

PARTICIPANTS

Achieving a Successful Transition
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PHIL TRULUCK

Executive Vice President, The Heritage Foundation

Presenters

C. BOYDEN GRAY

Former Counsel to President George Bush

THE HONORABLE EDWIN MEESE III

Former Counsellor, President Ronald Reagan

THEODORE C. SORENSEN

Former Counsel to President John F. Kennedy

JACK VALENTI

Former Special Assistant to President Lyndon Johnson

JACK WATSON,

Former Chief of Staff to President Jimmy Carter

Commentators

JOHN BURKE

Professor of Politics, University of Vermont

MARTHA KUMAR

Professor of Political Science, Towson University

RICHARD E. NEUSTADT

Professor Emeritus, Harvard University

CHAPTER I: ACHIEVING A SUCCESSFUL TRANSITION

"If people are going to learn about their jobs, they need to do that early, because once you get into the White House, it's like drinking from a fire hose, and you don't have the time to read anything, to talk to people."

—Martha Kumar

From the time George Washington graciously made way for John Adams, the transfer of power from one American President to another has come to symbolize peaceful changes from one government to another. Be they smooth or tempestuous, transfers of power have showcased the best of American democracy to the world and demonstrated the virtues of self-government to people living under dictatorships.

In the post–World War II era, outgoing and incoming administrations have shown an increased awareness of this symbolism. Ever since the height of the Cold War, both sides have taken pains to show public signs of cooperation. After each election, the public has come to expect news accounts detailing who each side has placed in charge of its transition efforts and the obligatory “photo-op” of Presidents and Presidents-elect exchanging pleasantries.

Beyond the symbolism, the transition is a critical period for a President-elect. The decisions and public statements made during this period can have lasting effects on the new administration as Presidents-elect give form and substance to their administrations. Although the transition is said to begin immediately after the election, it actually begins before the election and runs well into the first year of a presidency. Thus, while most presidential campaigns deny that they have begun to plan for the transfer of power in the event they are successful, many have. In fact, more successful Presidents have begun planning for the transfer of power months before their election.



*Richard Neustadt, Jack Watson,
Ted Sorensen, and Ed Meese*

Where transitions were once informal ad hoc operations, today they are multi-million dollar ventures. For the past several years, Congress has provided money and space to incoming and outgoing transition teams and directed the U.S. General Services

Administration to finance transition teams. Presidents-elect have used some of these funds to pay for a staff, which consists primarily of veterans from the campaign waiting for new assignments in the new administration, and to assess the state of the enterprise they will be inheriting.

Theodore C. Sorensen, who participated in President-elect John F. Kennedy's transition, observed that modern day transitions have evolved into a "cottage industry." He questions whether these now-institutionalized mechanisms are actually necessary:

In the ten weeks they have as President-elect, new Presidents must decide questions ranging from personnel, to organization, to policy. Many of those need to be made quickly. Almost instantly after learning that he has been elected, the successful candidate must be ready to announce who they wish to direct the transition effort, who they will entrust to speak on their behalf throughout the process, and where he intends to spend most of his time prior to his election. Veterans of past transitions maintain that Washington is hardly the optimal place because of the intensive press scrutiny of their comings and goings and the importance of allowing the outgoing administration to continue to govern.

It is also during this period that Presidents must decide how they wish to organize the White House and which of their aides they wish to have working there. As argued in Chapter 2, most Presidents spend too much time selecting their Cabinet. Instead, Presidents should devote time to deciding who should serve in their inner circle and what qualifications are necessary for their close personal advisers.

Several hasty or ill-considered policy decisions made during a transition can have ramifications that affect the course of a presi-

dency for years. For example, the Bay of Pigs operation under Kennedy, Carter's ill-fated energy proposals, and Clinton's experiences with gays in the military and health care reform all had their origins in poorly planned or executed transitions.

