



THE WHITE HOUSE TRANSITION PROJECT
1997-2021



Kinder Institute on
Constitutional Democracy
University of Missouri

Smoothing the Peaceful Transfer of Democratic Power

Report 2021—06

THE WHITE HOUSE WORLD
START UP, ORGANIZATION, AND THE PRESSURES OF WORK LIFE

Martha Joynt Kumar, *Emeritus, Towson University*
The White House Transition Project

WHO WE ARE & WHAT WE DO

The White House Transition Project. Begun in 1998, the White House Transition Project provides information about individual offices for staff coming into the White House to help streamline the process of transition from one administration to the next. A nonpartisan, nonprofit group, the WHTP brings together political science scholars who study the presidency and White House operations to write analytical pieces on relevant topics about presidential transitions, presidential appointments, and crisis management. Since its creation, it has participated in the 2001, 2005, 2009, 2013, 2017, and now the 2021. WHTP coordinates with government agencies and other non-profit groups, e.g., the US National Archives or the Partnership for Public Service. It also consults with foreign governments and organizations interested in improving governmental transitions, worldwide. See the project at <http://whitehoustransitionproject.org>

The White House Transition Project produces a number of materials, including:

- **WHITE HOUSE OFFICE ESSAYS:** Based on interviews with key personnel who have borne these unique responsibilities, including former White House Chiefs of Staff; Staff Secretaries; Counsels; Press Secretaries, etc. , WHTP produces briefing books for each of the critical White House offices. These briefs compile the best practices suggested by those who have carried out the duties of these office. With the permission of the interviewees, interviews are available on the National Archives website page dedicated to this project:
- ***WHITE HOUSE ORGANIZATION CHARTS.** The charts cover administrations from Ronald Reagan to Barack Obama and help new White House staff understand what to expect when they arrive and how their offices changed over time or stayed the same.
- ***TRANSITION ESSAYS.** These reports cover a number of topics suggested by White House staff, including analyses of the patterns of presidential appointments and the Senate confirmation process, White House and presidential working routine, and the patterns of presidential travel and crisis management. It also maintains ongoing reports on the patterns of interactions with reporters and the press in general as well as White House staffing.
- ***INTERNATIONAL COMPONENT.** The WHTP consults with international governments and groups interested in transitions in their governments. In 2017 in conjunction with the Baker Institute, the WHTP hosted a conference with emerging Latin American leaders and in 2018 cosponsored a government transitions conference with the National Democratic Institute held in November 2018 in Montreal, Canada .

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The Kinder Institute on Constitutional Democracy. A central element of the University of Missouri's main campus in Columbia, Missouri, the Kinder Institute on Constitutional Democracy prepares students for lives of thoughtful and engaged citizenship by equipping them with knowledge of the ideas and events that have shaped our nation's history.

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

“[Inauguration day, I came into the office and]...the office was empty and all eight of his telephone lines were ringing. I didn’t pick up the phone. And the reason for that was, once I said hello and identified myself, I didn’t know how to help any person who was on the other end of the line. If it was a reporter asking me a question about the President’s schedule, I didn’t know the answer. If it was a White House staff person who I had never met, I wouldn’t have been able to find their office. And so I stood, not particularly knowing what to do, with his telephone ringing off the hook.

- It takes time for a President to appreciate the place of staff. If the president does not pick a Chief of Staff, the framework for the White House is not established and filled in.
- The President needs four kinds of knowledge in the staff:
 - The Campaign — Having a memory of a campaign and its goals is important to have in a White House and one of the best ways to do so is to bring in those people.
 - The President personally — the kind of people who can appreciate the president’s history and specific choices.
 - Substantive Policy — You want somebody in these positions whose first thought is not the politics of it but the substance of it. What’s the right economic policy? What’s the right national security policy?
 - White House Experienced — A database across time is no substitute for someone who’s been there before and is going back.
- The White House has rhythms that repeat themselves from one administration to another. It generally takes some while, though, before the new people appreciate the importance of those who have served sometimes for several presidents.
- Early Mistakes Cost Valuable Energy — especially in selecting appointees.

Staff Structure

- The White House is difficult to organize because it is a political organization required to perform management tasks.
- A White House is President-centered — Most often a White House staff mirrors the personal and political strengths of a President and rarely compensates for his weaknesses in those two areas.
- The Chief of Staff — “They can’t be a procrastinator. They have to be disciplined enough to get the work done. They also have to be disciplined enough to say no—no, you can’t see the President; no, we’re not putting that on the schedule. So what I’m trying to get to is a typical politician is sometimes not a very good Chief of Staff because politicians don’t like to say no.”
- No clear consensus on “spokes of the wheel” organization.
- The similarities in the organization of White House staff are found with greater frequency than are the differences between administrations. The functions performed by staff remain pretty much the same, the numbers of people on the staff and the supplementary help also is fairly constant, the turnover of staff, and the structure of offices is relatively stable.

Routine and Relationships

- A well run White House depends upon an established process of routines relating to the flow of information and the way decisions are made.
- One recurring soft spot in White House operations is consistent follow through on decisions already reached.
- The operations of the White House are carried out by an infrastructure of people who have little visibility yet they are crucial to making the operations work. Often their work must be done on an emergency basis and under less than ideal conditions.
- Cabinet relations are not simple ones for anyone, the President included.
- People work in a White House at the senior level rarely serve out a full four year term with the President working in the same job. They either leave or they shift from one position to another.

White House Work Life

- “It is a high-stress job but it is high stress not because of the long hours but because there is absolutely no margin for error whatsoever. Now you’re going to make errors and then you spend the rest of your time correcting but you just have to remember that once a problem reaches the White House basically it has no solution. If it had a solution it would have been solved at some level lower down. It’s so often a roll of the dice. Sometimes you roll seven and sometimes you roll eleven. The stress is not so much from the long hours—because the hours literally are twenty-four hours a day. It doesn’t matter if you’re at the White House or whether you’re at home or in San Francisco or where. The stress arises from the burden of the job rather than the length of the hours.”

SMOOTHING THE PEACEFUL TRANSFER OF DEMOCRATIC POWER

Report 2017—06

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When you enter your West Wing office for the first time, you are going to know right off you are in a world different from any you have experienced. “When you walk into the White House at the beginning of an administration, it is empty,” commented **Bernard Nussbaum**, Counsel to President Clinton.¹ “All of the files are gone. Even the secretaries are gone.” Your predecessors records are sitting in a warehouse waiting the creation of a Clinton library. While you may or may not have furniture in your office, one object you assuredly will have is a ringing telephone. “I think my first day I got 300 phone calls from people asking specifically for me,” related **Jan Naylor Cope** who worked in the Office of Presidential Personnel.² A deputy to a senior adviser in the Clinton White House described the ringing phone when he walked into his boss’s office. He entered “and found that the office was empty and that all eight of his telephone lines were ringing. I didn’t pick up the phone. And the reason for that was, once I said hello and identified myself, I didn’t know how to help any person who was on the other end of the line. If it was a reporter asking me a question about the President’s schedule, I didn’t know the answer. If it was a White House staff person who I had never met, I wouldn’t have been able to find their office. And so I stood, not particularly knowing what to do, with his telephone ringing off the hook.”³ **Bernard Nussbaum** answered his phone commenting on the business of the first day: “the minute you walk into the office, the phones are ringing. It’s as if the ten biggest litigation cases in your life are going on simultaneously,” he said. “I went to the office straight from the inauguration, and went to work right away, doing executive orders on that first day.” No records, no furniture, no support staff, no information while at the same time you face a deluge of phone calls from people asking for answers to questions for which most likely you have no response.

¹ White House Interview Program, Interview with Bernard Nussbaum, Martha Joynt Kumar and Nancy Kassop, New York, New York, November 9, 2000.

² White House Interview Program, Interview with Jan Naylor Cope, Martha Joynt Kumar, Washington, D.C., June 8, 2000.

³ Background interview.

All of this makes for a first day that is an anomaly in the prior experience of most who go to work at the White House.

FORCES WORKING AGAINST A SMOOTH TRANSITION INTO THE WHITE HOUSE

In addition to the lack of memory and the immediate demands for action greeting staff members, there are natural forces working against a smooth transition to power. First, a White House is organized around a President who may or may not come in with a sense of how important his staff will be to the success of his administration. Second, the White House is an artificial construct created all at once from a pool of people many of whom do not know one another. Third, it is difficult to weave together the necessary elements of campaign people and old White House and Washington hands. Fourth, it takes every administration time to discover the knowledgeable people working within the White House and in the Office of Management and Budget. Fifth, mistakes made early make it difficult to catch up and get ahead. Sixth, too many people come into office tired and have difficulty responding to the rush of work in terms of its volume and variety. Seventh, emptying out offices in the White House and in the Executive Branch is a daunting task, most especially if the transition does not involve a change in party

IT TAKES A PRESIDENT TIME TO APPRECIATE THE PLACE OF STAFF

President Ford discussed his initial lack of appreciation for the margin of effectiveness staff buys for a President. “I started out in effect not having an effective Chief of Staff and it didn’t work,” said former **President Gerald R. Ford**.⁴ “So anybody who doesn’t have one and tries to run the responsibilities of the White House I think is putting too big a burden on the President himself. You need a filter, a person that you have total confidence in who works so closely with you that in effect his is almost an alter ego. I just can’t imagine a President not having an effective Chief of Staff.” The Chief of Staff represents the staff and the need a President has to organize his time and his tasks. When he began his tenure as President, Ford had an open door policy with Cabinet officers and top administration officials. He soon found he had little time to do anything other than meet with those who requested his attention. “Traditionally every cabinet officer wants to see the President as often as possible and other top people as well,” said President Ford. “The net result is there aren’t that many hours in a day with all the other obligations that you have to handle on a daily basis.”

If the President does not choose a Chief of Staff, the framework for the White House staff structure is not established and filled in. President Clinton did not announce a Chief of Staff until mid-December in 1992. Until he named Thomas McLarty, no choices could be made on the decision-making process to be used for the Chief Executive and the President-elect’s relations with Congress and the news media had no permanent staff member assigned to them until right before Clinton and Gore came to Washington. The senior White House staff was appointed five days before the Inauguration, which left them no time to organize their White House before they came in.

⁴ White House Interview Program, Interview with President Gerald Ford, Martha Joynt Kumar, Palm Springs, CA., October 10, 2000.

THE WHITE HOUSE AS AN ARTIFICIAL CONSTRUCT

A White House is constructed from a standing start; not gradually developed through experience. The people who come into a White House are coming into a building governed by the rules of politics and moved by its dynamics rather than a common understanding of rules of management. “The most important thing to grasp first is how much a White House itself, especially as it starts off after a change in the party occupying the White House, resembles a city hall,” noted **Lloyd Cutler**, who served as Counsel to both Presidents Carter and Clinton.⁵ “It is very, very difficult to organize. It isn’t as if General Electric bought a company and sent in a management team that had worked together for twenty years and then they came to reshape this company that they bought. A new President naturally relies on the people who helped him get elected and also then seeks ethnic balance, geographic balance, leading public figures, experts in various fields.” Inevitably these people do not know each other well as the administration begins. Yet they are required to gather and analyze information and then make decisions whether or not their decision making process is in order.

At the same time a White House is pulled together from disparate sources, the President and his senior staff often have to withstand strong pressure from groups to get their people on board. One veteran White House staff member described the pressure a President faces:

The incoming White House can’t have a deaf ear or political tin ear but it must be disciplined to withstand that kind of pressure. It’s always going to happen and you have to have very diplomatic outreach teams and you have to have people in the White House that are open and receptive but you cannot populate the government and the White House by quota. It just won’t give you the team you have to have.⁶

Thus, as those organizing a White House put together their staff, they need to develop strategies and mechanisms to fend off those they want to hold at arms length and not let into the building. The reality is, though, people who do come into a White House often come with strong bonds with institutions and individuals outside of the building. Sidney Blumenthal, who worked in the Clinton White House as a senior adviser, discussed the nature of the relationships that White House staff members maintain. “I think everyone in here has their own relations,” he said.⁷ “There are people in here, for example, who are very well connected to constituency groups.” People with strong external relationships often prove difficult to weave into the fabric of a coordinated White House..

FOUR REQUIRED TYPES OF KNOWLEDGE: CAMPAIGN, PRESIDENT, POLICY, & WHITE HOUSE

One of the most difficult aspects of a transition into the White House is the need to accommodate in the government those who work in the campaign while at the same time integrating into the operation those who know the President even though they did not work in the campaign, and those with White House and Washington experience, and people who have substantive knowledge in the areas of social, economic, and national security policy. “You want somebody who was at least served in the upper echelons of the White House staff and knows what goes on, knows how that place runs.

