988 transition had all the appearances of an effective effort that would culminate in a successful early administration. Although Untermeyer's initial assignment was, by design, comparably modest, Bush had given some thought to what his administration might look like even before his election was secure. He and his associates also monitored and otherwise provided oversight to Untermeyer's operation, and none of the tension that had plagued Carter (and even the preelection jockeying for position in the Reagan inner circle eight years before) emerged.

The day after the election, Bush moved immediately to set up his transition operation and was ready to announce several key appointments: Baker at State, Untermeyer and Gray in the White House. The transition clearly benefited from the good auspices of the Reagan administration, both before and after the election. Advice and information of various sorts were quickly conveyed, giving members of the transition both an easy start and a head start. Many of them also could draw on their own experiences in past Republican transitions and presidencies. This was not just a friendly takeover—it was a familiar takeover.

Like Jimmy Carter, Bush had a propensity to draw on trusted associates. As a political insider, however, Bush could tap a pool of talent—for both his cabinet and his White House staff—that had prior White House or executive-branch experience (sometimes both). Where it was lacking, something else valuable usually was there in its stead: congressional experience or, as in Governor Sununu's case, other forms of executive leadership. But there was also one particular feature of that personal relationship: their links were to George Bush, not necessarily to each other, as had been the case with Reagan's lieutenants.

By all accounts it was a well-organized and -managed transition. The prospect of Sununu's appointment as chief of staff did generate a bit of intramural politicking, but Bush let the Sununu matter play out for a few days, then announced what had been his decision all along. The negotiations over Teeter's role in the new administration did linger, which had some effect on getting the domestic policy staff up and running, but most of the other pieces of the transition fell into place. Throughout, Bush played an active role, quite different from some of Reagan's indifference to staff and organizational matters and Carter's

preference for letting his fellow Georgians work differences out among themselves. Bush played a direct role in selecting both staff and cabinet members, and he was directly involved in determining some of the organizational matters and processes in which they would operate: retention of the Reagan cabinet-council system and a White House staff that had fewer assistants to the president at the top. Bush was especially determinative in Sununu's selection as chief of staff and Scowcroft's as NSC adviser.

Policy, too, had begun to be formed during the transition. Foreign policy clearly was moving forward due to the efforts of Baker, Scowcroft, and Bush. The budget, taxes, and the deficit had already begun to bear Richard Darman's considerable imprint. Steps had also been taken to deal with the savings-and-loan bailout. But on other domestic matters, the agenda had yet to coalesce; it was one soft spot, but clearly a major one.

Although for the most part the Bush transition was well managed, well organized, and attentive to personnel and organization issues, the open question for the Bush transition—and for Bush himself—was whether the judgments and choices made in these matters would prove to be the right ones.

### Notes

1. Untermeyer had first met Bush in 1966 when Bush was running for Congress in Houston. Untermeyer later served as his executive assistant (1981–1983). In 1983, he was appointed deputy assistant secretary of the navy for installations and facilities, and from 1984 to 1988 he served as assistant secretary of the navy for manpower and reserve affairs.

2. Correspondence with Chase Untermeyer, December 9, 1998.

3. Untermeyer's one-person operation was then deluged with phone calls and résumés. He began to put the résumés into an empty box that had once held a smoked turkey that friends from Texas had sent the previous Christmas; Untermeyer appropriately dubbed it the "turkey box." Correspondence with Chase Untermeyer, December 9, 1998.

4. "The Reagan to Bush Transition: A Miller Center Panel and Colloquium," in Thompson, ed., *Presidential Transitions*, pp. 176–177. By September, Untermeyer had moved to space at RNC headquarters. The RNC also funded Untermeyer's operation; Bush had decided neither to tap into campaign funds nor to raise funds independently, as Reagan had done. Untermeyer began to meet with a number of persons who had been involved in past transitions, Pendleton James most notably. Untermeyer also did a lot of reading on transitions and the presidency. Correspondence with Chase Untermeyer, December 9, 1998.