PLANNING DURING THE CAMPAIGN

A candidate is usually loath to plan for his presidency during the campaign, both for fear of tempting Providence and, more immediately, for fear of leaks to the press. Yet staff involved in transitions over the past 40 years, as well as scholars of the presidency, are unanimous in urging candidates to plan early for the possibility that they might win. The transition is a unique and valuable period for the incoming team, says Towson University Professor of Political Science Martha Kumar, and, accordingly, it calls for serious and early planning:

Transitions do make a difference. There is a time period there that's different. There's a suspension of partisanship that exists that a new team can make use of. The difficulty is, it's a time when you have the greatest opportunity to do something but you have the least ability to make use of it, because you don't have the knowledge that you will have a couple of years into an administration.

But in order to take advantage of that suspension of partisanship and move early, what you have to do is plan early. And plan early is bringing together information on possible people who could come into an administration, what kind of process you're going to use to consider nominees, and to consider what kinds of policy initiatives you're going to have as well, and also what your priorities can be. In order to pull that together successfully, it has to be done early.

Jimmy Carter's transition process effectively began on May 11 of the election year, when senior campaign aide Jack Watson wrote a memo to Carter recommending that he establish a small, confidential group:

It was a memorandum that basically said, "Mr. President, unlike so many of the Presidents who have come into the White House, certainly in this century, you have had no federal government experience, save that in the United States Navy. You don't have a Washington network. You are the governor"—or former governor at that time—"of a southern state. You've not been a national figure before you entered the presidential primaries in New Hampshire and Iowa caucuses. I think it would be a good idea quietly to pull together, separate from the

campaign, a small group of people who would begin in the lowest-profile way possible, quietest most controlled way possible, to start gathering certain information and facts, putting that information and those facts, those recommendations together so that when and if you are elected President in November, you can commence the transition with something of a head start.”

Watson followed up with other memos outlining his thoughts. As soon as Carter received the nomination on June 10, he instructed Watson to go ahead with his plan. By the time of the presidential election, Watson had a group working 14-hour days, seven days a week, essentially developing a checklist for Carter in the event he should win. Watson’s final pre-election memo, sent to Carter on November 3, contained specific steps for the transition. Watson paraphrases the memo as follows:

“Mr. President, the day after the election, you are the President-elect, and you’ve got roughly 10 weeks within which time you must essentially organize your government, your administration, set certain priorities, start to form what will be your administration.

“Initiate telephone calls of appreciation to key people, both in the Congress and otherwise across the country, leaders who have helped you in one way or another to be elected. Set up a group to supervise responses to telegrams from foreign leaders. Meet with leaders of the campaign to confirm arrangements for closing the campaign down. Assign authority to a very limited number of people, with staff aides to manage the transition,” and I suggested a transition coordinator, a director of the transition, and a press secretary, followed shortly thereafter by congressional liaison, as principal transition aides.

“Consider where you’re going to be, Governor. Are you going to stay in Plains? Are you going to spend part of your time each week in Washington? How do you want to do that, because how you do that will both affect the way the matters in the transition are handled and will also project certain messages to the country.”

Also, “Determine what you want the Vice President to do during the transition. Talk to Senator [Walter] Mondale, both for the purpose of getting his advice—Senator Mondale’s been in Washington awhile—on a wide range of subjects, and collaboratively between the two of you, set out what you expect him to do during the transition, how to help, so forth and so on.”

There is more, but that's what I mean when I say simple organizational checklists.

This practical, nuts-and-bolts approach must continue as the new President actually takes over. It is easy for a new President to forget such practicalities, points out Harvard University Professor of Government Richard Neustadt, when making commitments to run an efficient administration:

If you must economize, or must symbolize economy, eliminate jobs for policy wonks and even, if Boyden Gray will allow me, lawyers—not good first-rate clerical people and messengers and what we used to call writing pages. The Carter Administration got rid of so many people at the lower but critical level that they couldn't even get their messages to the Hill delivered properly because they fired half the messengers. There are plenty of policy people whose jobs you could scrap and then restore them one by one as you need them. Don't fire the really important help, the secretaries and the messengers.