⁵ White House Interview Program, Interview with Lloyd Cutler, Martha Joynt Kumar and Nancy Kassop, Washington, D.C., July 8, 1999.

⁶ Background interview.

⁷ White House Interview Program, Interview with Sidney Blumenthal, Martha Joynt Kumar, Washington, D.C., October 12, 1999.

You've absolutely got to have that," **Leon Panetta** said.⁸ "I would then say with that person you're going to assign one of your top campaign people who knows people, knows personnel and knows the politics of the President and who they screwed and who they don't want to screw and brings a political sense to that. That's the best combination. If you can get those two in one person you're even better off. If you can get those with two people they can work together that's good as well."

Campaign People

There are those who believe campaign people make an important contribution to a White House while others maintain those with a campaign background are often ill suited for White House work. Ann Lewis, Communications Director in the Clinton White House and later Counselor to the President, explained the advantages of bringing in those who were battle tested in the presidential election campaign. "I really like when I have to make a decision to hire someone that they've worked on a campaign because that tells me right away that they met a couple of my goals," remarked Lewis.⁹ "They share the values. They share them enough to get in to a campaign. They are used to working hard and long hours, sort of intense spurts of time. They are flexible because campaigns weed out the rigid people pretty quickly. Now that's all very helpful. It also means they already know a lot of the people they're going to have to work with because they come pre-connected to a network. That's very valuable. If you have somebody you want to get the job done who has existing relationships with people in some of the other offices. So, for that reason, I find campaign experience very valuable. I don't think it is either the only value or that I would not consider somebody who hadn't had it." Having a memory of a campaign and its goals is important to have in a White House and one of the best ways to do so is to bring in those people. In addition, they have met deadlines. "The other thing about a campaign is you have to meet time lines; you have to meet time deadlines," Lewis remarked.¹⁰ Too often, otherwise, you can meet people who are really smart and have done a really good job but they take too long to produce. They don't let go of the information; they don't give you a product. In a campaign, you have to meet those deadlines."

The problem with having campaign people come into the government is they remain to be tested on their ability to govern. Those who work in campaigns think in a short time span, see the world in black and white, and have a sense of attack. While fit for campaigning, these qualities are not necessarily what you want to emphasize in governing. "Campaigns are inevitably exercises of shifting tides and winds and expediency" observed **Roger Porter** who worked in all four of the last Republican administrations.¹¹ "You're trying to resolve this little thing here and this little thing there and keep this group on board and what we have here. That is different than governing. I think there is some merit in having people recognize the distinction between the way decisions get made in a campaign and how processes occur during a campaign," he observed. When you campaign you are living a very different life than is true when governing. "When you govern you've got to figure how to build a coalition and work with others because in fact in our system power is so widely distributed and fragmented that that's the only way you can effectively govern. Those are not necessarily the same set of skills that get illuminated during the course of a campaign."

⁸ White House Interview Program, Interview with Leon Panetta, Martha Joynt Kumar, Monterey Bay, CA., May 4, 2000.

⁹ White House Interview Program, Interview with Ann Lewis, Martha Joynt Kumar, Washington, D.C., July 9, 1999.

¹⁰ Ann Lewis interview, July 9, 1999.

¹¹ White House Interview Program, Interview with Roger Porter, Martha Joynt Kumar, Cambridge, Massachusetts, October, 1999.

Martin Anderson explained the dynamic of bringing into the White House people who worked on the campaign.

They work so long and so hard and become so much of the team that when their candidate wins they automatically come in. It's just the most natural thing in the world. Positions are found for them. That's why I've always argued that if you can identify the key people a candidate surrounded himself with six to nine months or the year before the election, I can tell you what's going to happen. You can tell because they all come in."¹²

It doesn't make a difference if they have the qualities needed to govern. "In my experience, it's a secondary consideration," he said. There are several priorities for a President. "With Reagan it was real clear. He knew what he wanted to do. He wanted people to help him do it so they agreed with him. They should be competent for the job. We didn't want idiots. They should know what they were doing. But given the choice of taking someone who was competent and fully agreed with Reagan and someone who was brilliant and disagreed, you took the first one. You also want loyalty, total, absolute loyalty and enthusiasm. Then if they know something about Washington that's nice but not that critical.

When they come into a White House even if they fit in in terms of their substantive contributions, campaign people, especially those working in the political and communications areas, often find the adjustment a difficult one because of the differences in the technology they work with in a White House. In a campaign, the operations involve the newest technology for accumulating and delivering information. A White House is traditionally at the low end of the tech spectrum. **Jodie Torkelson**, who headed the Office of Management and Administration, provides a glimmer of the contrast. "A lot of these folks had worked in telecommunications or very modern areas," she said of those working in the campaign. "Everybody had a laptop and everybody had cell phones. They expected when they went to the White House to find those kinds of things and it was a shock when you walked in the door you had a big old phone with big square buttons that lit up. You had about six lines across and you have to push here; if you wanted to transfer a call you had to click twice on the receiver. It was so archaic."¹³ Making the changes in the system the incoming crew want to make can take the whole of the administration. Making do takes time as well.

Personal Presidential Choices

In addition to choosing his own Chief of Staff, a President will select four or five other senior staff members. President Ford explained his picks. "The Press Secretary, I made the choice. First Jerry terHorst, then he left and then Ron Nessen. Those were personal choices," he said.¹⁴ As a veteran of the Hill, **President Ford** chose his legislative liaison. "I felt I had a better knowledge of the kind of a person who ought to do that and I picked Jack Marsh who had been in Congress with me as a southern Democrat. Then when I went as Vice President he was over at the Pentagon as legislative liaison for the Pentagon. Then when I became President I drafted Jack to come and be my legislative liaison," he recounted. "Another is your speechwriter. In my case I felt I wanted to pick the head of speechwriting and I picked Bob Hartmann who had been my Chief of Staff when I was Vice President. A speechwriter has to have an intimate relationship with the President and the President with the speechwriter," he declared. "Those are the kind of people that a President has to pick personally."

¹² White House Interview Program, Interview with Martin Anderson, Martha Joynt Kumar, Stanford, California, May 5, 2000.

¹³ White House Interview Program, Interview with Jodie Torkelson, Martha Joynt Kumar, Washington, D.C., October 19, 2000.

¹⁴ President Ford interview.

They may make different choices, but presidents will select a handful of people to occupy positions they consider to be crucial to the manner in which their presidency functions.

Substantive Policy People

As a White House starts up, substantive policy people must be represented from its creation. **Leon Panetta** discussed some of the blend here.

You want the most qualified people in those kinds of positions because as you go through the decision-making process you may want to make some changes, you may want to bring some political input in to it. You have got to have the substance down so you know what the hell you're getting in to. You make political judgments on top of that but you, by God, need to know what's really involved in that decision making process and you're not going to get that with—if you put campaign types in these positions, their first thought will be the politics of it. You want somebody in these positions whose first thought is not the politics of it but the substance of it. What's the right economic policy? What's the right national security policy? What's the right policy in terms of the counsel and the law? You want people that make straight calls on that. It's easy to make political decisions on top of that.¹⁵

An area where political and substantive people clashed in the Clinton White House was on economic policy and the priority to be accorded to deficit reduction. **David Dreyer**, who began his White House days in the Office of Communications and who later worked for Robert Rubin, discussed the conflict that can take place between political and policy people. “There are times when the political people were advising him [Rubin] he couldn't quote, unquote break a campaign promise by under-funding or not funding a particular program where he was able to persuade them and cabinet people who represented those programs that we had to hit a particular dollar figure on deficit reduction where the financial markets would regard as credible,” he said.

That, in tandem with Lloyd Bentsen going out on a Sunday news broadcast and talking about an energy tax to demonstrate seriousness and purpose about deficit reduction were key things which got the markets believing that we were actually going to do what we had set out to do. There were some strong-willed individuals seated around that table from the [James] Carvilles and the [Paul] Begalas representing the President's political promises—and they had an important brief to argue—and the programmatic people like Secretary [Robert] Reich at the Labor Department and Dick Riley at Education. He got all of those people singing off of the same sheet of music about the President's priorities and the depth of the deficit reduction we were going to do and that meant that some of our tax promises and some of our programmatic initiatives weren't going to be as fulfilled or as out front as they wanted them to be.¹⁶

People with White House Experience

A well functioning White House is generally a blend of people from the campaign and those with a previous tour of service in the White House. **James Cicconi**, who served in the Reagan and Bush administrations, discussed the advantage of prior service. “I was a hell of a lot better at my job under President Bush because I had worked in a more junior position under President Reagan,” he said.¹⁷ “I was able to see how Darman and others, how that job functioned, when it functioned well, when it functioned poorly, how it needed to adapt to the President's style of work. I saw how it worked; I saw how White Houses work and are structured, how decisions get made. I learned the importance of

¹⁵ Leon Panetta interview.

¹⁶ White House Interview Program, Interview with David Dreyer, Martha Joynt Kumar, Washington, D.C., August 1, 1999.

¹⁷ White House Interview Program, Interview with James Cicconi, Martha Joynt Kumar, Washington, D.C., November 29, 1999.

speaking up and how to affect a decision, how to deal with pressure and stress in the job and balance things in your life at the same time. I was a lot better the second time around than I would have been coming in cold, a lot better.”

William Galston, who worked in the Clinton White House, observed: “the only institutional memory that counts is what’s in somebody’s head. A database across time is no substitute for someone who’s been there before and is going back.”¹⁸ **James Baker** discussed what you learn from being in or near a White House. His first experience with a White House was coming to meetings there during the Ford Administration when he came in place of the Secretary of Commerce, Rogers C.B. Morton, who was ill at the time. Baker said he learned the following: “How options should go to the President. How decisions should be made. The role of the honest broker. The land mines that you have to be aware of as Chief of Staff.” Once he came in as Chief of Staff, his earlier time had served him well as he prepared to come in. Michael Deaver explained what he viewed James Baker as bringing to President Reagan and his White House. “He [President Reagan] had a lot of counsel from Baker and people that Baker brought to the table who had been through other wars, who had been through fights with the Congress, who knew how to work with the Republican minority leadership and knew how you used OMB [Office of Management and Budget] and all these things that Jimmy Carter never figured out, I don’t think,” explained Deaver.¹⁹ “That was a tremendous asset for Ronald Reagan.

Those people who have not worked on a campaign are looked upon with suspicion. **Gerald Warren** who worked in the Press Office and the Office of Communications in the Nixon and Ford White Houses explained his entry and the manner in which he sought to fit in.

I walked in to the White House for the first time on January 21 early in the morning. I had come in on the red eye. I was advised by a very wise person who had been through this before to skip the inauguration festivities because I wasn’t a member of the team. I wasn’t in the campaign. I was told that I was going to be initially viewed as an outsider who wasn’t in the trenches with the [Richard] Nixon folks so I should go in as quietly as possible. So I did. That turned out to be true. I was a newspaper editor. I wasn’t identified as a Nixon person. I had to overcome that within the staff.²⁰

When asked how one overcomes the initial cool response of those who have worked with the President-elect, **Warren** said. “I think just by quietly going about your work and learning the ropes of the White House staff, how the White House staff works and doesn’t work, which is a very difficult thing for people coming in for the first time to do.”

DISCOVERING KNOWLEDGEABLE INSIDERS

It takes some while before those coming into a White House appreciate the knowledge of the White House support staff. The White House has rhythms that repeat themselves from one administration to another. It generally takes some while, though, before the new people appreciate the importance of those who have served sometimes for several presidents. “There are certain people who have that metronome in their head and know how it’s supposed to work, like the clerk downstairs in the White House,” observed **Warren**.²¹ “There’s always someone in each office, some secretary in each office, who has the key, who knows how it works. The difficult thing is to find that person and

¹⁸ Interview with William Galston, Martha Joynt Kumar, College Park, MD., June 5, 1997.

¹⁹ White House Interview Program, Interview with Michael Deaver, Martha Joynt Kumar, Washington, D.C., September 9, 1999.

²⁰ White House Interview Program, Interview with Gerald Warren, Martha Joynt Kumar, Middleburg, Virginia, October, 1999.

²¹ Gerald Warren interview.

then, in the case of a Republican administration replacing a Democrat or Vice versa, protecting that person and saying please help us.” Invariably such people are demoted until the new staff recognize the usefulness of those who previously served. In the case of the Press Office, for example, Connie Gerard worked for press secretaries from George Reedy through Marlin Fitzwater. “Each of us going in, in those circumstances, seems to make the same mistake,” he said. “They move these people away as if they were [Lyndon B.] Johnson loyalists. Well, she may or may not have been but she knew how the place worked; she was willing and eager to share that with us. It took us about a week of stumbling around before we brought her back in to a prominent position in the Press Office.”