5. Dick Kirschten, "As Reagan's Presidency Fades Out," *National Journal*, September 3, 1988, p. 2202.

6. Burke interview with David Bates, October 5, 1998.

7. Burke interview with J. Bonnie Newman, September 29, 1998.

8. Correspondence with Chase Untermeyer, December 9, 1998. Although Bush had instructed him not to do any recruiting, Untermeyer also "took the risk" (in his words) of asking Ross Starek, who had been the State Department's personnel liaison to the White House, to serve as his assistant. Untermeyer, moreover, intended to make Starek his deputy at presidential personnel if Bush won.

9. An internal Reagan White House memorandum indicates that while representatives from the Dukakis camp were invited by the GSA to attend meetings, they never did: "GSA has assured us the Dukakis organization was invited to every meeting, but they never attended." Memorandum from Gordon Riggle to Rhet Dawson, November 3, 1988, FG001–04 606669, RL. Raymond Fontaine even ordered stationery well before the election, and he got the two campaigns to agree that it would have the neutral letterhead "Office of the President-elect" so that half would not have to be thrown away the day after the election. The GSA secured space for a transition headquarters at a Commerce Department building at Connecticut and Florida Avenues. Judith Havemann, "Rules of Transition Start with 'No,'" *Washington Post*, October 21, 1988. The 1988 transition benefited from better financial resources. Under new rules passed by Congress, the transition operation of the incoming administration was allocated \$3.5 million, \$1.5 million more than had been appropriated in 1980. The new funding arrangement, however, carried with it a new requirement: public disclosure of staff, salaries, and expenses. As it was, all of the additional resources were not needed: only \$2,209,000 was spent. The Bush transition was "as clean as a hound's tooth" Fontaine, the comptroller of the GSA and its "transitions czar" since 1968, would later pronounce. Judith Havemann, "Transition Leaves Substantial Change," *Washington Post*, May 2, 1989.

10. Memorandum from Robert H. Tuttle to Kenneth M. Duberstein, November 1, 1988, "Transition Planning," FG001–04 606669, RL.

11. "The Reagan to Bush Transition: A Miller Center Panel and Colloquium," in Thompson, ed., *Presidential Transitions*, p. 180.

12. Correspondence with Chase Untermeyer, December 9, 1998.

13. "The Reagan to Bush Transition: A Miller Center Panel and Colloquium," in Thompson, ed., *Presidential Transitions*, p. 180.

14. Jack Watson's 1980 memo to the Carter administration department and agency heads was attached to the checklist memo, and some of the language in it would appear verbatim in Duberstein's own memo issued to Reagan administration officials on November 21. Indeed, both the Watson and Duberstein memo bear the title "An Orderly Transition of the Presidency." Duberstein's memo, however, contained more detailed instructions on making sure that those purporting to represent the Bush transition were in fact on the list of authorized representatives, a problem that had come up in 1980. As well, Duberstein outlined

steps to avoid actual and potential conflicts of interest regarding any information that might be transmitted, and he issued more detailed instructions about the handling and transmittal of nonpublic or otherwise confidential information. Memorandum from John Tuck to Kenneth Duberstein, "Chief of Staff Duberstein Checklist," November 5, 1988, FG 0001-04, FG 0006-01, 606669, RL; Memorandum from Ken Duberstein to Cabinet and Agency Heads, "An Orderly Transition of the Presidency," November 21, 1988, FG0001-04 606627, RL.