Ronald Reagan's transition also began with a small, secretive group meeting regularly before the election. Edwin Meese, who headed Reagan's transition team, explains the importance of this early planning:

We had a small group of people who didn't have any particular contribution they could make to the campaign, in an office that was totally separate from the campaign headquarters—as a matter of fact, it was one city away—in absolute secrecy do the planning for the personnel operation. We realized that once the transition started, recognizing the very short period of time—I think we had 77 days—the one thing that you had to be prepared to do was to have a plan for handling personnel, and also to have a pretty good picture of what jobs had to be filled. So we had three or four people that were working on that.

THE PRESIDENT-ELECT'S ROLE

As senior Kennedy aide Ted Sorensen says, it is vital for the President-elect to recognize that the day after the election, he takes on a different role from that of candidate or that of President. Says Sorensen:

Remember you are not now a candidate. Forget this business about the permanent campaign, the White House staffed primarily with former campaign workers who have no substantive policy experience, who are working up a daily message for the press and focusing on the 15-second sound bite for that

night's television—and still attacking the opposition and scrambling for daily headlines and shunning the incumbent.

And now it's not enough to give a great speech, or to raise a profound question, or to point with alarm to some oncoming peril. From now on, that's not enough. You have to have answers. You have to run the show, and from now on, every word you speak is spoken to multiple audiences all around the country and all around the world, and you must exercise much greater caution and provide much greater depth when you speak. Your obligation now is not merely to your party, but to all Americans.

Setting the Right Tone

Indeed, says Neustadt, it is important that the President-elect understand that between the election and Inauguration Day, the public is watching the candidate become the President. How the President-elect undertakes this change will be of lasting importance:

Mr. Kennedy did it. Mr. Reagan did it, very carefully and well—the public is very interested in watching the candidate become President, if indeed they can tell the difference. If they tell the difference, it makes a lasting impression. The public relations . . . of making that transition in perception is highly important, because there's not going to be another time when public attention is so focused on first impressions of the new President as in the period December–January–February. There's no overemphasizing the importance of looking different, looking presidential.

In particular, the President-elect must be careful not to complicate matters for the incumbent President. As Sorensen reminds the next President-elect:

Mr. President-elect, remember you are not yet President. We only have one President at a time in this country, and it's very important that during the next several weeks you do nothing and say nothing that will undermine the incumbent President and confuse the world as to who is in charge. So you should be careful what you say, and you should be careful who has the right to speak for you—who is permitted, even, to talk on your behalf, to government leaders and so on around the world.

During this time you should not seek to advise the incumbent President, either privately or publicly. You should not endorse what his plans are, much

less attack what his plans are, even though many of them are long-range and going to affect you and perhaps impair your discretion in the White House. If he wishes to consult you in private on one of those long-term policies affecting your future, all right, but you still have the right to accept or reject, and he still has the right to accept or reject your advice.

Sorensen notes only one exception to this “hands-off” approach to the incumbent:

There is one exception, and that is on personnel matters. You can, if you wish, ask the President of the United States to impose a freeze on federal branch employment, or a hold on additional nominations, or a halt to transferring people from political Schedule C positions into permanent civil service positions. That’s your right, to make those requests; it’s still his right to say “no.”

Meese explains that this was a major reason Reagan kept well away from Washington, except for a few carefully planned trips:

One of the good reasons to have the President outside the city is to make sure that there is no interference or no perceived interference, or any conflict between the incoming President and the President who really is there, so we were very careful during that period of time to make no comments about the Iranian situation and do nothing that would interfere in any way with Warren Christopher and the others that were trying to get those hostages back. This principle of “one President at a time” is, I think, a very important one.

It is also important to keep the President-elect out of town, says Martha Kumar, simply to allow him to rest:

The campaign is grueling, and the beginning of the government is going to be grueling as well, so he does need to use that period to recharge his batteries. Reagan very successfully did that. He had a sense of going, from his work in the movie industry, from one project to another and knew how to do downtime and was able to do it. Clinton kept things going, and when he came into the White House, some people felt he came in tired.

Setting the right tone also means building the necessary bridges to ensure a smooth handover and a good start for the new administration. As the “outsider,” Ronald Reagan took steps during the post-election period to establish a climate of cooperation with Washington. To reach out to the city’s leaders, Reagan made three trips to Washington before Inauguration Day. The first was a social visit, to acquaint himself with the people with whom he



Ted Sorensen and Jack Valenti

would be working, and to visit with President Carter. The second was more businesslike. Reagan met with Carter alone for two-and-a-half hours for a briefing on the main issues that the new President would face. His third visit came

about a week before Inauguration Day, when he had a series of policy meetings leading up to the Inauguration.