There is a whole group of people in the Office of Management and Budget who know White House operations. **William Galston**, who worked on education issues in the first term of the Clinton Administration described the importance of permanent people in the Executive Branch. “Just think about it institutionally,” he said.²² “There are very few people in senior staff positions in the Congress who didn’t start out with junior staff positions in the Congress. There is a training process. But somehow when you get to the White House, the cycle of training and experience is broken and it’s as though you’re starting over again with each administration.” What that means “is that a lot of power shifts to the more permanent executive branch presence’s. Now that’s not all bad. For example, without the assistance of senior OMB people, career people, I would have been lost in the early months on my job....You have to figure out that they’re there and you have to figure out how to interact usefully and respectfully.”

COMING IN TIRED

If the President-elect moved directly from the campaign into transition mode, it is quite possible he failed to rest during that time period. The result is coming into the White House tired. If he is exhausted, so too will be his staff as wherever a President is during the transition he is certain to have staff who follow his moves. **David Gergen** described the problem and the Clinton example. “I do believe that the physical pacing of the President is so important. The transition time is one in which its extremely important to put him down for a while to recharge the engines. You come off a grueling campaign and everybody is exhausted. If you don’t allow those people to have some time, especially the candidate, to find himself or herself again, get yourself back together and be ready for what is going to hit in January, you’re just asking for enormous problems,” he said.²³ For Reagan it was not difficult to take time off after the election and get rested. “That was sort of his natural bent anyway,” **Gergen** observed. “After he did a picture, he relaxed; that was his way of life. Then you get up for the next one. Clinton I saw at renaissance weekend in Hilton Head in late December or early January 1993. I was stunned at the pace he was trying to keep. He came in tired. He would stay up half the night partying and enjoying himself, seeing friends. He’d be up at six o’clock in the morning to play football. He was going on like four hours sleep. He had been doing it all through the transition.” The result was a President who came into office without having taken time off to make the switch from campaigning to governing.

²² William Galston interview.

²³ White House Interview Program, Interview with David Gergen, Martha Joynt Kumar, Shirlington, Virginia, August 26, 1999.

EARLY MISTAKES COST VALUABLE ENERGY

Especially in the area of appointments, the early months are difficult ones replete with opportunities to go off track. **Jerry Jones**, who worked in the Personnel Office in the Nixon White House, told of the huge number of resumes he had to deal with that had been requested by those working in the transition. He was brought into the White House to deal with letters solicited by the personnel transition team from people whose names were in *Who's Who in America*. The transition team had sent letters to them asking they send in names of people appropriate for jobs in the administration. They enthusiastically did so.

The EOB [Executive Office Building]'s halls on the first floor, over by the Personnel Office, were *stacked* with letters from these people. And then, when they didn't hear from them - which they couldn't do because there were *multi-thousands* of these letters and resumes *everywhere* - it simply broke the system down. Then, when they didn't hear, they wrote *again*. So there were then *twice as many letters*. Then, when they didn't hear again, they started *calling*. They all thought their recommendations - because they're important people - should be listened to. Then, when they *weren't*, which they couldn't possibly be— there were at that time 555 presidentially-appointed jobs. There were about 3,000 Schedule C jobs, [there] were about 150 some odd ambassadorial appointments - of which about 30 were politically appointed - and there were 300 and some odd federal judgeships, of which vacancies came up from time to time as people retired. That's a *very small* group of people. And if you have 50,000 resumes, how do you even begin to deal with it? Well, they *couldn't*. It was a huge black eye.²⁴

One mistake in the appointment process can draw the energy of a new administration into areas where it had not planned to go. “The John Tower confirmation, failure to confirm, that was a serious bump in the road for us,” observed **Andrew Card** who served as Deputy Chief of Staff in the early part of the Bush Administration.²⁵ The Tower confirmation was a problem because it was unanticipated and it threatened to compromise their routines and focus. “It preoccupied senior staff attention at the White House for probably two weeks when we couldn't afford to give it the attention.” They were lucky for the selection of Richard Cheney to be Secretary of Defense in place of John Tower. “The President's selection of Cheney was masterful. The background check was fast because it was easy. There were no skeletons that anybody could find and Cheney knew the process, the process knew him. So we stopped the bleeding very, very quickly.” If Cheney had not been so easy to confirm they could have faced a loss of momentum. “If we had stumbled after the Tower problems I think it would have taken us a long time to recover and it would have jeopardized any momentum we had on the policy side,” **Card** said.

In a White House early hiring decisions can have a lasting impact. They are most likely people who worked on the campaign and for whom the President feels great loyalty and an accompanying reluctance to let them go. In addition, those close to a President can do a great deal of damage because they are knowledgeable about the inner workings of the White House. If those who are not working out well have closer ties to the opinion community than does the President, the damage than can do on the outside is that much greater. One former senior staff member described the problem President Clinton faced having disgruntled former staff publicly airing their dissatisfaction. “Some of it was in some cases those people had the stronger personal and institutional bonds and ties with the opinion establishment whether it's the press corps or opinion leaders of other sorts. So just to dump them means you made an enemy out in that world.”²⁶ In the Clinton administration, former presidential loyalists Dick Morris and George Stephanopoulos adopted television perches they used to criticize

²⁴ White House Interview Program, Interview with Jerry Jones, Martha Joynt Kumar, Rosslyn, VA., April 11, 2000.

²⁵ White House Interview Program, Interview with Andrew Card, Martha Joynt Kumar, Washington, D.C., May 25, 1999.

²⁶ Background interview.

their former boss. “If you know you’ve got somebody like that who knows and understands you that well—you’re a person; you’re a human being; you’re not perfect,” observed the same former staff member referring to Dick Morris. “Everything that you do and say can be read in a lot of different lights. But if you have somebody who is apt to have sort of a vendetta against you and want to read those and tell the world about them in a negative light, you do what you can to try to keep that person in the fold.” A President cannot afford to have staff members who have been in an inner circle go outside of that circle into a public forum. The damage such aides can do is an incentive to try to keep them in the fold, even if they are disgruntled.

EMPTYING OUT THE OFFICES

One of the difficult tasks at the end of the administration is emptying out the offices of political appointees and for those coming in, making certain the deed was done in a complete fashion. Chair huggers are rampant in the White House and throughout the administration. If it is a transition involving a change in party, the White House is automatically cleared. In a transition involving the same party and where a Vice-President is the President-elect, the problems of clearing the desks is magnified. Then it requires canceling White House passes and leaving people on the payroll for a short period of time. In the transition from the Reagan to the Bush administrations, one official familiar with the process said White House staff had their passes canceled a week after the Inauguration but they were kept on the payroll for two to three weeks.²⁷

In a hostile transition, pressure is there to protect the people out in the departments and agencies, which makes it difficult for those coming into the White House to set up their administration. The Executive Branch is more difficult to clear out than is the White House. Traditionally, the President-elect chooses to empty out the offices under his own direction or have the incumbent President fire people. At the request of President-elect Clinton, President Bush sent letters to people they appointed informing them they were terminated. A person involved in that transition said people out in the departments sought to hold onto their jobs by requesting of the Bush people: “Don’t tell them I’m around; let them find me’. ‘I’ve done a good job; of course, they want me on their team.’ ‘They’d be foolish to replace me’,” people said.²⁸ In fact, they did clear the decks and then requested of each department head a briefing book with the responsibilities sketched out for each of the political appointees from the Schedule Cs to the department secretary.

A friendly transition has unanticipated problems. Those coming into office believe the transition will be a smooth one and fail to take into account the two issues they will confront: bringing in their own people and thinking through representation of their party’s coalition. One person familiar with the transition from Presidents Reagan to Bush observed:

I think the friendly takeover was more difficult than the hostile because in the friendly takeover there was almost an expectation for the people who were left in the Reagan Administration that they would stay on and how dare you punish me and fire me. President Reagan did not clear the decks basically. His people basically were there. Many of them assumed they would move on but there were a lot who were holding on and because they hadn’t been asked to leave assumed they could stay. I think that was very, very uncomfortable and it also had policy ramifications. Then there were, ‘I was doing a perfectly good job at the Department of Agriculture and President Bush fired me because he disagreed with our policies.’ It wasn’t because he disagreed with the policies. And then there was a backlash in the policy

²⁷ Background interview.

²⁸ Background interview.

debate. So I think that was more difficult. At least when you have a hostile takeover there's an expectation on those who are in jobs that they are likely to be out of them.²⁹

A friendly transition has the additional problem of taking into account all of the factions within a part. "The other thing is, in a friendly takeover, there's still the reality that there are different camps. When it's a hostile takeover you don't have to worry about the different camps," said an observer.³⁰ "When we came in as the Bush team, we had to worry about the old Reagan team, we had to worry about the Bob Dole campaign workers, the Pat Buchanan campaign workers, the Republican factions that complicated both the personnel process and the early policy debate process." The personnel issue in a friendly transition is especially difficult because it is unanticipated and little attention is given to it when something could be done to ameliorate hard feelings towards the incoming team. In the case of the transition from Presidents Reagan to Bush, the incoming people could have insisted President Reagan fire people rather than leave the task to those coming in. The hard feelings felt by those asked to leave remained for years to come.

WHITE HOUSE ORGANIZATION

The White House is difficult to organize because it is a political organization required to perform management tasks. It does so in an environment where staff turnover is high and loyalty is to the President, not to the staff member who hired them. As unique an operation as it is in some ways, a White House is subject to patterns that repeat themselves from one administration to another. It is no accident, for example, that the communications operations of Presidents Nixon, Reagan, and Clinton had striking similarities. No matter what party the President represents or what the goals of their administrations were, all of the Chief Executives needed an effective communications operation to win a second term and to push through policies of interest to them. Each President and his staff developed a communications operation that had strong central direction with the Chief of Staff involved in the development of strategies, a coordinated effort within the process, liaison, and policy shops of the White House, and a planning operation that thought through events several weeks out. The President didn't talk to their predecessors about these operations nor did many of their staff. They all came to the same conclusion about what worked. That pattern repeats itself all over the White House no matter who the incumbent is, what party he represents, or who he hires. All of the successful presidents have had a sense of the importance of the White House staff to the success of their administrations and to their effectiveness as Chief Executives.

The stakes are high in having a well functioning White House because of the catalytic role staff play in policy as well as in politics. "I would say one of the defining characteristics of government right now is that almost everything can be and often is centralized in the White House. So the White House staff becomes critical," observed Clinton presidential aide Sidney Blumenthal.³¹ Today a White House has a shadow government for the departments of government. National security policy is coordinated in the National Security Council, economic policy in the National Economic Council, and domestic policy in the Domestic Policy staff. "There are the councils, the policy councils, domestic policy and national security and national economic. Those are generators of policy," said Blumenthal. "The departments and agencies certainly generate policy but they have to work in tandem with the

²⁹ Background interview.

³⁰ Background interview.

³¹ Sidney Blumenthal interview.

White House policy councils. White House staff can generate policy too. They can play a catalytic role.”

What An Effective White House Staff Buys for a President

The White House staff extends the reach of a President and increases his capacity to handle the crushing responsibilities of those early weeks and months. “The Chief of Staff, the national security advisor and all the layers involved, function as an extension of the President” observed former Chief of Staff **Howard Baker**. “They extend his ability to operate, his understanding of issues.” They represent “an extension of his own governance,” he said.³² “It’s crucial in terms of how he’s going to function as President, whether or not he’s effective,” observed **Richard Cheney**, former Chief of Staff to President Ford.³³ “A President can do a lot just based on his own personal skills but there’s a limit. His reach, his ability to sort of guide and direct the government, to interact with the cabinet, to deal effectively with the Congress, to manage his relationship with the press, all of those are key ingredients to his success.” The staff is particularly important because of the difficulty moving policy in Washington. You need people in place because “there’s not a lot that he can do by himself” observed former Chief of Staff **James Baker** observed.³⁴ “Most of it, he has to do with the iron triangle up there in Washington, D.C.-the press, the Congress, and the political groups.”

James Baker spoke of the importance of getting in place a good White House team. “I think it bought us a successful first year, which we then translated into a successful first term....it was our conclusion - mine and my people’s-that the way presidents are judged in terms of success or failure is whether they can move things through the Congress, whether they can accomplish change in legislation. Therefore, we formed this legislative strategy group that was really the most effective operation I think in the White House. Trying to turn policy into law, trying to get things moving through. That was the major operative element in the Reagan White House. That legislative strategy group.”³⁵

Donald Rumsfeld discussed the importance of the White House staff in ordering the decision-making process. “He has the Congress, the press, and office seekers and friends and people promoting policy positions all trying to get access,” he said.³⁶ “The staff system should discipline that whole process in a way that what comes up has been reasonably rationalized and comes up in a reasonably orderly way So [the President] ought to want that White House staff to put a discipline and integrity into the process, create a structure, that will give him reasonable assurance that ‘what you see is what you get’,” **Rumsfeld** said. “He has to make the decisions. He needs a staff that will preserve his options in areas where he ought to be the decision-maker. The staff must figure out how to send things forward to him so that the decision that’s made not only decides that single issue but decides more than that issue. That way the same kinds of issues don’t keep popping back up.”

