



The White House: Moving Out/Moving In Part II: Panel Discussion – The Presidential Transition: Changing Presidents

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How does a first family prepare to move into the White House? How does a President-elect plan to govern from day one—and through his first 100 days? What role does the outgoing President play in assisting the newcomers, and where do his official papers go? A panel of scholars and former White House staff discussed keys to a successful White House transition. This program was presented in partnership with the White House Historical Association.

Martha Joynt Kumar, Professor of Political Science, Towson University; **John P. Burke**, Professor of Political Science, University of Vermont; **Roger B. Porter**, IBM Professor of Business and Government, Kennedy School of Government, Harvard University; and **Terry Sullivan**, Professor of Political Science, UNC-Chapel Hill.

NEIL W. HORSTMAN: It's my pleasure to introduce the moderator for the second session this evening. Martha Joynt Kumar is a professor of political science at Towson University. She studies presidential press relations, White House communications operations, and presidential transitions. Her recent book, "Managing the Message: The White House Communications Operation," won the 2008 Richard E. Neustadt Award from the presidency section of the American Political Science Association for the best book on the presidency. Kumar is the director of the White House Transition Project, a non-partisan project of 2 dozen presidency scholars who prepared information on White House operations and presidential transitions for the 2000-2001 and 2008-2009 transitions. Please join me in welcoming Martha Kumar.

[Applause]



You're scholars who are looking at how transitions have worked over time, and our transition is the transition into the West Wing, the transition into governing and how presidents make that transition, and their staffs as well, from campaigning to governing. This transition from President Bush to President-Elect Obama is a different transition in many ways than we've seen before, and we will explore some of that. It has been a very effective transition in both what the White House has done, Josh Bolten, his chief of staff, President Bush himself taking the initiative on it, and Congress doing things as well, including thinking about the transition clearance process in a 2004 piece of legislation.

So, what we see today in the transition has its roots in legislation that has gone back some time, and also in the practice of previous presidents, of what things have gone right and what things have gone wrong and how people have learned from it. And so we will focus on how that--how the transition takes place into governing. And for our panel, we have: Roger Porter is the IBM Professor of Business and Government Professor at the Kennedy School of Government at Harvard University. And Roger has been a person who has watched transitions close up because he has worked in several administrations. He worked for President Ford. He worked for President Reagan, and he worked for President George H.W. Bush, and he has also talked a great deal to people who were in administrations. And so he's had a perspective there as well. So he has seen transitions in and out, up close, from his position as both somebody who studies economic policy and who has headed economic policy, and domestic policy as well.

John Burke, who is at the University of Vermont, has written the best, most comprehensive books on recent presidential transitions. He has one on the Bush transition of 2001, becoming president, and then he has presidential transitions from politics to practice that takes the administrations from President Carter forward. And so he has a perspective as a scholar that goes back over time. As we'll see, presidential transitions that are well--that are prepared by the outgoing administration, have a somewhat short history. They really only go back to the Truman to Eisenhower transition.

Terry Sullivan works at the University of North Carolina, also a political scientist, and works on the White House Transition Project as the executive director. And he has specialized on presidential appointments. He worked on a project that we had in 2000, where we created a piece of software that helped nominees to office answer all the various questions that they have to in the forms they have to fill out, which is an arduous process. And he worked on developing a piece of software that made it a much smoother process. And he has a study of presidential--the presidential transition in in the first 100 days, through looking at the diaries that Sharon told us about, that the diarist puts together. And so his view of what those first 100 days are is compiled from what presidents actually did, not what their staff think they did or what they thought they did. So it is what the diarist actually has told us. So, with our panel we have people who know the documents well and have perspective over time. I think one of the things we do want to



get a sense of is how different is this transition? And what has gone right? And we'll also look a bit at, in the past, what things have gone wrong.

Roger, can you tell us from your perspective, because you've seen several transitions, what you think have been key elements of transitions? What you think are important for us, because all of us are watching the transition, and all of us are interested in our own way of how they work and why this one has been so successful.

ROGER PORTER: Happy to. And it's a real privilege for me to be on a panel with people who have devoted as much scholarly attention to transitions as my colleagues have. Transitions are very interesting events in many respects. It will probably not surprise you that transitions tend to be times filled with great hope. All new beginnings are hopeful. So during the course of that transition there is an enormous amount of excitement. Having been involved in five, three coming in and two going out, the short piece of wisdom that I can leave you with is the transitioning in is a lot more fun than transitioning out.

[Laughter]

That probably does not surprise you. Something else might. And that is that the people who are leaving and who are transitioning out, whether or not they are of the same political party as the people who are coming in, genuinely wish the people who are coming in well. They want to be helpful. They hope they succeed. I think this is in part because when you have the privilege of working in the White House in a particular area, you become attached to that area and those programs, and you want the people who are succeeding you to have the kind of success that you hope you had or that you wish that you had. So one of the things that's very interesting about transitions is that the people who are leaving are eager to be helpful. None has been more eager than the current administration in trying to be as helpful in as many ways as possible to the new ones coming in.