Avoiding Mistakes

A President-elect, says Ted Sorensen, will be champing at the bit. But he must avoid the temptation to go astray, and into trouble, by unveiling new but ill-considered policy initiatives:

You should resist that temptation in these heady days to undertake something that your press adviser or campaign worker tells you would be a bold initiative to go it alone, show that you're willing to take high risks, because now you're a winner and nothing bad can happen. Everybody at this table can tell you something bad that happened in those first 100 days because they made the mistake of thinking that they had all the answers and could take that kind of risk. The world is a whole lot more complex when you're inside the White House looking out than it was before, when you were on the outside looking in.

Presidents can avoid such mistakes, says University of Vermont Professor of Politics John Burke, by heeding warnings from experts and seasoned politicians. For example, during Bill Clinton's transition, he ignored advice to proceed carefully with health care reform and set up a lumbering, secretive task force that added to his political problems. More notably, Clinton's transition was marred by the gays in the military fiasco that dominated media attention:

Senator Sam Nunn back in August of 1992 heard about the proposal that Mr. Clinton had made, contacted Mr. Clinton, and warned him about the firestorm that would likely emerge if he went through with it. Again, it was not advice that President-elect Clinton chose to heed.

Such care, says Richard Neustadt, should also be applied to actions and initiatives taken by the new President before he has had time to fully understand the government:

Try to avoid actions after January 20 that are doubly unfamiliar: unfamiliar to the President who doesn't grasp the character of the organizations that will have to carry the actions out (as Mr. Kennedy, I think, did not grasp the internals of the CIA or the Joint Chiefs of Staff before the Bay of Pigs) but also unfamiliar to the bureaucracies or the congressional committees that will have to act.

The real key to the Bay of Pigs is that nothing on that scale had ever been done by the Central Intelligence Agency before. Somewhat the same thing can be said of the Bert Lance affair in 1977, when Office of Management and Budget Director-designate Bert Lance wanted to revise the terms of his Senate confirmation, something no Senate committee had been asked to do for a long, long time if ever. Try to avoid the doubly unfamiliar in that sense until you've been there long enough to have some idea of what you're doing.

Concentrating on Top Staff

The President-elect, during the interregnum, should concentrate on the key decisions he must make. He and his top staff must be absolutely determined to maintain focus. According to Jack Watson:

A successful transition ... involves a careful and a meticulous process of exclusion. Decide what is most important, most immediate, for the President and his forming team, his inchoate team, to be paying attention to. The pressures on a President and his inchoate staff about things that should be on his agenda are overwhelming. So one of the main disciplines that a good director of transition and others working with him or her should do is setting priorities.

Meese agrees and recommends two priorities:

You have to be very disciplined in what it is that the President and the other members of the transition team are going to do, and the two main things that a President has to do during that time are, number one, select his management team, primarily his Cabinet and the members of the White House staff, and secondly, determine his policy agenda in the sense of setting his primary goals so that he knows what it

is and can articulate this from ... Inauguration Day on.

In every campaign speech, [Reagan] had always mentioned two primary objectives. One was the revitalization of the economy, and the second was rebuilding our national defenses. So it was pretty easy to recognize that those were going to be the primary policy goals of the administration and to work that into the planning during the transition.

Reagan spent his transition period “holed up” in California beyond the intense glare of the Washington press corps. He concentrated on the process of selecting top White House and Cabinet officials. Explains Meese:

With the President-elect in California, that was where the Cabinet selection process was taking place. I would go out from Washington every week, and we would have a meeting with the President, particularly in the early weeks. We also had some of his so-called Kitchen Cabinet, who would help him with the appointment process in California when he was governor some years before that. They also were asked to select and recommend to him three people for every Cabinet position, and then he whittled those down, had interviews with the potential Cabinet members he didn't know.