³² White House Interview Program, Interview with Howard Baker, Martha Joynt Kumar, Washington, D.C., November 12, 1999.

³³ White House Interview Program, Interview with Richard Cheney, Martha Joynt Kumar, Washington, D.C., July 27, 1999.

³⁴ White House Interview Program, Interview with James Baker III interview, Martha Joynt Kumar and Terry Sullivan, Houston, TX., November 16, 1999.

³⁵ White House Interview Program, Interview with James A. Baker, III, Martha Joynt Kumar and Terry Sullivan, Houston, TX., July 7, 1999.

³⁶ White House Interview Program, Interview with Donald Rumsfeld, Martha Joynt Kumar, Chicago, IL., April 25, 2000.

A White House Is President Centered

The White House staff is President-centered in the character of its organization as well as in terms of the loyalty of those who serve. While it might seem logical a President's staff will complement his personal weaknesses rather than mirror his strengths, presidential history indicates otherwise. Most often a White House staff mirrors the personal and political strengths of a President and rarely compensates for his weaknesses in those two areas. Presidents who are strong communicators, for example, have equally forceful communications operations and those who have little regard for presidential publicity mirror their sentiments in their lack of commitment of White House resources to such endeavors. President Reagan devoted time and resources to communicating his personal, policy, and electoral goals while his successor did not. Even at its end, the Reagan White House had an excellent administration wide communications operation yet when President Bush came into office his staff made little effort to replicate or even retain a part of what was then a state-of-the-art communications operation. President Bush, commented David Demarest who served as his Communications Director, was "a president who, by his own admission, was not the kind of president that could rally the country on domestic issues very successful through oratory and rhetoric. He was not comfortable in that role and felt that he wasn't going to go to the airwaves like a Ronald Reagan would and convince people of a point of view."³⁷ As a result of his conclusions about his own rhetorical weakness, President Bush avoided rather than devoted attention to publicizing himself and his program.

The pattern of devoting staff energy to areas where a President is comfortable is found across the board, not just in the communications area. President Clinton's White House operation, for example, mirrored his strengths as a political leader. He brought into the presidential orbit the services of pollsters and political consultants in a manner no President had previously done. His Wednesday evening Residence Meetings were critical for the shape, tone, and timing of the President's agenda. Pollster Mark Penn presented his findings to the President and to an assemblage of White House senior aides and outside political people.

An area where presidents are the most likely to reach beyond their comfort zone is to expand their knowledge base by bringing into the White House people with Washington experience. If they come from a non-Washington environment, presidents find they need to supplement their team with people who are familiar with the forces at work in the Washington political community. Except for President Reagan who brought along experienced White House hands when he came into office in January 1981, presidents most often tend to bring in such people only under the duress created by a poor start. Thus, Presidents Carter and Clinton reached to the Washington crowd only when they ran headlong into difficulties moving their political and policy agendas. Both, for example, had Lloyd Cutler as a White House counsel but only after the weather turned stormy.

While White House staff members will deal directly far more with the Chief of Staff than they will with the President, the President sets the tone for a White House and it is to him staff members assign their allegiance, not the Chief of Staff. **Marlin Fitzwater**, who worked under seven Chiefs during his years in the Reagan and Bush White Houses, observed. "The Chief of Staff is not as important as the President," he said.³⁸ "The President is still the ultimate manager. And, if a Chief of Staff doesn't reflect what he wants to do or the way he wants to do it, chaos will result because people will follow the President and not the Chief of Staff." The people who come into the White House are

³⁷ White House Interview Program, Interview with David Demarest, Martha Joynt Kumar, Washington, D.C., December 7, 1999.

³⁸ White House Interview Program, Interview with Marlin Fitzwater, Martha Joynt Kumar, Deale, MD., October 21, 1999.

there because of the President, not the Chief of Staff. “You have to remember that every person in the White House has a private constituency; that’s how they got there. Somebody liked them and got them there. It seldom is the Chief of Staff. And that private constituency almost always is loyal to the President. If you’re the Press Secretary or the deputy Press Secretary or the assistant Press Secretary for the kids in the lower press office, every one of them has a little power base of their own that got them that job with the White House and it’s always directly traceable to the President. They worked for the President; their family knows the President; the President liked them, something. But he is the source of all power in the White House.”

The President is the central resource in a White House and his office serves as a complementary tool of governing. A President and his staff regularly employ the mystique of the Oval Office as a resource as he seeks to convince others to do what he wants them to do. President Ford explained how he did so: “I’m not sure I was always successful but I tried. When we were having a terrible dispute about delivering some arms to Turkey that they had bought and paid for but the Greek lobby was opposed to, I tried to bring members of the House and Senate down to explain they were both NATO [North Atlantic Treaty Organization] allies.”³⁹ He continued: “I would bring down members of the House and Senate and say this is plain justice. You can’t not deliver on what you promised. And we tried to use the Oval Office for that benefit.” At the same time, the Oval Office comes between a President and his staff.

The mystique that helps a President as he seeks to persuade others interferes with his getting a honest opinion from many of his staff. “There were many times when people would stand around in the Oval Office, where you’re always intimidated, and they’d tell the President what they thought the President wanted to hear and then they’d walk out in the Roosevelt Room across the hall and say, ‘Did we do the right thing?’” explained a senior staff member who spent several years working in the White House.⁴⁰ “I said, ‘Well, you have a reservation about it? Why didn’t you tell the President about it?’ ‘Well, he seemed like he was comfortable with it.’ ‘Well, he should know you’re uncomfortable with it.’, the advisor related. “And I’d go back and talk to the President, “I know you met with [OMB Director]and [head of the Council of Economic Advisors] but you should know that you probably got the impression that [CEA advisor] thought this was okay. The truth is [he] has some reservations.’,” he said. Without staff willing to serve as an interpreter between the President and those bringing him advice, the Chief Executive can end up with many a false impression.

The same Oval Office mystique also makes it difficult for others to speak with the President in an honest fashion, including prominent political people. A Chief of Staff described the problem and a typical incident. When you are Chief of Staff, he indicated you must “deal with the fact that very, very few people level with the President,” he said. “The dynamics of the Oval Office, the way the city works, people want a good relationship with whoever the guy is in the Oval Office. It’s very, very rare anybody will walk in to the Oval Office and say, ‘That a dumb, stupid thing you just did, Mr. President.’ It just doesn’t happen.”⁴¹ One political figure who was a good friend of the President called the Chief of Staff and said,

‘You guys are about to make a terrible mistake. I need to talk to the President about it.’ I said fine. So I scheduled him and at the appointed hour took him in and put him in the Oval Office and then I left in case he wanted to talk about me so they could have an open, honest dialogue, just the President and this guy who was going to give him this great advice.

³⁹ President Ford interview.

⁴⁰ Background interview.

⁴¹ Background interview.

Thirty minutes later the door opens, the guy walks in to my office. He said, “Look. I didn’t get a chance to tell the President. Here’s what you’ve got to tell him.” Then he’d lay it on you. They talked about how are [the President’s wife] and the kids.... If you’re a member of Congress, if you’re a cabinet member, it’s very, very rare that anybody ever directly confronts the president. But there is a lot of bad news out there that has to be delivered and somebody has to deliver it. You have to set up mechanisms and processes that the President can get an honest appraisal of his performance, performance of cabinet members, what’s going on in the administration.

Organizing a White House Staff Has Several Parts

As former White House Staff Secretary and Personnel chief, **Jerry Jones**, expresses it: “if you figure that the White House is going to determine whether your government is going to be successful or not, and if I’m right that it is, it is the brain of the Executive Branch, then you’ve got to do it *right*,” he said.⁴² Setting up a White House involves four components: organization, process, values, and people. “*You can’t start too early and you can’t get good enough people.... You have to organize it properly. You have to have the proper process. You have to have the proper values and you have to have the proper people.* The President is the key to all of that and he’s got to know that he has to do that.” That means a President must start directly after his election to select his key staff. But in order to do so, he needs to be aware of the importance of the staff in his governance. Presidents come to understand their importance after they have been in office, but rarely do they have the understanding as they come to power that they will have later on in their administration. Of recent presidents, only Presidents Bush and Reagan paid attention to their key White House staff picks in their first two weeks. President Clinton did not announce his pick for Chief of Staff until mid-December and the remainder of his White House staff came on board five days before the Inauguration.

STAFF STRUCTURE

The Place of the Chief of Staff

President Gerald Ford discussed the importance of having a Chief of Staff in order to put in place a process for gathering information from Cabinet officers. He said: “Well, that was one of the benefits of shifting to have the Chief of Staff be the filter. He would demand that cabinet officers or others who had a request had to put it in writing, they had to make their best case and that made it easier for me to look at it. Sometimes I would see the cabinet officers; sometimes I would just act on the documents that were submitted. It was a big time saver and I think much more effective the way we ended up.”⁴³

The priorities of the Chief of Staff are fairly similar no matter who holds the position or their party. **Donald Rumsfeld** described what others agree are key activities for a Chief. “First is knowing what the priorities are, and the second is getting the right people,” he said.⁴⁴ “Another area is seeing that problems are dealt with early, preferably before they become major problems. A fourth is to see that you’re arranged in a way that you don’t have problems you don’t need. That involves setting a

⁴² Jerry Jones interview.

⁴³ President Ford interview.

⁴⁴ Donald Rumsfeld interview.

tone, tempo and behavior pattern that is not going to lead to scandal or crossed wires among departments and the like.”

One former Chief of Staff discussed the manner in which a small item can turn around to create a problem you had not even considered arising if you and your President do not have a clear communications line. His President reviewed the list for state dinners and in one instance decided a particular Cabinet officer should be taken off the list. “He was at the last three,” the President told his Chief of Staff.⁴⁵ “‘There are other people who should go to these things,’ [the President] said to me. I said fine. I didn’t sense any particular reason why that person had to be there at that particular one. I said okay and the list went out.” It was not long before the Chief heard from the Cabinet officer. “Well, the cabinet officer went ballistic and said [in attendance would be the] President of [the XYZ] country and it’s terribly important I be there. We’re doing all this business with them and it’s absolutely necessary that I be there.” The Chief went to talk with the President who held firm in his position the Cabinet member should not be there. The next day the Cabinet member was at the White House and “stays afterwards and says, ‘Mr. President, I simply have to be at that dinner.’ The President is a good guy, he says, ‘Fair enough. I’ll figure out how to do it,’ never telling him that he was the one that took him off in the first place, never telling him that he was the one that denied it in the second place, not intentionally but unintentionally, leaving the impression that I did it. And the guy believed I did it.” The result was: “So, suddenly, I’ve got a problem with a cabinet officer I don’t need, because the President didn’t know how to deal with something like that. He didn’t understand what the inevitable effects would be of his making that decision that way.”

A Chief of Staff is good for about two years. The reason they generally do not stay longer is because of the enemies they make. Their job is often to say “no” to people, something that earns them the enmity of many. **James Baker** told President-elect Reagan that he thought a Chief of Staff should most likely stay only two years. “When he asked me to take the job and I took it, I said, ‘Mr. President, these jobs are best performed in two-year increments.’ The Chief of Staff is a big target,” he said.⁴⁶ “You walk around with a target on your chest and on your back. You use up your chits pretty quickly, because the job of the Chief of Staff is to say no to people. Everybody wants something from the President, and your job is to say no or to say yes, maybe, but-. You use your political capital up fairly quickly.” In reality, though, James Baker stayed in the position for four years. In earlier administrations Sherman Adams and H.R. Haldeman stayed beyond a full term as well and only left when ethical and legal issues forced them out of office. Most chiefs, however, do follow Baker’s two year instruction as can be seen in the increments chiefs served in the Clinton White House. There were four chiefs who served around two years each in the eight years of the Clinton Administration.

One person who worked under several chiefs of staff described the kind of discipline a Chief of Staff needs to exercise: “They can’t be a procrastinator. They have to be disciplined enough to get the work done. They also have to be disciplined enough to say no—no, you can’t see the President; no, we’re not putting that on the schedule. So what I’m trying to get to is a typical politician is sometimes not a very good Chief of Staff because politicians don’t like to say no.”⁴⁷

The ‘Spokes-of-the-Wheel’: A Disagreement

There is some disagreement on the idea of the Spokes of the Wheel and its effectiveness as a management mechanism in a White House. Donald Rumsfeld was entirely opposed to it and James

⁴⁵ Background interview.