The reality, however, is that there are three huge things that need to be done during transitions, and if they are done well, they will greatly benefit an administration, and if they are done poorly, they will greatly saddle them. I call them the Ps. The first is "people." A president has to make a large number of appointments, and getting the right people in place and having them ready to start on day one is one of his most urgent tasks. Presidents spend a good deal of time trying to put together teams of people who will work well together.

You probably noticed that President-Elect Obama, in announcing his cabinet appointees, announced them in clusters or groups or teams. In fact, the term "team" is now used consistently and regularly by Democratic and Republican administrations for the people who are going to be working together. But it's not just the cabinet level appointees who are important, but you have to have the deputy secretaries, undersecretaries, etc., and the



people on the White House staff who are going to be working with them. So that's the first and one of the most challenging tasks.

The second is policy because presidents, when they come in, are expected to have a set of policies that they are prepared to advance. Dwight Eisenhower had a fascinating entry in his diary when he was going up to give his first speech to a joint session, saying, "We are not ready." And, "People are expecting a great deal from us, and we really need more time for reflection, but the moment for performance has arrived."

I remember very well working with President Reagan on his first major address to the nation on February 18 and with President Bush on his first major address to the joint session of Congress on February 9. So you get sworn in, you give your inaugural address on the 20th of January.

By early- to mid-February, you are supposed to be back up before a joint session of Congress and a very attentive American public, outlining what it is that you're going to do. Well, you have to decide what policies from the previous administration are we going to continue? What ones are we going to try to change? What initiatives are we going to advance? And presidents are like vacuum cleaners with respect to their appetite for information. So when you go in there on day one, you better have some staff with you who can respond quickly, because the request, at least in the policy office, which is where I worked on economic and domestic policy, presidents come into office expecting to have people who can provide them on very short order with large amounts of information and analysis to help them in making decisions.

Now, in addition to people and policies, there is a third thing that is involved in transitions, and that's processes. Because presidents establish institutional arrangements for how they are going to make decisions, they are generally going to utilize one form or another of decision-making. John has just finished, if I can give you the plug, has just finished a fascinating book that will be coming out on presidents and their national security advisors, and how the National Security Council, under the direction of the president and his national security advisor, has worked.

There's another group that deal with economic policy, another with domestic policy. And the institutional arrangements that get established tend to get established early and are very difficult to change mid-stream because if you start trying to make changes six months, 12 months, 18 months into an administration, the press will view it as some people winning, some people losing, some people being favorites, some people not. So presidents do themselves an enormous amount of good if, in fact, they establish a set of institutional arrangements for how they're going to make decisions.

And part of this concerns what we heard on the previous panel, the real estate in the West Wing, because the West Wing, which is where these staffs are, is physically very small.



Sometimes our memories play tricks on us, but earlier this week, I spent the better part of an evening, after most people had left, over in the West Wing, going through the entire place with one of the current staff there, and spent some time with Josh Bolten, the current White House chief of staff.

I wondered how much it had changed since I had left there at the end of the first President Bush's administration. And I was--I shouldn't say I wasn't surprised. I was pleased that it is very similar. I recognized almost everything. Things do not change very much. It hasn't gotten any larger. The walls haven't expanded. The offices are still small. And where people are officed determines an enormous amount about who they run into, who they spend time with, etc.

So one of the big decisions that presidents have to make and that people whom they are appointing negotiate over is where their office is going to be because that has a huge impact on, if you have a West Wing office or you're in the Old EOB. So, those are the three things that, in my experience with transitions, matter the most in terms of getting off to a good start.

We all have learned in our lives that you only get one opportunity to make a first impression. That is true for presidents of the United States as well, and getting off to a good start with a great first impression involves paying close attention during the transition period to people and policies and processes.

MARTHA JOYNT KUMAR: On the processes, there is a person who was involved in the assignment of office space in an earlier administration and was saying that when he came in--he worked on salaries, the number of slots each office got, and the office space--and one of his jobs was to assign parking places for people in the West Wing. And so he said that what he did was, he thought the way to do it was just assign it alphabetically.

[Laughter]

It did not work well. He said that there are even battles over ship models.

PORTER: Well, one thing you need to remember is you cannot pay people additional salary. So the notion of giving people a bonus because they're working very long hours, doesn't work. What you can do is some of those things, like parking places and where your parking place is. And so while people in general don't want to be petty and certainly don't want to be viewed by others as petty, many of them are inordinately concerned about where their office is, where their parking place is, and on cold days, having a parking place closer to the entrance than further from it is a big advantage.



KUMAR: Thank you. John, you've studied administrations, really going back to President Truman, to Eisenhower. And can you tell us the things that you think are important for us to know about transitions?