It was much easier to do that with him in California, because you didn't have this horrendous press attention. There was a lot of press out there, but it was much easier for him to have these interviews privately, without an awful lot of attention as to who was coming and going to his private home. The fact that he was out there enabled him to do the two things that I mentioned that were priorities; that is, decide on his management team, make these appointments, and also be working on his major policy priorities.

It is extremely important to select the key White House staff early, says Martha Kumar, and then to establish a cordial, businesslike relationship with the incumbent's staff. There is so much to learn by Inauguration Day, and there is virtually no time. As Kumar explains:

If people are going to learn about their jobs, they need to do that early, because once you get into the White House, it's like drinking from a fire hose, and you don't have the time to read anything, to talk to people. What you need to do is have that done early, before you come in. For that reason, it is particularly important that a White House staff is appointed, and is appointed as soon after the election as is possible.

The Reagan team, says Meese, also paid close attention to the manner in which Cabinet announcements would be made:

We scheduled the announcement of Cabinet members in two or three different groups. The purpose of that was so we wouldn't have a lot of leaking, a lot of piecemeal announcements along the way, and when we did present the Cabinet in these different iterations of three or four, maybe five or six at a time, then the press—that was their first opportunity. They were warned not to talk to the press, even if the press had gotten some inkling that they might be appointed and were hounding them, and we had very good cooperation from the prospective Cabinet members, not to talk to the press and not to give any interviews, and the first interview that they had was when they were actually presented to the press in a more formal setting.

In addition, Neustadt believes it is important that Cabinet nominees understand that their role is not to be the President's close advisers; instead, they are to carry out tasks that are much more down-to-earth:

The President must prepare the Cabinet members against the shocking discovery that most of them are not the principal advisers to the President, and are not going to be, and never will be, not since the White House staff has come into a mature existence. Most of them won't understand that as they go in, and most Presidents-elect won't understand it either. If they go in with exaggerated ideas of their importance to the system, they will then discover that they have to front for their civil servants; they have to spend half their time on the Hill testifying; they have to deal with their congressional subcommittees. Their perspective will get farther and farther from the White House perspective, and the result will be considerable unhappiness for most of them.

Moreover, says John Burke, the President-elect must be clear in his own mind as to the roles of the top White House and Cabinet officials. These roles will have a profound impact on how the President should organize his White House and administration:

It's important to consider how these individuals who are appointed to the White House staff fit together in a decision-making process that will come to bear once the President is in office. Here I think there's an interesting contrast between the Carter transition and, again, the Reagan transition.

Jimmy Carter wanted Cabinet government. He spoke frequently about Cabinet government, thought about the Cabinet as having a very central

role within his policymaking, yet little was done during the transition to bring this to fruition. It was a piece of the transition that dropped out of the way.

In 1980, it was quite different. Ronald Reagan, coming from his practice as Governor of California, was interested in continuing that practice of bringing the Cabinet centrally into his decision-making, but there was also a realization that change needed to be made, that there had to be some adaptation to the realities of Washington, to the larger number of federal departments and so on. So through the transition period, as everything else was going on, as the Cabinet was being appointed, there was also a very constructive dialogue, a very constructive process of deliberation to try to figure out, how can we make Cabinet government work in a way that would fit with the realities that will come to bear after Inauguration Day?

This led to the Cabinet Council system that Ed Meese and others developed.

THE TRANSITION PROCESS

Campaigning versus Governing

Campaigning and governing are very different, as many politicians have learned the hard way. A winning campaign staff may not be a winning team in the White House. Jack Watson recalls that he felt like a javelin catcher, not just as Carter's Chief of Staff, but as the transition chief:

One of the biggest problems that we had, now well-known because it's been written about, was the merging of the campaign staffs and the transition teams, pulling together those people who had been devoting their lives on the road and otherwise to the election of Jimmy Carter as President in 1976 and those people who had been working equally hard in a more policy-oriented way, and in a more governance way, trying to get the President-elect ready for the transition of 1976 and merging those two operations, one very, very large campaign organization and this other small team, which in this case had been headed by me.