⁴⁶ James Baker III interview, July 7, 1999.

⁴⁷ Background interview.

Baker a proponent though in reality their differences were ones of language. **Rumsfeld** describes the concept in the following terms:

...the only thing that happens where the spokes come in to the hub is that it gets overheated and the bearings have to be replaced - and that's going to be either the President or you, or both.... And we did [get away from it], in relatively short order. You simply have to have a structure where things are reasonably tidy and you know who is doing what, and what the President is saying, to whom, and there's some record of it. You can have a number of things going on off to the side - that are not part of the system - but you start multiplying that and you're just going to have a mess.

James Baker used the term "spokes-of-the-wheel," but he and his staff organized their operation in such a manner as to eliminate the "oh, by the way" aspect of the decision making associated with the concept. What Baker applauded is the inclusion of people and their ideas while at the same time making certain the Chief of Staff and other senior staff are aware of the ideas people are taking to the President and have the commitment of the Chief Executive to hold off on making decisions until the ideas were staffed out in the normal process. He described the system:

we had a spokes-of-the-wheel type approach to the White House, where any cabinet officer who wanted to see the President could, on twenty-four hours notice. Anybody who wanted to see the President alone could see the President. The President also had a post office box number where people could write him and not have to go through the staff. But the President committed that he would always debrief us about those communications, and he did. For the most part, it worked really, really well.⁴⁸

In reality, there were only three people who had walk in access to the President. They were James Baker, Edwin Meese, and Michael Deaver. When others went in to see the President, including Cabinet secretaries, they were accompanied by one of the three men. There were times, though, that someone was able to slip by and get to the President without the Chief of Staff knowing about it. **James Baker** provided an example.

I remember one time, Bill Clark in a leaks investigation ordered lie detector tests for everybody following a National Security Council meeting. Well, that meant the Vice President of the United States was going to be strapped up to a lie detector. [George] Shultz, the Secretary of State, said, 'Not me. I'm leaving. Put me on the lie detector. If you've got that little faith in my word, I'm out of here.' I said the same thing. The minute the President - He had okayed that when the National Security Advisor, Bill Clark, had come in to see him one-on-one. But after it was all reviewed, I'll never forget Reagan's saying, 'Bill shouldn't have done that,' picking up the phone and calling Clark.

In order to have control over the process and make certain others can't slip unnoticed to see the President and get his ear and agreement, a Chief of Staff has to assert control over several aspects of White House operations. **James Baker** speaks of the need to control a variety of operations. "I had the make-the-trains-run-on-time responsibility, the political responsibility. You'll see there [referring to the memorandum] I had the press office, the communications office, congressional liaison, the things that you need to do to make policy successful, to get it through the legislative branch," he said. He controlled: "The paper, the schedule, the politics, the legislative strategy, and the message, and the bully pulpit," he said. By implication, his role in policy was important as well because he controlled the legislative strategy and communications. "The policy wonks can go in there and they can do whatever they want to on policy. They can do it forever. But to implement it, you have to have this side of the equation," he noted. Thus, while he did not control the substance of policy, it would be difficult for anyone to implement it without his involvement.

⁴⁸ James Baker III interview, July 9, 1999.

A Well Run White House System: Orderly, Fair, and Collegial

James Baker discussed the importance of an orderly system to the overall success of the staff operation. “You have to make sure you have an orderly system, that you have a system that’s fair. Otherwise, you start the leaking in the press, one against the other. You have to have a system that lets the President hear all sides. And you have to have one, that if you’re going to be running the White House, you have to know what’s going on. You have to have a system where you’re in the know. We had that.”

For **Marlin Fitzwater**, an orderly system was one based on a system of collegiality. “The Chief of Staff has to manage in a way that makes everybody in the staff believe their access to the President is greater because of it, their reputation is enhanced because of it, their increased attention is greater because of it. Generally that involves a management process of, again, collegiality, of having meetings with various people, talking to legislative folks, talking to communications folks, taking them in to see the President, letting people know that if they go through the Chief of Staff they have more access not less; they have more power not less; they have more prestige not less. If you ever get the idea you have less, you’ll find other ways to do it; you’ll circumvent them. Everybody in the White House is an egocentric, power-hungry kind of person. You wouldn’t be there if you weren’t.”⁴⁹

Consensus was a key ingredient to the manner in which Robert Rubin worked when he was in the White House and in the Treasury Department as well. **David Dreyer**, who observed him at close range, commented on the three elements of Rubin’s style: “One was that he spoke with great authority. Two [was] he was a fabulous listener and, three, he believed in consensus.... Rubin was independently respected for his achievements in the private sector. He was a great listener and believed, certainly at Treasury when I observed him most closely and at the White House when I often observed him, that everybody—I mean everybody—had some kind of a contribution to make. So, for example, when we worked together at Treasury, he’d have people from the scheduling office in policy meetings. One of them every once in a while would say something that may not have had value in and of itself but which triggered a thought or an impulse on Rubin’s part that he didn’t get from anybody else. So he was eager to have people—junior, senior; related, unrelated—in the meetings and got the most out of whoever was there. Third, once he had a policy and he had heard everyone and a decision was made, it was imposed and implemented in such a way that people didn’t feel they had been rolled over. So in the course of executing a policy, there weren’t a lot of people on background trying to establish their independent judgment with the generalists saying if only Rubin had listened it would have gone better.”

White House Staff Size and Office Configuration: Similar Patterns Among Administrations

The similarities in the organization of White House staff are found with greater frequency than are the differences between administrations. The functions performed by staff remain pretty much the same, the numbers of people on the staff and the supplementary help also is fairly constant, the turnover of staff, and the structure of offices is relatively stable.

In the last 30 years the White House staff has ebbed and flowed but one can expect to be working with a total size of around 600. In large measure the differences are more ones in how “staff” is calculated than it is a matter of how many people are sitting in offices in the West Wing and in the Old Executive Office Building. **John Rogers**, who headed the Office of Management and Administration in the Reagan White House, made the point. “I had a number that I thought was necessary, no matter what Administration. About 600 people are needed for a modern White House

⁴⁹ Marlin Fitzwater interview.

staff. Even if you went back to the Reagan Administration, I think we had 361 on the White House payroll, as I recall. Another 400 were somewhere else. Sometimes the number is disguised within details, etc., but 600 turns out to be the average.”⁵⁰

While this figure has not been a particularly troublesome one for Republicans who rarely make promises to cut the staff, Democrats have had difficulty reconciling their White House staff needs with the promises they made prior to coming into the White House to cut the staff by 25%. Presidents Carter and Clinton both made such a promise. In order to meet their promises, the presidents made heavy use of interns, volunteers, and detailees from governmental institutions. In the Press Office, for example, on any day in the Lower Press Office where there are six staff members on the payroll, their numbers are supplemented by three interns who are present to relieve them on tasks, such as answering the phones and directing calls. Volunteers work in offices throughout the White House on tasks where they have specific knowledge or skill. The Presidential Correspondence and Messages unit is staffed almost entirely by volunteers, who are typically retirees, as well as interns who are rotated in during the year in three waves corresponding to the semesters and summer terms.

In addition to volunteers for seasonal tasks such as helping to handle the crowd of youngsters at Easter and the decorating of the White House at Christmas, some work on operations within offices. The Office of Presidential Personnel is the spot traditionally relying most heavily on volunteers, most especially at the beginning of an administration when the personnel load is the heaviest. **Bob Nash** discussed the use of volunteers as the Clinton personnel staff moved from the transition operation into the White House. He said: “There were 220 people total. That included Dick Riley. We got up to about 220 probably around—at least by December 1 I believe we had that many. Most of those people stayed until January 20. On January 20, a little over 100 people came here. Most of those were volunteers. The headhunters came here.”⁵¹ In addition, there were lawyers who volunteered their time to aid in the process of vetting the names of nominees. Once a sufficient number of names has been generated and the personnel process has settled into a rhythm of a normal staffing operation, volunteers are used for tasks such as the computer operation.

While the number of staff have hovered at the 600 number, there has been a growth in the number of commissioned staff members and in the degree of specificity of the titles staff have. In the Chief of Staff’s operation, for example, Hamilton Jordan carried the title Assistant to the President when he operated as Chief of Staff. Today Chief of Staff John Podesta carries the title and his major assistant carry titles such as Counselor to the Chief of Staff, Deputy Chief of Staff for Operations. A President can expect staff members to stay an average of around 18 months with senior staff remaining around two years.

In the seven offices in our study, there are three that have had the same basic structure over the past four administrations: the Press Office, Personnel, and Counsel. The offices that have been fairly fluid in terms of structure and personnel are the Chief of Staff, Staff Secretary, Communications, Management and Administration. What ties the three offices that have had a consistent structure is the permanence of the tasks and constituencies they deal with. Their numbers have changed over the years, some units have been added in each, and staff titles have grown, but the offices perform similar functions in each administration. They serve the needs of the press corps following the President, staff up an administration, and vet nominees as well as handle legal issues coming into a White House. The

⁵⁰ White House Interview Program, Interview with John Rogers, Martha Joynt Kumar, New York, New York, November 10, 1999.

⁵¹ White House Interview Program, Interview with Bob Nash, Martha Joynt Kumar and Terry Sullivan, Washington, D.C., September 1, 2000.

structure of the offices of Chief of Staff, Staff Secretary, Communications, and Management and Administration depend upon, first, the choice of the President in selecting a Chief and then he in turn generally chooses those heading the other three offices. More than is so with the first three offices, these three vary substantially in their structure from the time of the Reagan White House to the Clinton one. Each of the offices has existed during most of the last fifteen years but sometimes not as an independent office.

DECISIONS AND ROUTINES

Establishing Routines

A well run White House depends upon an established process of routines relating to the flow of information and the way decisions are made. **Roger Porter**, who worked in four of the last six administrations observed: “There needs to be established a set of routines that people understand and are comfortable with that allow a whole series of tasks to be performed without an enormous amount of stress and hardship. Once those routines get established and they are made efficient then they help the whole flow of the place.”⁵² He commented that: “in the absence of those routines getting established then you have an enormous number of fire drills where something comes up and you discover that we’re behind and we have to catch up, we have to do things in hurry and then you pull every one off. You feel like you’re in an organization that is staggering from one deadline to another.” If you can get your routines in place then you can devote time and energy to the substance of problems. **Porter** said: “The less efficient routines that have gotten established then the more you’re going to be doing these fire drills that are very draining and very exhausting. When you come to the end of a fire drill, you’re sort of tired and you say I wish we had one more day because we got 90 per cent of the way there but we didn’t get 100 per cent of the way there.” When you have operations routinized, problems are flagged earlier and everything works more smoothly.

There are limitations to the degree to which routines and order can be imposed on the staff. As one who worked in the White House for 12 years under seven chiefs of staff, **Marlin Fitzwater** described what happens when a Chief of Staff institutes a system of line management. “Occasionally you’ll find a Chief of Staff who tries to set up a line staff management relationship that says so-and-so reports to the assistant for policy and the assistant for policy reports to the domestic czar; the domestic czar reports to the Chief of Staff and so forth,” he said.⁵³ “They always fail because people won’t obey the lines of authority. First of all, they are not there to make a career of it. They are there for a year or two. They are there for their own thing and, again, everybody’s looking to the President. So people just tear that apart. You can see it happening as sure as anything.” Establishing order is attractive as a concept but difficult to develop and maintain.

Implementation of Decisions

One recurring soft spot in White House operations is consistent follow through on decisions already reached. Former Clinton Chief of Staff **Mack McLarty** said that in his discussions with those who previously served in the position, a recurring theme of their conversations was the importance of implementation of decisions. There was “a pretty good theme of follow-through and execution

⁵² White House Interview Program, Interview with Roger Porter, Martha Joynt Kumar, Cambridge, MA., October 22, 1999.

⁵³ Marlin Fitzwater interview.

with the cabinet, not just to get certain policies decided on but to get them implemented; that they felt there was a weakness of actually getting things implemented and executed,” he said.⁵⁴ In the Clinton White House, however one person familiar with the decision making process noted that the implementation of decisions was a secondary concern. “That was something that we focused on early on but we didn’t end up doing too much of that. That tended to be more honor system,” he commented.⁵⁵ “In other words, if the President would send something back, he would send some document back and there’d be a question on it—Bruce Reed, what about blank—it would more be the case that we would depend on Bruce Reed sending an answer back than that we would be calling Bruce and saying what about that. I don’t think that there was particularly a conceptual or a principal reason for that as much as it was just a time thing.” What they did deliver “were a lot of information memos, not a lot in percentage terms but there were a lot of information memos that we would get in a given period of time or a week that would be in response to things that the President had asked. Occasionally he would ask about something—Bob Rubin or Gene Sperling or somebody would see him in some other meeting and give him an answer orally.” They did not set up a system for formally tracking decisions. “ We thought about trying to do a real serious tracking system and we just ended up thinking that the cost-benefit analysis part of it didn’t warrant it; there were undoubtedly some things that slipped through the cracks but not important enough to kind of do this whole time-intensive thing. Again, there was a period there where we kind of tried to do a little of that but we ended up not really following it through very actively.”