15. Memorandum from Colin Powell to Ken Duberstein, "NSC Transition," November 3, 1988, FG001-04 606669, RL.

16. Steven Roberts, "Bush Personnel Team Aims for Stiff Scrutiny," *New York Times*, November 12, 1988.

17. On November 16, the appointments of the remaining transition deputies were announced. Janet Mullins was tapped to head congressional liaison. Mullins had been deputy national political director during the campaign and had been chief of staff to Senator Mitch McConnell of Kentucky and Senator Bob Packwood of Oregon. Jim Pinkerton was placed in charge of policy development. Pinkerton had been director of research during the campaign and had served on Reagan's domestic policy staff. David Demarest was named to head public affairs, the same job he had done during the campaign. Fred Fielding, a former Reagan White House counsel, was assigned to look after the vice president-elect's office, as well as that of the First Lady. David J. Ryder, a former Bush aide who had directed operations at the Republican convention, was selected to direct management and operations. J. Mike Farren, a former undersecretary at Commerce, was chosen to serve as deputy director under Fuller. Internal Reagan White House memoranda indicate that several of the newly appointed deputies had already been at work for some time before the November 16 announcement. Both Farren and Ryder had met with representatives from the White House before that date, and one internal memo indicates that Farren "appears to be the Deputy Director of the Transition, reporting directly to Fuller-Teeter." The memo also notes that "there will be four lines reporting to Fuller-Teeter in the transition organization: Management, Public Affairs, Personnel, and Policy Development." Memorandum from Rhett Dawson to John Tuck, "Transition Effort Update," November 15, 1988, FG001-04 100467, RL.

18. David Hoffman, "Bush Names Baker Secretary of State," *Washington Post*, November 10, 1988.

19. Burke interview with J. Bonnie Newman, September 29, 1998.

20. Burke interview with David Bates, October 5, 1998.

21. David Hoffman, "Bush Said to Favor Sununu for Chief of Staff," *Washington Post*, November 15, 1988.

22. Maureen Dowd, "Bush Narrowing Field for Top Cabinet Posts," *New York Times*, November 17, 1988. Fuller also told the press that each member of the staff had been required to sign a pledge to prevent conflicts of interest and stop unauthorized leaks to the press. The pledge requires that staff members "hold in confidence any non-public information provided" and requires them to disqualify themselves from any transition matter that appears to be a financial conflict of interest.

23. At his postelection press conference, Bush clearly indicated that changes in personnel would be made. Bush noted, echoing the campaign, that he would "for the most part bring in a brand new team of people from across the country." Martin Tolchin, "Bush Prepares to Share the Fruits of Victory," *New York Times*, November 11, 1988. On November 10, President Reagan facilitated the process by requesting that all political appointees submit their resignations "effective at the pleasure of the president." The order had been agreed upon by both Reagan and Bush before the election and was done at the request of both, according to one senior aide. Gerald Boyd, "Reagan Asks the Cabinet to Resign to Give Bush Flexibility in Choice," *New York Times*, November 11, 1988.

24. Other members of the unit were Bush, Peter Teeley, David Bates (who would be tapped as secretary to the cabinet), Ron Kaufman, Rich Bond, and Don Rhodes of the vice president's staff. Mary Matalin, who had headed the RNC's Victory '88 effort and was slated to become a top aide to Atwater at RNC, was placed in charge of an operation to keep track of fund-raisers and political operatives at the state and local levels for possible positions in the incoming administration.

25. Burke interview with David Bates, October 5, 1998.

26. Burke interview with J. Bonnie Newman, September 29, 1998.

27. Frank Swoboda and Judith Havemann, "Bush Transition Team Embarking on Search for New Talent, Diversity," *Washington Post*, December 3, 1988.

28. Bernard Weinraub, "Bush Plans a Drive to Recruit Minorities," *New York Times*, December 4, 1988. Brought on board were: Betty Heitman, a former president of the National Federation of Republican Women, Jose Martinez, a former aide to John Tower, and Constance Newman, an African American and former HUD official.

29. Maralee Schwartz and Frank Swoboda, "Bush Assistant Describes Trouble Recruiting Women," *Washington Post*, January 12, 1989.

30. Judith Havemann, "Veteran Aides Leading Bush's 'Friendly Takeover,'" *Washington Post*, November 17, 1988.

31. Judith Havemann, "After Jan. 20, How Soon Will the Honeymoon End?" *Washington Post*, October 24, 1988.

32. The memo requested (1) basic organizational information, including statement of resources, goals, and functions of each unit ("Limit: Chart plus 1 page per organizational unit"); (2) "management," including chain of command, regulatory authority ("Limit: 1 paragraph per program"), and review of recent management studies ("Limit: 2 paragraphs per study"); (3) "external process," including key interagency relationships, congressional committee jurisdictions, oversight and legislative issues, and a list of the top-ten anticipated legislative goals for the upcoming 101st Congress ("Limit: 1 page per issue, 1 page of summary discussion"); (4) budget details, trends, and issues; (5) personnel; and (6) policy-development process and goals, including "a calendar of major events, decisions, and milestones that present challenges and opportunities for the Bush administration in calendar year 1989 (Limit: Use basic calendar format—1 page per month)." Memorandum from Ken Duberstein to