Experts and former officials disagree on the degree to which campaign staff should be placed within the new administration team. In her survey of former White House officials for the White House 2001 Project, Kumar has found them divided:

There are a lot who feel that campaign people are inappropriate for a White House because the kind of

schedule ... they're working on is day-to-day. They're not doing anything long-range. They tend to be working on an image of their guy as good, the other guy is bad, and attack; and when you come into a White House, you need a very different kind of person, one that can work over time, people who compromise.

Also, people who tend to come in from the campaign, as Dick Neustadt has observed, can be characterized sometimes by their arrogance, ignorance, and adrenaline, and they're difficult to rein in.

On the other hand, there are people that say it is important to have campaign people because they know the rhythms of a President. It's important to have an understanding of what his needs are, what he likes, how he likes to get his information. Does he want to get it on paper? Does he like to get it verbally? Is he a morning person? An afternoon person? All of that you need to know right at the start, and it's the campaign people that know that.

Campaign people are people who are battle-tested. They can work on deadlines, so you don't have to find that out in a White House. And, importantly, they have the campaign memory. They are the institutional memory. They have a sense of why they're there. And when those people leave a White House, that White House can sometimes be in trouble and the administration lose its course. There are those who have felt, in the Reagan Administration, that Iran-Contra came about partially because those campaign people were no longer in the White House.

Similarly, senior officials and advisers to recent Presidents have a range of views on this subject. Lyndon Johnson's aide, Jack Valenti, for example, feels it is necessary for a President to surround himself with people who have been "under fire," particularly people from his campaign:

I think a President must have around him in the White House people that he trusts, and the only people you know you trust are the people who you've known in the past, who have taken bullets in their stomach for you and keep going. I would not have anybody on my staff, frankly, if I were President that I really didn't know well. How is he going to perform when the dagger is at the belly? You don't know until you have seen this fellow in action.

Others, like Ted Sorensen, take a somewhat different view. Sorensen accepts that it is important for a President to bring in the people he has grown to trust over many years, including those

who worked in his campaign. However, he notes, it is critical that the President ensure that he draws upon people who have substantial experience in government.

Guidelines for a Transition Team

Just as the President-elect should focus on the most important decisions, John Burke argues that the transition effort itself must not be too all-encompassing if it is to be successful:

There is one paradox that I think has occurred when you look at the last four transitions. Two of the transitions were quite ambitious in the pre-election period: those in 1976 under Mr. Carter and Mr. Watson and then more recently in 1992 under Mickey Kantor during the Clinton transition. The other two, the Reagan transition of 1980 and the Bush transition of 1988, had much more limited mandates, and yet I would argue that they tended to be more successful in terms of the transition that occurred after the election as well as in the governing period.

The Reagan transition team was particularly focused on coordination and on the end results it wanted. To avoid potentially damaging friction within the civil service, for example, Ronald Reagan's top aides were careful to define how the transition teams should operate and what the teams should do. As Ed Meese explains:

We did send transition teams into all the departments and many of the agencies, but we gave them the mission not to be a conquering army coming in and taking over or harassing the people who were there, but rather to be information gatherers, because there's a lot that can be gathered and a lot that needs to be known, particularly for an administration like ours which is coming in very new with many people who had not had experience in the federal government before. Some had, among the Cabinet, but many had not.

The briefing books that they provided as a result of their information gathering were extremely important to many of the department heads. Basically, these briefing books had such things as the organization of the department, the staff, the appointments that would have to be made in the early days, the major functions of the department, and a particular feature that we asked for, which was to ask the outgoing people in the departments, "What are the major problems that are going to be encountered in the first 90 days that the new Cabinet and the new members of that particular department, the assistant

secretaries and so on, are going to have to deal with?"

Meese also says that they were careful to make sure the activities of the transition teams and the President-elect's policy team were coordinated and they were speaking with the same voice:

It was very important that there be coordination, so one of the things we did was to have a 7:30 meeting every morning of all the division heads where we could talk about what was happening, plan the activities for the next several days, develop an answer to the problems that inevitably come up, and basically make sure everybody was going in the same direction. I think the largest we got up to at any one time was a little over a thousand people doing something relating to either the inaugural or the transition. So this kind of coordination was very necessary.