Handling Crises

There is a common approach to handling crises whether the administration is Democratic or Republican and the crisis domestic or foreign policy.. The Chief of Staff has the role of managing the team and making certain a group is tasked with dealing with a crisis allowing the remainder of the White House staff to handle their tasks. **Leon Panetta** observed: “The role of a Chief of Staff is not so much a management position as a battlefield position in that you have a certain mission that you want to accomplish for the day with the President that’s laid out for that day. In the process of trying to do that mission you suddenly will find yourself under fire with mortar shells, artillery shells coming in on all kinds of crises. What can happen is the troops can panic because of those kinds of events taking place and you lose sight of the larger mission that you have to accomplish. So what you have to do is you have to have the discipline to be able to handle that kind of incoming fire and yet make sure the troops keep their eye on the mission and keep.... So to do that, if a crisis is hitting and something breaks, normally what I would do is set up almost a kind of crisis task force team immediately on that issue so that I could say to the rest of the staff you do your thing; we’ve got control of this.”⁵⁶ He continued: “What you want to do is make sure that that’s pulled out of the normal operation so that there is a separate kind of focus on that. So you can basically say that crisis is being handled, these are people that are involved with it and it doesn’t tie up the rest of the operation.”

Watergate made governing difficult as the attention of the senior staff and the Cabinet officers as well was directed towards dealing with the crisis. Since so much of the time of the principals was consumed by Watergate related issues, Chief of Staff **Alexander Haig** had a system that relied heavily

⁵⁴ White House Interview Program, Interview with Thomas McLarty, Martha Joynt Kumar, Washington, D.C., November 16, 1999.

⁵⁵ Background interview.

⁵⁶ Leon Panetta interview.

on the deputies to move the operations of government. He said: “Every day the staff went over the business of the country and the designated Cabinet members joined us on Monday, Wednesday, and Friday. A good part of those meetings was consumed with just handling the ongoing public relations crisis. It doesn’t take long to realize that the principals walked out of these meetings and into the maelstrom and by the end of the day hadn’t done what the President wanted done. So I put a substructure together of the principals’ key assistants, their deputies, or their hand-picked agents. My deputy in turn ran that meeting for me. He would sit in on the earlier principals’ meeting, make notes on everything that was decided on, and then meet with the subgroup who in turn would and could spend all day getting the decisions implemented. That modified system began to work very well. I would pursue such a system today, Watergate or no Watergate crisis. It was both efficient and built better teamwork.⁵⁷

During crises, the Chief of Staff sometimes puts in place a group of people he can contact who will offer him feedback on the issues related to the crisis. In addition to his deputies on whom he relied for their attention to the details of running the government, **Alexander Haig** had a group of lawyers from outside of Washington with whom he discussed the Watergate situation. He said: “because of my set of problems during Watergate, I had legal people, constitutional lawyers, experienced political lawyers, criminal lawyers, all kinds. That included men like Maurice Liebman from Chicago. He was a lovely, wonderful man although he was a Democrat at heart. I also brought in a professor from Duke University and a professor from Chicago; a judge from Chicago.” They came in and provided him with an outside perspective, something presidents do as well.

A COMPLEX WEB OF INTERRELATIONSHIPS

A good clue to the complicated interrelationships surrounding a White House can be found in something so simple as the arrangements for washing the windows. **Chris Hicks**, who headed the Office of Management and Administration noted: “if you paint that colonnade along the Rose Garden, where the press room is on the other side, GSA [General Service Administration] is responsible for painting to the glass doors that go in to the mansion and washing the windows on those doors, the French doors. But the residence staff is responsible on the other side of the glass. It’s the same pane of glass.”⁵⁸ The White House occupies eighteen acres and has several agencies and departments in charge of operations found there. The Department of Interior is involved in the building because the Residence is a national park, President’s Park, maintained by the National Park Service. The General Service Administration maintains the property, including making repairs to the West and East wings, which are not part of President’s Park. The Navy operates the White House mess as well as Camp David, the Secret Service establishes and maintains security for the President and the grounds, the White House Communications Agency – the old Army Signal Corps – provides sound for presidential events and sometimes film as well. The residence staff, some on detail from the Interior Department, maintain the house itself and perform the duties incidental to running the White House as a home.

The operations of the White House are carried out by an infrastructure of people who have little visibility yet they are crucial to making the operations work. Often their work must be done on an emergency basis and under less than ideal conditions. When President Bush and Margaret Thatcher were speaking in Aspen, Colorado on the occasion of the anniversary of the Aspen Institute, Saddam

⁵⁷ White House Interview Program, Interview with Alexander Haig, Martha Joynt Kumar, Washington, D.C., December 22, 1999.

⁵⁸ White House Interview Program, Interview with Christopher Hicks, Martha Joynt Kumar, Washington, D.C., November 18, 1999.

Hussein invaded Kuwait. “So we have two heads of state, both of whom need to be communicating with their respective governments and other heads of state and we’re managing it out of a Winnebago parked halfway up a mountaintop,” commented Bonnie Newman who served as director of the Office of Management and Administration.⁵⁹ “You’ve got people actually holding hand-held transmitters to keep that signal going. That’s what folks don’t appreciate, a lot of that background stuff, and that it’s apt to be a nineteen-year-old private in the army who is operating the TelePrompTer from the basement of some hotel while a President is making a very significant speech.”

The web of relationships in a White House most often predate the incumbents and are impervious to the efforts of the temporary inhabitants to get control of their operations. **Hicks** described the origins of the Signal Corps entry into the White House. “I never got control of the military office or the Signal phone system. That started during the [Franklin] Roosevelt Administration. Talk about detailees. During World War II it was decided they needed to be able to have President Roosevelt get in touch with Winston Churchill anytime he wanted so the Defense Department detailed over these people from the Army Signal Corps and they’ve stayed ever since.”⁶⁰

Relations with the Congress

Whether they are Chiefs of Staff or directors of Personnel, or heads of the Office of Legislative Affairs, senior White House staff spend a great deal of time managing the President’s relations with members of Congress and handling with them issues important to the Chief Executive. It is a central aspect of the lives of all three of those occupying the above posts. **Kenneth Duberstein**, who worked in the Legislative Affairs unit, explained the manner in which in the area of appointments the Chief of Staff, Legislative Affairs and Personnel come together to work with people on the Hill.⁶¹

That requires a close coordination between personnel and the congressional relations staff. We certainly had it at the beginning of the administration and at the end of the Reagan Administration with Bob Tuttle. One of the legislative affairs people on the Senate side sat in on all final personnel meetings. As personnel decisions went to the President, they were reviewed first by the Chief of Staff and then by the President but sitting in the room as the personnel head made his pitch to the President was the Chief of Staff. The other person who had been consulted in advance was the head of congressional relations. That’s the way I think it should work. The personnel office [head] obviously has done his or her personal checks with the political affairs office but the congressional relations person has to take the lead on the Hill.

The object of passing names by people on the Hill is to discover political problems you might otherwise not discover though you will wish you did. **Duberstein** continued:

It would have to go to the Hill and say, “Here are the people we are thinking about. I don’t know if you know any of these folks. Do you have any sense of them? This is not a final decision that’s going to the President. Here are the three candidates; here is the short list.” They may say he is terrific or she is wonderful or I never heard of this one. “Well, that person is close to ex-senator—it’s not from your state, it’s from another state. That’s where the recommendation came from. Oh. I’ll check it out.” That’s what you’re looking for. You’re looking for pitfalls. You’re not looking for a veto; you’re looking for pitfalls. You’re looking to say, “Oh. There may be a problem here,” separate and apart from the FBI stuff. Political problems; political vetting. You’re saving the President problems because if in fact he

⁵⁹ White House Interview Program, Interview with Bonnie J. Newman, Martha Joynt Kumar, Washington, D.C., January 26, 2000.

⁶⁰ Christopher Hicks interview, November 18, 1999.

⁶¹ White House Interview Program, Interview with Kenneth Duberstein, Martha Joynt Kumar, Washington, D.C., August 12, 1999.

goes forward with an intent to nominate and a nomination and then it blows up, you are spending chips that you're going to need elsewhere.

Chase Untermeyer, who headed the Personnel office in the Bush Administration, went to the Hill when he was asked to do so or when he explained policy. “If summoned would clearly be that occasion by a senator who was upset, wanted to know why you weren’t naming somebody he wanted named or more people from his state. So my job was to sit there and listen,” **Untermeyer** said.⁶² “And I remember I had several good meetings with Senator [Claiborne] Pell who at the time was the chairman of the Foreign Relations Committee on ambassadorships since that is always very sensitive and to let him know what the administration was planning to do on ambassadorships.”

Chief of Staff **James Baker** discussed the importance for the Chief of Staff going up to the Hill to discuss matters important to members of Congress. He stressed the importance for White House staff to remember their position as staff, most especially in relation to those serving in elected political office. He said: “But I went up there. Occasionally I would see some members of Congress in my office. Sometimes they would come down. But it’s a hell of a lot better for you to go to them. They’re committee chairmen. You’re just a staff person. You’re really powerful, but every bit of that power is derivative from the President. The minute you forget that you get in trouble,” Baker commented.⁶³

Relations with the Hill are shaped by the President himself, particularly those Chief Executives who are interested in establishing good personal relationships with members. **Leon Panetta** discussed his view of presidents from his vantage point as chairman of the Budget Committee. “The other thing is Reagan also had a tremendous relationship with the American people and his ability to use the bully pulpit. So he could bring an awful lot of pressure down on you by going directly to the public, probably more so than almost anybody I’ve seen even including Clinton,” he commented.⁶⁴ “The ability to generate in the public—suddenly the willingness to call a member of Congress or do something as a result of the speech. We’d always wait and see kind of that onslaught coming. So a combination of his personality plus his kind of relationship with the American people was very powerful.” Thus, for Reagan, his relationship with members of Congress was personal both in terms of his work and that of his staff in their relations with individuals on the Hill and it was institutional as well as with a political and communications machine capable of creating pressure on both House members and Senators in an effort to spur them into particular actions.

Relations with the Cabinet

Cabinet relations are not simple ones for anyone, the President included. **President Ford** indicated he at first thought he would have open access to Cabinet members but soon he found that was not a realistic policy. He needed a filter to protect himself. “I started out with the concept that any cabinet member or top executive in the administration could have direct access to me. In effect, that undercut the role of the Chief of Staff,” he said. “I shortly found out that was impractical. A President doesn’t have that much time every day to meet with the various cabinet officers and other top people. You’ve got to have the Chief of Staff as sort of a filtering spot. I changed the policy, I guess it was, within two months.” A President must be careful, though, that when he has the Chief of Staff as the filter, the Chief does so as an “honest broker” representing the articulated views of the Cabinet secretaries and not his own view.

⁶² White House Interview Program, Interview with Chase Untermeyer, Martha Joynt Kumar, Houston, TX., July 6, 1999.

⁶³ James A. Baker, III interview.

⁶⁴ Leon Panetta interview.

Often the relations between the Chief of Staff and the Cabinet secretaries involve discipline or stroking. One person who watched the operations of several Cabinet secretaries in their relations with the White House observed: “And it’s usually either over significant policy or it might be discipline. ‘Okay, you’re a loose cannon out there; come in to my office, shut the door and we’ll argue about it. We want you toeing the line on this thing or whatever,’” the person commented.⁶⁵ He then continued. “Jack Kemp was probably the best example....It was when he would make utterances about economic policy. Come on; you’re job is HUD. Stay focused on HUD. Don’t talk about Latvia and Estonia. Or don’t criticize us.” The Cabinet hear from others on the White House staff in addition to the Chief of Staff.

Now during the Reagan Administration it was more Mike Deaver disciplining the cabinet—stay on message; stay on message; stay on message—I understand that you met with the press the other day and you did not talk about our tax cut plan. Every time you talk to the press talk about our tax cut plan. I don’t care what else you’re talking about.” So there was discipline and I think that comes from the Chief of Staff. The other thing a Chief of Staff should do is be sensitive to when a cabinet member feels abused because inevitably that will get to the President. So you want to try to address it so the President doesn’t have to. Or tell the President that so and so feels unloved today or something like that and the President will pick up the phone and call the cabinet member and then they feel loved.