Cabinet and Agency Heads, "Transition Organization and Briefing Materials," November 21, 1988, FG0001-04 606627, RL. In addition, C. Boyden Gray also sent a memo to department and agency heads, as well as to heads of White House units, asking them to designate a transition-team person. Gray also requested that the designee sign a confidentiality statement. Memorandum from C. Boyden Gray to Department, Agency, and White House Officials, November 14, 1988, FG0001-04 60627, RL.

33. Judith Havemann, "Helping Bush's Cabinet Get Its Footing," *Washington Post*, January 17, 1989.

34. Baker, *Politics of Diplomacy*, p. 17.

35. Gerald Boyd, "Circle of Senior Aides Helps Bush Fill Top Posts," *New York Times*, December 8, 1988.

36. Brady's reappointment was not unexpected; he was a longtime Bush friend and supporter. Thornburgh's retention was more of a surprise, and there had been some discussion of other possibilities, including former EPA Administrator William Ruckelshaus and Illinois Governor Jim Thompson. Cavazos, a former Texas university president and the first Hispanic member of the cabinet, easily filled Bush's promise during the campaign to have a Hispanic in his cabinet, although it would not be among Bush's more successful picks. Bush in fact would have two Hispanics in his initial cabinet (with the appointment of Lujan at Interior).

37. Mosbacher was a longtime Bush friend and Texas oilman; Hills was a well-known Washington lawyer and former HUD secretary under Ford; Yeuter had been serving as U.S. trade representative.

38. Kemp had been considered for several cabinet positions, but transition officials and the Bush inner circle were concerned that the outspoken conservative would not be a team player.

39. Tower, *Consequences*, p. 36.

40. Walter Pincus, "Bush Team, Tower Negotiate on Filling Key Pentagon Slots," *Washington Post*, November 23, 1988. The *Washington Post* also noted that these negotiations over subcabinet personnel were "at odds with Bush's often repeated statement during the campaign that he would name his Cabinet and then allow them to pick their subordinates without interference from transition personnel."

41. David Hoffman, "Bush Selects Tower as Defense Secretary," *Washington Post*, December 17, 1988.

42. Tower, *Consequences*, p. 33.

43. Tower, *Consequences*, p. 83.

44. "The Reagan to Bush Transition: A Miller Center Panel and Colloquium," in Thompson, ed., *Presidential Transitions*, pp. 179-180. By Christmas Day, the cabinet appointments were essentially complete, with one exception. That exception was the appointment of an energy secretary, which was delayed until January 12. Bush apparently had been wavering between naming an energy secretary familiar with oil and gas issues or one familiar with nuclear power. He eventually settled on the latter, with the appointment of retired Admiral James Watkins, who had been chief of naval operations and was a

protégé of Admiral Hyman Rickover. Untermeyer had come up with Watkins's name, but "my feeling at the time, however, was not one of great pride, but one of anger with myself because I hadn't thought of him a month earlier, since he was such an obvious choice and someone I had known when I was in the Navy Department" (quote at p. 180).

45. David Hoffman, "Watkins, Bennett Named to Cabinet," *Washington Post*, January 13, 1989.

46. Ann Devroy, "Slow Pace of Appointments Irks Some Cabinet Officials," *Washington Post*, February 14, 1989.

47. Ann Devroy, "High-Level Government Jobs Reserved for Bush Supporters," *Washington Post*, January 14, 1989.

48. Burke interview with James Cicconi, April 29, 1998. Jack Kemp at HUD was given only one "strong suggestion" by the transition—that he hire a former aide to Senator Mitch McConnell of Kentucky, an early Bush supporter.