Equally important was the use of the transition period as a time to develop a strategic plan for the first six months of the administration. Meese explains:

If I had to say what was the unique contribution that our transition made to the history of transitions, it was the development of a strategic plan for the first 180 days of the presidency. We figured out that it was exactly six months between the 20th of January when the President was inaugurated and the middle of August when Congress traditionally took their summer recess, and it was that honeymoon period that was very critical for the President to get his program through Congress.

With the tax rate reduction and some of the other economic steps, and with the budget relating to the military, this was going to be a major congressional effort. So we had one person, Dick Worthman, who was assigned to develop a strategic plan, to combine the policy recommendations, to schedule when appointments would be made and milestones and deadlines for appointments, to bring in the communications aspects, when there should be presidential speeches and so on so that we have a general outline of what ought to be done during that first 180 days.

And that strategic plan then brought together the various aspects not only of the transition, but also the future aspects of the White House and the presidency itself and how you could integrate these various parts: What the role of Cabinet members would be, what the role of the various departments and the various sections in the White House would be, and also the people that had to be contacted, the liaisons

that had to be established in order to bring together the primary policy objectives and have them accomplished by the time of the congressional recess in August of 1981.

Developing Good Relations with the Press

Successful campaigns usually develop a good working relationship with the press, but once the election is over, they must establish a completely different relationship. The White House



Jack Valenti and Jack Watson

press corps is not the same as the campaign media, and it can be daunting for freshly appointed transition staffers to deal with the media onslaught. Carter transition chief Jack Watson recalls his “baptism by fire” just after the 1976 election:

We finished our initial meeting, made certain arrangements, certain agreements. Certain administrative details were attended to, and President Ford’s Press Secretary, Ron Nessen, said, “Jack, the press is out front. Would you like to go out and say something to the press? They’d like very much to see you since you’re the first Georgian to cross the Potomac. Or if you don’t want to do that, I’ll just take you out the side door of the West Wing, and you can be on your way.”

And I said, “What do you suggest that I do?” And he said, “Well, I’d suggest that you go out and say something to the press.” And I said, “Well, all right.”

We came to the front door of the West Wing, and as we got to the door I saw a large, loud, raucous group of people that looked more like a mob than the White House press corps and leading this group was Sam Donaldson.

I can feel it even now, a little bit. My knees kind of buckled. I took my breath in before I walked out the front door of the West Wing, and as I did it, I approached this group of screaming folks. The press secretary who was at my arm and kind of holding

me, leading me along, said simply, “Welcome to Washington, Jack.”

To try to keep relationships with the press as smooth and coordinated as possible, the Reagan team set up a press section that talked to the press and gave them as much information as possible. If the President-elect is to get good press, says Neustadt, he must treat the White House press with great care and attention:

I would try to cushion the White House press corps—especially its new members, because many people are newly assigned after the election—against the terrible frustrations of being thought by their own organizations to be important and being treated as important but actually living in semi-imprisonment. It’s worthwhile to be quite tender with the White House press corps during the transition.

Mr. Kennedy did this without even having to think about it. For one thing, he divided his time between Palm Beach, Manhattan, and occasionally Washington. The press loved to go to Manhattan, and they loved to go to Palm Beach. But can you imagine how they felt in Plains, Georgia, living in Americus at a cruddy hotel for weeks at a time and then having to go play softball with the President, who they claimed cheated on them?

By January 20, the press just raged against Mr. Carter. So give them some people to talk to. Give them some news to distribute. Give them a sense of importance. It can be done. And give them nice places to take their wives at Christmas time. Terribly important.

Get to Know the FBI

It is critical for the success of an administration that the FBI clear the new President’s nominees quickly to reduce the lengthy confirmation process. Edwin Meese urges the next President-elect’s team to move swiftly on this:

Get acquainted with the Director of the FBI rather rapidly and get his support and cooperation in the clearance investigations, the background investigations of your people, and also particularly important is to ask the FBI Director that if they come across a snag with anybody that they’re investigating would he please let you, the Transition Director, know directly when that happens, that you would much prefer to find it out from him than through the pages of *The Washington Post* or *The Washington Times*.