Relationships with the First Lady and the Vice President

For many working in a contemporary White House, there are several individuals and groups involved in the work you are doing. In recent White Houses, the staff members thought through their relationships with the First Lady as well as the Vice-President. **Leon Panetta** discussed the importance of having the support of all three people when you come into a White House. “I think it’s absolutely essential in a job like Chief of Staff you have to have the full support and confidence of the President, even beyond that the respect and confidence of the first lady and the Vice President because you need to have the ability to make some very tough decisions and some crucial decisions. If you’re worried that every step you take you’re going to be undercut by those above you because they don’t trust your judgment then you’re in trouble,” he said.⁶⁶ “The first and foremost quality that is essential is trust. You’ve got to have their trust....when I went in as Chief of Staff I went in and said to the President, I have to have your full support because there are some decisions that have to be made and I need to make sure that I have your full support and trust in that process. I said the same thing to the First Lady as well as the Vice President.” **Don Baer**, who served as the head of the Office of Strategic Planning and Communications, had to think through the needs of the President and then those of the offices of the First Lady, the Vice President, and Cabinet officers. In discussing the pressures associated with his office and position, he observed: “You have to make sure you’re managing the relationships with the First Lady and her operation and the Vice President and his operation or cabinet secretaries who want to or interest groups. It’s a lot [of pressure],” observed **Don Baer** of the operations of the Office of Strategic Planning and Communications.⁶⁷

Those are relationships that can harm a staff member more than they can help them. Many of the staff members interviewed in talking about why a particular staff member left, remarked the person “got crossways with the First Lady.” That was a theme that came up with people in the Reagan White House and it arose in the Clinton White House in terms of the First Lady being involved in hiring staff members. Senior staff members were interviewed by Hillary Clinton as well as by President

⁶⁵ Background interview.

⁶⁶ Leon Panetta interview.

⁶⁷ White House Interview Program, Interview with Don Baer, Martha Joynt Kumar, Washington, D.C., July 22, 1999.

Clinton when they came to work at the White House. For Panetta and others, the interview was an opportunity to make certain what their relationships would be and to bring on board the First Lady and Vice-President as well as the President.

Outsiders as Sounding Boards

In addition to Alexander Haig who used a sounding board of outsiders during Watergate, there are those in the White House who confer regularly with a group of people who do not work in the government. **Tom Griscom**, Director of Communications in the Reagan White House when Howard Baker was Chief of Staff, commented on the group of people he assembled. “One of the things I did was have an informal group that I would talk to every week just to make sure you don’t lose perspective,” he commented.

I never put the whole group together. A lot of times, because of the press of business, they were telephone conversations. Sometimes you could sneak away for a little bit during lunch and catch up. But they were not formal sessions; they were more informal, give-and-take. They worked because it was all kept private. This was not trying to say, ‘Look who I can talk to,’ or somebody on the outside saying, ‘Well, they’re asking my advice.’ I think that was important. It was really designed to understand what we’re doing right; what we’re doing wrong. That’s how they always started. The first piece of advice most of them gave—and they were right—is you will come in there with your breath taken away when you look at the magnitude of what you have to deal with. And you come in from the outside and you’re not tainted by the White House, but within a short period of time you’ll get consumed. What you’ll find is that your ability to carve out any time to think and look ahead will go away. Sure enough, that’s what happened. You get so consumed by the day-to-day management that you stop and want to know where you are, how you are doing and what you are missing.⁶⁸

While others commended the efforts made by White House staff to get a view from outside of the building, few were able to do so. Very few people found they had time to step back and assess where they were or look backward at what they had done and how they could improve their operation. Occasionally White House staff will have a retreat of some sort where they assess their operations, as the Press Office staff did during the Ford Administration, but such meetings do not take place on a regular basis. In the Clinton White House there were assessments of particular events and how a week went in terms of its being a good or a bad one for the administration, but presidents and their staffs do not seem able to find time to assess their operations, only the outcomes from them.

THE PRESSURES ASSOCIATED WITH WHITE HOUSE WORK LIFE

“When they come to the White House there’s no forty-hour week and they shouldn’t expect it,” said **President Gerald Ford**.⁶⁹ “It has to be almost a twenty-four-hour-a-day job for both the President and the staff.” The White House is a place where the work load is heavy, the hours long, the pressures great, and the benefits many fold. As hard as people say the work is, few would trade the time they spent working in the White House nor is there a shortage of people wanting to work there. **Donald Rumsfeld** expressed the view of many that their service involved dual aspects. He related his experience:

⁶⁸ White House Interview Program, Interview with Thomas Griscom, Martha Joynt Kumar, Washington, D.C., July 19, 1999.

⁶⁹ President Ford interview.

in the White House you are very much at the center of things. There is an amazing flow of information. It is stimulating, because there's so much pressure. In my case, it was working with just a truly wonderful human being; a fine, decent, honorable, good person. The disadvantages for me— and I don't know that it's universal—is that some people like being an assistant and others don't. The disadvantage for me was that I had run large organizations and then I found myself back as an assistant. And I knew, as anyone in that job ought to know, that no one really cares what you think. What they really want to know when they ask you a question is *what the President thinks*. Therefore you constantly have to answer, respond and behave in a way that reflects what you believe to be the President's thinking and the President's best interest. That causes a change in how you handle yourself. You're not as natural. You're not as responsive. You're not as open, because you're trying to do it in a way that serves him and his presidency. That is a very different kind of a job than *running* something yourself. So it has those pluses and those minuses.⁷⁰

WORKING IN A WHITE HOUSE

The pressures relate to the volume and variety of the work, the heavy commitment of hours and days, the generous amount of criticism directed towards the President and individual White House staff members, and the narrow margin of error allowed to those working for the President. Though less numerous than the pressures, the benefits are an important component of White House work life. They revolve around the importance of and respect accorded to White House work as well as having a part in history as it is made.

Working in a White House has clear rewards, most especially because it is interesting and important work. "It's exciting," said **Abner Mikva**. "You're at the point of some very important decisions. Whether you're making them or not, you're involved in the decisional process. You're dealing with interesting people, interesting situations. There just was not a single boring moment that I had."⁷¹ Satisfaction comes with the work and with one's place in history as well. **James Fetig**, who served as the liaison to the Press Office for the National Security Council, commented: "The benefit as a citizen is to understand the glory of this republic and how it works, to have a chance to serve the American people and serve the Constitution and the highest office of the land first-hand, personally; to be there, to be part of history; to stand in places where history has been made. It's a very uplifting and motivating thing to do. When you walk through the gate of the White House every morning, you have no question of why you're at work. Getting motivated to go to work at the White House was never an issue, never a problem whatsoever. It was a delight to do no matter how frustrating it could be day by day, hour by hour."

The importance the White House experience takes on in the lives of those who worked there can be seen in the positive views of the experience held by two men who for very different reasons had some bad memories associated with their White House tenure and the years afterwards. Yet both H.R. Haldeman and Michael Deaver in retrospect would not have turned down the opportunity. Michael Deaver spoke about the conversation he had with former Nixon White House Chief of Staff H.R. Haldeman following Ronald Reagan's election as President. As Deaver related it, Haldeman encouraged him to go to Washington with Reagan by pointing out: "You've got to go back. There have only been forty men [presidents] and each one of those men had a guy like you and so there's only forty people like that," Haldeman told Deaver.⁷² I said, 'You mean to tell me after going to

⁷⁰ Donald Rumsfeld interview.

⁷¹ White House Interview Program, Interview with Abner Mikva, Martha Joynt Kumar and Terry Sullivan, Chicago, IL, April 26, 2000.

⁷² Michael Deaver interview.

federal prison and public humiliation that you would go do this again?’ He said, “In a heartbeat.” When Deaver went to see Haldeman several years later, Haldeman took him into his office behind his house. “We walked in to this place and that’s all it was. It was every cartoon that had been drawn about him. Every photograph of him with everybody in the world. We sat down and he said, “We have wonderful memories, don’t we?” I said, ‘Yes.’ In Deaver’s case, he too has memories of his White House days in his office. “If you look in this office, I do have that picture over there of the five presidents. That’s the only thing I’ve got because I love that picture, the way the light shines.”⁷³

Many former White House staff find work related benefits follow them once they leave the White House. Michael Deaver explained the package of benefits, including the impact on his post White House work experience. “I got a lot of stuff out of it. I got exactly what Bob Haldeman said. There were only forty people that were close to a president like I was. Some of them didn’t even have a guy like me,” he said.⁷⁴ “So that was an incredible opportunity. I learned a lot about how the whole system works and so it’s given me a different caliber in the business I was in; calibrated me up to a different level. And I love my life and I love what I do.” Once people learn how the system works during their White House years, they have many opportunities to stay in Washington and work on issues related to the government operations they became familiar with during their tenure there. Wherever they go, those who served in a White House take with them the experience of working in an environment where they were constantly under multiple and intense pressures related to their assignments there. Pete Roussel explained the benefits. “I remember during the economic summit here [Houston] one day we were walking to a meeting and somebody in the car—they had all the major CEO’s gathered for a meeting—“Pete, you’ve got to go in to this meeting and brief the CEO’s about this economic summit. Aren’t you nervous?” I said, ‘Are you kidding? This is fun. This is a day at the beach compared to what I’ve been through,’” he explained.⁷⁵ “It disciplined me mentally and I guess emotionally too in ways that no other experience, none, in life, I don’t think, could possibly do. So it was a great value to me in that way and I commend it to anybody else that does it for that reason.”

Pete Roussel discussed his first day on the job as a Deputy Press Secretary, which gives life to the assertion that one witnessed history at close quarters and then also the pressure that comes with such a position. He was called in to see Chief of Staff James Baker who told him he was to get on a plane for Phoenix, Arizona. Roussel related that Baker told him:

Tomorrow morning at ten a.m. the President is going to walk into the briefing room here and announce the appointment of a woman named Sandra Day O’Connor to the United States Supreme Court, a historic appointment; the first female justice,” he said. ‘I just hung up with her. She’s going to be swamped with press when this gets out. I’ve told her you’re on the way; you’ll handle it.’ At that point I had two thoughts: basically the first one was, ‘hey pal, your first day here and you’ve been handed an assignment that will never happen again; you’d been given a front row on history in a sense.’ The second thought I had was a much less positive one and it was emphasized to me by Baker as I was walking out the door and—this goes to the whole issue of working with the press in the White House—what he basically said was in essence, these weren’t his exact words, ‘Right now only a handful of people know about this. You can count them on your hands. So if this gets out before ten a.m. tomorrow morning, good luck.’ Not a real reassuring thought at that point knowing that such things can happen.⁷⁶

⁷³ Michael Deaver interview.

⁷⁴ Michael Deaver interview.

⁷⁵ White House Interview Program, Interview with Peter Roussel, Martha Joynt Kumar and Terry Sullivan, Houston, TX., November 3, 1999.

⁷⁶ Pete Roussel interview.

There is pressure that comes with knowing the information should not come out and that you will be held responsible if it does.

People work in a White House at the senior level rarely serve out a full four year term with the President working in the same job. They either leave or they shift from one position to another as happened in the current administration with Robert Rubin, George Stephanopoulos, Bruce Lindsey, Gene Sperling, Leon Panetta, Bruce Reed, Rahm Emanuel, and Sylvia Matthews. In fact, Matthews, Sperling, Lindsey, and Reed are still in the Clinton White House, though no one is in the same position he or she held in January 1993. Most who work in a White House expect to work two years and then leave for another post outside of the building. Though the benefits of working there are many, the pressures are indeed great and the toll service in a White House takes is heavy in terms of one's time, energy, and family and personal life.

Constantly on the Job

White House working hours are long no matter what the administration nor the office one works in. **Alexander Haig** described the heavy commitment of time he made when he worked in the White House as Chief of Staff. "I usually was in by seven and I never went home before midnight seven days a week. I did that for two years," he said.⁷⁷ In addition to his two years observing that schedule when he served as Chief of Staff, Haig followed the same schedule earlier for his four years serving as the deputy to National Security Adviser Henry Kissinger. In fact, **Haig** commented, it was worse working for Kissinger:

because Henry used to have his ideas at night. He would call me at one, two o'clock in the morning, three o'clock in the morning and I had just gotten home. He didn't sleep but four hours a night. I didn't sleep but three hours a night. And I did that for seven years. That's the kind of job it is and that's why you have to change. People do get burnout.