49. Ann Devroy, "Slow Pace of Appointments Irks Some Cabinet Officials," *Washington Post*, February 14, 1989.

50. To further this effort, Bush aide Ron Kaufman was selected to serve as Untermeyer's deputy.

51. Burke interview with Andrew Card Jr., September 17, 1998.

52. Burke interview with J. Bonnie Newman, September 29, 1998.

53. Burke interview with J. Bonnie Newman, September 29, 1998.

54. David Hoffman and Maralee Schwartz, "CIA Director, Envoy Won't Be in Cabinet," *Washington Post*, December 3, 1988.

55. Michael Isikoff, "Drug Czar Won't Be a Cabinet Member," *Washington Post*, January 25, 1989.

56. Burke interview with Andrew Card Jr., September 17, 1998.

57. Burke interview with David Bates, October 5, 1998.

58. Burke interview with Andrew Card Jr., September 17, 1998.

59. Burke interview with Andrew Card Jr., September 17, 1998.

60. Bush and Scowcroft, *A World Transformed*, pp. 8, 16, 19.

61. Baker, *Politics of Diplomacy*, pp. 28, 29, 38, 41-43, 47, 49.

62. David C. Mulford, "The Bush Presidency and International Economic Issues," in Thompson, ed., *The Bush Presidency I*, pp. 127-142.

63. On Sunday, November 13, Fuller indicated that decisions on Bush's economic policy team have "got to be priority one" and that they would prepare a plan for dealing with Congress "in the early days of the Bush administration," as Bush had promised during the campaign. While not indicating the particulars of a Bush budget plan, Fuller noted that Bush would come to the negotiating table with a "flexible freeze" requiring spending to be held to the rate of inflation. Teeter said that "cuts would be likely in domestic spending programs that have grown in recent years." David Hoffman, "Bush Team Acts to Calm Markets," *Washington Post*, November 14, 1988.

64. According to Darman, the Reagan budget projections had been based on fairly rosy projections of economic growth (hence revenues produced) and interest rates. As he would point out to Bush in an early December memo, "If interest rates were merely 1 percent higher than forecast, and real growth 1



percent lower, the deficit would be about \$135 billion higher than it was supposed to be balanced. The picture got worse, not better, from there." Moreover, in order to meet Gramm-Rudman targets, spending growth had to be no more than 2.8 percent, less than the flexible freeze had called for. Darman, *Who's in Control?*, p. 207.

65. Darman, *Who's in Control?* pp. 200, 210.

66. Darman, *Who's in Control?* p. 206.

67. Darman, *Who's in Control?* p. 208. Emphasis in original.

68. Darman, *Who's in Control?* p. 210.

69. There is some archival evidence that the budget discussions were not just at the tax/no tax, freeze/no freeze level. On January 10, the budget group's meetings focused on health care; on January 11, education and drug control; and on January 12, enterprise zones, problems of the homeless, and other Bush initiatives. Sununu's Daily Schedule, FG006-03, Box 110, Bush Presidential Library, Texas A&M University, College Station, Texas (hereafter cited as BL).

70. Burke interview with Andrew Card Jr., September 17, 1998.

71. Burke interview with Jim Pinkerton, October 15, 1998.

72. At the Democratic convention the previous summer, Richards delivered a speech with a line that said that Bush "wasn't born with a silver spoon in his mouth, George Bush was born with a silver foot in his mouth."

73. Memorandum from Susan Porter Rose to Vice President and Mrs. Bush, January 13, 1989, Chief of Staff Files—Sununu, OA 11322, Box 30, BL.

74. Burt Solomon, "Getting Ready," *National Journal*, November 19, 1988, p. 2927.

75. Carol Matlack, "Political Math May Explain Bush's Environment Push," *National Journal*, December 10, 1988, p. 3145.

76. Gerald M. Boyd, "Sununu Answers His Critics: I Have to Be Tough Enough," *New York Times*, November 19, 1988.

77. Bush, *All the Best*, p. 403. Other reports indicated that on election day, Bush had privately told Craig Fuller—a possible contender for the job—and others in his inner circle that he wanted Sununu for the position. David Hoffman, "His Political Stature Gave Sununu Edge," *Washington Post*, November 18, 1988.