An important factor during the pre-election period, says presidential scholar John Burke, is the degree of oversight provided by the campaign organization over personnel selection:

One of the things that Ed Meese did while also directing the campaign and having a central role in it was to meet if not daily, almost daily with Pendleton James, who was directing the personnel selection operation during the pre-election phase.

President Bush's Counsel, Boyden Gray, also emphasizes the importance of making the earliest possible start on the clearance process—even if it is not clear what jobs the individual will be nominated for, if any.

Start people through the FBI process the day after the election. Even if you don't know what jobs they're going to have, you will know that there are 100 or 150 people who will serve in key jobs, in the White House and in the departments, and start them right away.... Set up a good relationship with the Director of the FBI; that's the first thing you ought to do. In fact, that ought to have been done before the election. But you cannot waste November, December, and January for the clearance process, because there will be a bottleneck and inevitably things will slow down. You cannot waste those months; you cannot waste any day.

Doing this, he adds, also increases the chances of avoiding the kind of embarrassment that followed the nomination of John Tower. Gray says one of his irritations as President Bush's incoming Counsel was getting the transition team to provide the names of candidates:

After we got into the White House, things were slow. I kept begging the transition team for names. I said, "I don't care what jobs they have. Just let me start them." They wouldn't do it.

Making the clearance system move quickly, says Gray, also reduces the opportunity for Congress to add to the difficulties:

If the Hill gets in on the act, and if you don't have your nominees ready to go before the legislative process starts to begin, they use nominees as hostages to get their programmatic preferences. Democrats as well as Republicans do this, even with nominees of their own party. If you're not done and ready to go with a substantial number of people, people being policy, you will get tripped up the way President Clinton was in the beginning. You have to run these checks before you announce the people.

SPEAKERS LIST

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- Martin Anderson
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Former Assistant to the President and Deputy Chief of Staff,
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- Donald Devine
Former Director of the Office of Personnel Management,
President Reagan
- C. Boyden Gray
Former Counsel, President Bush
- Pat Griffin
Former Assistant to and Director of Legislative Affairs,
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- E. Pendleton James
Former Director of the Office of Presidential Personnel,
President Reagan

Kelly D. Johnston

Former Secretary of the United States Senate, 104th Congress

Steven Kelman

Administrator of the Office of Federal Procurement (OMB),
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James King

Former Director of the Office of Personnel Management,
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Charles Kolb

Former Deputy Assistant for Domestic Policy, President Bush

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George Nesterczuk

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Leon Panetta

Former Chief of Staff, President Clinton

Landon Parvin

Speechwriter, President Reagan

Peter Rodman

Former Deputy Assistant to the President for National
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Sichan Siv

Deputy Assistant to the President for Public Liaison,
President Bush

Theodore C. Sorensen

Former Counsel, President Kennedy

Barry Toiv

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Chase Untermeyer

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Former Secretary of Defense, President Reagan

Anne Wexler
Former Assistant to the President for Public Liaison,
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Government Executive Editor, *National Journal*

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Karen Tumulty
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Former NBC Television Correspondent

Fareed Zakaria
Managing Editor, *Foreign Affairs*

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Colin Campbell
Professor of Public Policy, Georgetown University

Carol Gelderman
Professor, University of New Orleans

Ed Gillespie
Former Director of Communications and Congressional
Affairs, Republican National Committee

Stephen Hess
Senior Fellow in Government Studies, The Brookings
Institution

Robert Kagan
Carnegie Endowment for International Peace

Martha Kumar
Professor of Political Science, Towson University

Paul Light
Vice President, Director of Government Studies, The
Brookings Institution

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Professor, Villanova University

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James P. Pfiffner
Professor of Government and Public Policy, George Mason
University

Georgia Sorenson
James MacGregor Burns Academy of Leadership, University
of Maryland

James A. Thurber
Center for Congressional and Presidential Studies, American
University

Susan J. Tolchin

Professor of Public Policy, George Mason University

Shirley Anne Warshaw

Professor of Political Science, Gettysburg College