While few worked the hours Alexander Haig observed, a normal White House day involves little time for oneself or one's family. **Marlin Fitzwater** discussed the demands of a day and observed that you really have only about two hours to yourself when you work at the White House. He said:

You usually leave about 7:30 or 8:00. This is the worst part. You get home at 9:00—it takes an hour to get home—have a drink and you realize that you have to be in bed by 11:00 in order to have enough sleep to deal with the next day. So basically your entire private life is boiled down to between 9:00 and 11:00. That's tough to take. That's the part that people can't understand. People ask, what's it like to work in the White House? How many hours do you work? But the idea that there's really only two hours a day where you can deal with yourself or your family, that's the tough part.⁷⁸

The constant pressure to be at the White House means people have little time to spend with their families. **Ron Nessen** discussed the lack of time he had with his child. "I left home at 6:30, as I said, and I, usually because I had this thing about returning phone calls, got home at 9:30 or 10:00 or later if there was something going on. My son was eighteen months old then. I never saw him. Sometimes I'd wake him up at 11:00 to play with him because that was the only time I'd see him."⁷⁹ **Phillip Brady** talked about the illusion for young children their father is not around. "One night I put my oldest son to bed," he said. "It was on a Sunday night. I put him to bed and he said without any sense of sarcasm, 'See you next week, Dad.' I was home all that next week; it was just that I'd leave before

⁷⁷ Alexander Haig interview.

⁷⁸ Marlin Fitzwater interview.

⁷⁹ White House Interview Program, Interview with Ron Nessen, Martha Joynt Kumar, Washington, D.C., August 3, 1999.

he got up and I got home after he went to bed. So the only time I could possibly see him was on the weekend when we weren't traveling."⁸⁰

Physical Stress

White House work has a physical dimension to it. **James Fetig**, who was the press officer for the National Security Council working with the Press Office, discussed the physical difficulties inherent in working in a White House. "The most difficult thing that anybody ought to know when they come in is going to be physical," he said. "It's the lack of sleep. The phone rings most nights and you almost never have a night of uninterrupted sleep. You start averaging four to five hours of sleep and the rest of the time you're at work."⁸¹

Margita White, who headed the Office of Communications, provides us with an example of the physical toll of White House work. It involved an offer, which she accepted, to take a position on the Federal Communications Commission.

I came back on *Air Force One* three-thirty in the morning—I had been on *Air Force One* or the press plane back and forth—from a six-state trip, regional briefings and what have you. I got home about three-thirty or four, went to bed, got up at six, knocked over a full pot of coffee on my leg, was taken in to the shower with cold water and then to the emergency room and I had second-degree burns all the way down my leg. As they peeled off the skin and I was in the emergency room, I had a phone call from Dick Whalley who was then the chairman of the FCC. He [Dick Whalley] said I just want Margita to know what I did. He talked to my ex-husband and he [Dick Whalley] had just found out that there was going to be a vacancy on the FCC and he had gone to the White House and said I want Margita White. When I came to, I learned about this. I thought, you know, I think I want to do that.⁸²

Recognizing Burnout

There is no optimum amount of time to spend working at the White House but burnout is a real factor. The difficulty with burnout is people rarely recognize it in themselves. Accompanying the burnout factor is what **Chase Untermeyer** dubs the "White House Narcotic." if a person is on the White House staff that at some point they should want to leave otherwise they run a couple of risks. One of which is White House burnout. The other is sort of the opposite, which you can call the White House narcotic, the sense that this is all too wonderful, I can't possibly leave it; I can't possibly leave being in a situation in which if you walk into the White House Mess you see famous people or various cabinet secretaries; or out on the lawn: "There are all these flags today. I wonder who's coming?" Or walking through the lobby of the West Wing: "What movie star will I see?" All of that is wonderful to the degree of telling stories at the Thanksgiving dinner table but from the point of view of really doing anything with your life I think it's of limited value."⁸³

People on their own rarely recognize they are reaching the point of burnout but when they do, the President should honor their request to leave. Most often in a White House, others have to recognize it for them. "If it's your job to oversee fifteen people, if you're the Chief of Staff or the deputy Chief of Staff, you can figure out pretty quickly—there's so much happening so quick. There's so much performance going on," said one person who worked in a senior level White House

⁸⁰ White House Interview Program, Interview with Phillip Brady, Martha Joynt Kumar, McLean, VA., August 17, 1999.

⁸¹ White House Interview Program, Interview with James Fetig, Martha Joynt Kumar, Rockville, MD., February 5, 1999.

⁸² White House Interview Program, Interview with Margita White, Martha Joynt Kumar, Washington, D.C., October 26, 1999.

⁸³ Chase Untermeyer interview.

position.⁸⁴ “It doesn’t take you long to evaluate it. It doesn’t mean somebody makes one mistake and they’re gone but you can pick it up pretty quickly. Attitude is a big thing; energy level, enthusiasm. And you have to differentiate between success and failure. The success/failure issue as opposed to the effectiveness/energy/enthusiasm issue. There are going to be successes and failures.” Those at the top have to be aware of the need to recognize burnout in others as well as in themselves.

GETTING IT RIGHT

Did you get it right? Is the President satisfied with what you did, if indeed your work rises to his level of attention. **Don Baer** described the pressure associated with getting it right. There is “a lot of pressure and stress on you about in the meantime how did the thing that you planned a week ago play today when the President went out and did it. How did it play in the press? Did all the pieces of it fit together and go the way you had planned? How did he feel about it because you don’t always have the time [to go over it] in specifics and even if you do he’s not going to remember most of them to tell him exactly what he’s doing and why he’s doing it and what his place in all this is; here’s what he’s going to say. What did he want to say? Did it come out the way he thought it would?” Those are all concerns associated with the job you are doing for the President.

Ann Lewis indicated that in addition to the physical strain of working the number of hours one does in a White House, there is an emotional strain that comes with the impact of your work. “The second is the emotional strain when everything you may say and do is enormously important, is watched so closely, and has potentially the impact that a White House statement does.”⁸⁵ **Jody Powell** discussed the pressure of getting things right. “There’s a tremendous amount of pressure to get things right, to not make a problem worse or create a new problem because you either got it wrong in terms of understanding it or you said it wrong. I didn’t find that particularly onerous but it is probably the biggest source of pressure, that you need to be careful. You have to be careful but you can’t be so careful that you’re not communicating either. So you’re balancing those two things.”⁸⁶

Hostile Political Climate

An added stress in the Clinton White House and was a factor of somewhat lesser importance in the Reagan and Bush White Houses was that associated with a plethora of lawsuits and their attendant subpoenas requiring people appear on the Hill and before grand juries. **Ann Lewis** indicated you need to add in these pressures when considering the stresses of White House work life. “You add to that being in, as we are, a hostile political climate in which the danger of lawsuits, special investigators, having your notes or papers sort of called in on any particular issue is ever present,” she said.⁸⁷ “I think the biggest impact is that it takes time away from positive things. You’re in a defensive mode much of the day. The things that it does, which I actually think are not bad, are that you remember to think all decisions through very carefully. You have a much more structured decisionmaking process than I think you would if you didn’t always think someone was looking over your shoulder or tomorrow you’ll get a subpoena on that or you’ll see it in the *Washington Post* or whatever.” At the same time the process of making decisions was improved, it was accompanied by a reluctance to take risks. “I think it slowed things down tremendously and made it more difficult and I think people were

⁸⁴ Background interview.

⁸⁵ Ann Lewis interview, July 7, 1999.

⁸⁶ White House Interview Program, Interview with Jody Powell, Washington, D.C., August 2, 2000.

⁸⁷ Ann Lewis interview, July 7, 1999.

a lot more cautious sometimes than they needed to be just because it was easier to do nothing because nothing could be criticized than it would be to take a risk and do something even if it wasn't that much of a risk."

Scrutiny

With litigation now so important a factor in White House work life, there has been something of a common understanding among staff that one limits the amount of notes one takes. "There a lot of times when somebody would literally take out a pen and start writing something and someone would say, 'What are you writing?' And people going, 'Oh. You're right,'" said **Jodie Torkelson**.⁸⁸

It wasn't—yes, I think everybody just knew that writing in this administration turned out to be deadly to people and nobody wanted to get subpoenaed. I had staff that got subpoenas because they took a phone message from David Watkins and they had David Watkins written down on one of those pads that make the little Xerox copy. When they did a subpoena for anything that had to do with David Watkins and travel office, whatever, they ended up having to be subpoenaed and they had to go and testify all because they wrote the guy's name down because he called about his health benefits. That's all it was. So it wasn't like it was irrational behavior; it was so silly the kinds of people that were getting dragged in to things for the dumbest of reasons that no one felt secure writing anything down. You just didn't. If you didn't want to have a legal bill, you didn't take a note.

Scrutiny of those working in a White House can be so severe even when you are saying nothing you are indicating an answer. **Ron Nessen** discussed the kind of scrutiny the words of a Press Secretary receive from the reporters listening in the briefing. "One time a reporter asked me about rumors that Bill Simon was going to resign as Secretary of the Treasury or he was going to be fired as Secretary of Treasury. And there was some discussion in the White House of whether he was going to stay or go. I knew about the discussion. The reporter said what about the rumors that Simon's going to be fired or something. I was trying to think how am I going to answer this; I don't want to lie about it. There is some talk but nothing's decided. So I just took a second to think about what I was going to say and the reporter starts scribbling down wildly because of this long pause, this long pause when I was thinking of what I was going to say. He interpreted that to mean something. There's a lot of scrutiny," he said." You have to be careful what you don't say or how quickly you say it."

No Margin Of Error

Ray Jenkins spoke of pressures in addition to the time one spends at the White House. He said: "It is a high-stress job but it is high stress not because of the long hours but because there is absolutely no margin for error whatsoever. Now you're going to make errors and then you spend the rest of your time correcting but you just have to remember that once a problem reaches the White House basically it has no solution. If it had a solution it would have been solved at some level lower down. It's so often a roll of the dice. Sometimes you roll seven and sometimes you roll eleven. The stress is not so much from the long hours—because the hours literally are twenty-four hours a day. It doesn't matter if you're at the White House or whether you're at home or in San Francisco or where. The stress arises from the burden of the job rather than the length of the hours."⁸⁹

Marlin Fitzwater provided an example of an instance when a minor error by an entry level staff member in the White House quickly turned into a presidential level decision on whether to fire her. A young woman mixed up the contents of two envelopes with presidential talking points ending up

⁸⁸ Jodie Torkelson interview.

⁸⁹ White House Interview Program, Interview with Ray Jenkins, Martha Joynt Kumar, Washington, D.C., July 8, 1999.

in an envelope marked for Sam Donaldson. “The talking points, unfortunately, were written by some legislative affairs person and it said, ‘Greetings. Hello, members of Congress. Glad to have you here today. (Hold up your hand or shake hands or something).’” Fitzwater said. “This is really written by some guy who has never met the President probably, some kid who is trying to be thorough so he puts in all the instructions which happens often when you’re writing briefing papers. Anyway, Sam got it, ran a story on the evening news about Ronald Reagan is so dumb he doesn’t even know enough to say hello and shake hands.” While an innocent mistake, it caused reverberations that were felt right up to the Oval Office. “Yet it was a mistake of such magnitude and ramifications, it was on national television; the basis for a story and the President of the United States thought she should be fired.” While the discussion between the President, the Chief of Staff Howard Baker, and Fitzwater resulted in the woman keeping her job, it is surprising to consider such an action rises to the presidential level and does so quickly. For Fitzwater, “it was always a great example of the risk you face and the small margin for error. That’s a lot of tension. If you think of a twenty-year-old kid taking a first or second job and having to live every day with the idea that if they happen to give somebody the wrong piece of paper their career is over.”⁹⁰

REDUCING THE SLOPE OF THE LEARNING CURVE

Those coming into the White House have strong forces lined up against them as they set about to create a smooth running operation. The people populating it come in at one time, they do not know one another, and they are required to make decisions of great magnitude from their first day on the job. In addition, there is scant written information on White House operations left behind by those who preceded them. Working in their favor, though, are the good will of the public and the Washington community and the benefits to be reaped from learning from those who preceded them. Most often on Inauguration Day there is a feeling of good will among the public and in the Washington community for those who begin their term in office and a willingness to give them time as they find their way. It is a period “where you want to wish the new guy well whether you voted for him or not, and you want to give him the benefit of the doubt initially,” commented James Cicconi about the early months of a President’s term.⁹¹ “So there is a period where there is almost a suspension of partisanship, a knowing suspension of it and where a sense of fair play enters in.” If an administration makes use of information relating to the start up and the operations of those administrations preceding them, a President and his team can make even greater use of their early days in the White House. As is true of any institution, the White House is an organization that has rhythms and routines associated with its operations that one can discern. Perhaps the most effective resource for those accompanying the Chief Executive as he enters office is the group of those who previously served in the White House. Not only are the previous occupants a source of a great of information on where one can find the gears and levers operating the institution, those who worked in the building are almost uniformly eager to help those who succeed them. It is up to the President and his staff to find them and then to make use of the information they possess.

⁹⁰ Marlin Fitzwater interview.

⁹¹ James Cicconi interview.