78. According to Sidney Blumenthal, Baker "wanted even more power. His political allies reflected the thinking in his circle by openly talking of Baker as 'deputy president.'" The key would be chief of staff: a more pliable Craig Fuller rather than the independent and abrasive Sununu. According to one Republican operative, "Bush hauled Sununu in there to keep Baker from having influence on that position, and left Fuller in the lurch as a result." Sidney Blumenthal, "I, Baker," *New Republic*, November 2, 1992.

79. David Hoffman and Ann Devroy, "Fuller, Teeter, Sununu Eyed as Top Bush Team," *Washington Post*, November 12, 1988.

80. Bernard Weinraub, "Amid Tension, Two Vie for White House Chief," *New York Times*, November 15, 1988; Maureen Dowd, "Bush Narrowing Field for Top Cabinet Posts," *New York Times*, November 17, 1988.

81. Gerald Boyd, "Bush Is Reported to Have Chosen Gov. Sununu as His Chief of Staff," *New York Times*, November 16, 1988.

82. Gerald Boyd, "Top Aide Reticent on Sununu Choice," *New York Times*, November 18, 1998.

83. Burke interview with Andrew Card Jr., September 17, 1998.

84. Bernard Weinraub, "Gray-Baker Vendetta: A Long-Running Tale of Potomac Intrigue," *New York Times*, March 29, 1989.

85. "Transcript of Bush and Sununu Remarks at News Conference," *New York Times*, November 18, 1988.

86. Gerald Boyd, "Bush's Political Engineer," *New York Times*, November 17, 1988.

87. "Under the proposed division Teeter would be in charge of helping formulate domestic policy and promote it politically and publicly." Ann Devroy, "Bush Picks Kemp as HUD Chief," *Washington Post*, December 16, 1988.

88. Gerald Boyd, "Sununu and Teeter Differing on Access," *New York Times*, December 8, 1988.

89. Burke interview with Jim Pinkerton, October 15, 1998.

90. Ann Devroy, "Teeter, Citing Family Concerns, Says No to White House Post," *Washington Post*, January 10, 1989.

91. Maureen Dowd, "Sununu Sees Himself in Background," *New York Times*, November 29, 1988.

92. John Milne, "Sununu Hints at a Run for Senate," *Boston Globe*, December 8, 1988. As the title of the article indicates, Sununu also discussed the possibility that he would return to New Hampshire and run for the U.S. Senate in either 1990 or 1992. The article noted that "such an announcement could reduce his power by making him a 'lame duck' before he is sworn." The *Globe* also reported that Sununu had a political war-chest of \$232,000 left over from his last campaign, and that he had spent \$12,000 for a voting list that the Bush primary campaign had compiled. He had purchased the list on June 15, a month after he had announced he would not run for a fourth term as New Hampshire governor.

93. Ann Devroy, "Sununu Swiftly Backpedals on Size of His White House Role," *Washington Post*, December 9, 1988.

94. Interestingly, Clayton Yeutter would be appointed as counselor to the president, with cabinet status, in Bush's fourth year as president. By that time Sununu was no longer chief of staff.

95. David Hoffman, "President Scales Back National Security Council," *Washington Post*, February 3, 1989.

96. Bush and Scowcroft, *A World Transformed*, p. 19.

97. Fitzwater, *Call the Briefing!*, p. 173.

98. Lois Romano, "Bush's Team and the Avalanche of Applications," *Washington Post*, December 23, 1988.

99. The prospect of Darman's appointment led to some "inside baseball" speculation in the press. According to the *New York Times*, "Under one plan being considered, Mr. Baker would extend his reach into budgetary and domestic matters through the appointment of his former deputy at the Treasury

Department, Richard G. Darman, as director of the White House Office of Management and Budget." Bernard Weinraub and Peter Kilborn, "Baker Will Wield Broad Influence, Aides to Bush Say," *New York Times*, November 13, 1988.

100. Ann Devroy, "White House Staff May Have New Cast," *Washington Post*, December 17, 1988.

101. Ann Devroy, "White House Staff May Have New Cast," *Washington Post*, December 17, 1988.

102. Burke interview with J. Bonnie Newman, September 29, 1998.

103. Burke interview with J. Bonnie Newman, September 29, 1998.

104. Burke interview with J. Bonnie Newman, September 29, 1998.

105. Burke interview with J. Bonnie Newman, September 29, 1998.

106. Burke interview with Andrew Card Jr., September 17, 1998.

107. Fitzwater, *Call the Briefing!* pp. 173–174.

108. Burke interview with Jim Pinkerton, October 15, 1998.

109. Bush Library records of Sununu's schedule begin on November 21. Chief of Staff Files—Sununu, FG006–03, Box 110, BL. But there is also some evidence of his activities before this date. For example, on November 18, he received a letter from Bobbie Kilberg outlining her thoughts on the White House public liaison office and reminding him of an upcoming meeting with her in New York City; Kilberg later got the job. Letter from Kilberg to Sununu, 1988, Chief of Staff Files—Sununu, OA 1806, Box 1, BL.

110. Later, in 1982, as they campaigned for governor of their respective states, they often ran into each other at radio stations in the overlapping radio markets of the region. Card had also served as the Reagan administration's liaison to the governors and had worked on a number of projects with Sununu in that capacity. As he would later recall: "So we became, I would say, pretty close friends, certainly political allies. I know his wife and children and all that kind of stuff." Burke interview with Andrew Card Jr., September 17, 1998.

111. Burke interview with Andrew Card Jr., September 17, 1998.

112. There is also some evidence that Fuller provided information to Sununu. For example, in late December 1988, Fuller sent Sununu a memorandum that he and Darman had put together in November 1981 setting up a weekly-update briefing system for President Reagan. Memorandum from Richard Darman and Craig Fuller, November 30, 1981, Chief of Staff Files—Sununu, OA 11322, Box 30, BL.

113. Burke interview with Jim Cicconi, April 29, 1998.

114. Burke interview with Jim Cicconi, April 29, 1998.

115. Joe Hagin, who would do Bush's day-to-day scheduling, obtained a list of Reagan's daily and weekly meetings from his counterparts in the outgoing administration, which he then forwarded to Sununu. Memorandum from Joe Hagin to John Sununu, "Regularly Scheduled Meetings," Chief of Staff Files—Sununu, Box 49, BL. Although the memo has no date, it was attached to Sununu's daily "items for discussion" agenda for January 11, 1989.

116. Burke interview with Andrew Card Jr., September 17, 1998.

117. Burke interview with Jim Pinkerton, October 15, 1998.

118. Burt Solomon, "Bush's Transition in Tone," *National Journal*, December 10, 1988, p. 3144.

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### Bush in Office

As the beneficiary of both a friendly and a familiar takeover, Bush was in an enviable position upon taking office in 1989. On the surface, much looked promising. Yet beneath, possible fault lines could emerge. The services of a skilled and experienced staff had been enlisted, but the White House was headed by a potentially powerful chief of staff in John Sununu. During the transition, Sununu had pledged allegiance to the philosophy of being a "neutral broker" as chief of staff, yet his own public comments indicated that he also saw himself on occasion as a policy advocate. Where would his allegiance fall once the administration was under way? Could advocacy be successfully merged with the more custodial and managerial functions of the neutral-broker role? How would Sununu's own career experience as a long-serving state governor accustomed to making his own executive decisions and as someone new to the Washington scene meld with his now quite different responsibilities? Were his critics right about the potential risks in his ability to delegate, be cooperative, and curb his own ego?

Both Bush and Sununu had put great thought into the operations of their White House staff. But again, the effects of some of these changes would await the new presidency. Understandably, Bush had sought to reduce the "title creep" over the eight years of the Reagan White House. But some of the units that were downgraded—especially the political affairs and public liaison offices and the speechwriting staff—could affect the selling of the Bush agenda and the place of politics in its crafting. Did the Bush White House possess the ability not just to formulate policy but also to communicate those policies, to market and sell them, in the absence of a Mike Deaver, David Gergen, or, in this case, Bob Teeter?