JOHN BURKE: I think the first thing, let's even move back earlier in American history and think about what a presidential transition looked like in the 19th century because they were vastly different from what we're seeing today. Presidents had virtually no White House staff--Maybe two or three key aides, often relatives, and that was it. The president did have to worry about appointing a cabinet. 19th century, that might be eight or nine individuals, but the federal departments were quite small. Presidents did have to worry about patronage, however. And a lot of them complained about having to see people constantly about patronage, especially before the civil service was created in the 1880s. And that situation stayed through most of the early part of the 20th century, until Roosevelt's administration. And it is during Franklin Roosevelt's transition that we first see a president thinking about a political agenda, thinking about a legislative agenda. Because the other interesting thing, of course, is that Congress was not generally in session at the time the president was inaugurated. And that only begins with the 20th Amendment to the Constitution in 1933.

The 100 days benchmark, of course, refers to Franklin Roosevelt calling the Congress into session during his first 100 days as president to deal with the Great Depression. I think that situation continued into the Eisenhower presidency. We do see Eisenhower paying a lot more attention to what the White House staff looks like, and by his presidency the size of the White House staff had grown. So Eisenhower made some major changes in terms of how the White House staff was organized. But very, very little was done before Election Day, and that's the point I want to come to. It's only really with Jimmy Carter that we see a president thinking about the transition in a very serious way and delegating somebody the authority to begin work on a transition.

That occurs with Jimmy Carter in 1976, and then continues with Ronald Reagan, George Bush, Sr., Bill Clinton, George W. Bush, and now with Barack Obama. And the point I want to make is that that pre-election effort really has become critically important in determining how well the president's transition after election day pans out and how the early administration of a presidency operates and whether it's going to be successful or unsuccessful.

I think the key to the Obama transition is what happened before Election Day. Barack Obama delegated that responsibility to John Podesta, former chief of staff, and Podesta, by all that we've been able to understand, and we don't know a lot about what the Obama team was doing, but there have been hints here and there, did a remarkable job in preparing this potential presidency for having a potential transition. They were able to work on personnel choices, they examined the policies of the Bush presidency, they thought about how to take all of the campaign issues that candidate Obama had been



campaigning on, and to translate that into a much more limited agenda. And most important of all, and this gets to Roger Porter's emphasis both on people and process, they selected a chief of staff shortly after Election Day. And this really is, I think, a key component of having a successful transition, because once you get that chief of staff selected, that means that the chief of staff in turn can then take over the primary job of putting together the White House staff, which becomes very, very important to the president, which is precisely what Rahm Emanuel did in the days and weeks after Election Day. But again, I think it all stems back to what they did during that pre-election period.

KUMAR: And in a way it's very difficult to start that early because there is a sense that candidates worry that they are going to be charged with being arrogant by starting early. And that, of course, happened in this case, where President-Elect Obama, when he was-- in the summer, when he went on his trip to Europe, around that time when he was speaking in Berlin, around that time it came out in, I think first, in "The Post," that John Podesta was working on transition. And some of his critics came out very early and said that that was a sign of arrogance. So to begin the process that is so important is very difficult to do because you have to fight through that arrogance label and try to do it in spite of that. So it requires doing it behind the curtain, and hopefully, in the future that people will recognize how crucial it is and not regard it as part of arrogance, but rather find it a part of good governing. And that was one of the things that the Bush administration tried to create, was an environment in which they said how important it was to start early, for both McCain and for Obama. And Clay Johnson, who is the Management Deputy at the Office of Management and Budget, testified several times on transitions and talked about that point, of how crucial it was to start early.

Terry, what can you tell us about your findings on the president's first 100 days, what you see across administrations, what things you see as significant for us to understand about the president and about the presidency through those diaries?

TERRY SULLIVAN: Well, let me just start by saying I'm very happy to be here and I really appreciate the invitation from both the National Archives and the Historical Association. And let me just tell you something about the other two people on this panel. One of our partners on the White House Transition Project is the James Baker Institute at Rice University, and early on in the presidential election campaign in 2000, Governor Bush sent people to the Baker Institute to learn what they needed to know after they won the election.

And Secretary Baker was very interested in finding one particular memo from his work in the Reagan administration that was sometimes called the Wirthlin Memo. So we were assigned the task on the staff to go find this memo out of Secretary Baker's archives in the Rice Library, which is an impossible task. And as a consequence, instead of going to the Baker Archives to find this document, we went to John Burke because he's the guy who knows the transitions, and if you want to find something about those transitions, he's the



human intellectual repository of the history of these transitions. Later, in 2000, while the election was going on, the Baker Institute had the distinct privilege--and Secretary Baker was the guy who herded all the cats together--to bring together in one place for a day this conference to talk about their job all of the living White House chiefs of staff in one place, which is a phenomenal thing, to get all of these men, as it turns out, all these men together to talk about their job. And in the audience at the Smithsonian Institution were academics and policy people and reporters and all these people, and midway through the conference, we had a very secluded lunch for this very important group of people, and as we were going into the dining room there at the Smithsonian, Secretary Baker turned around, as did two or three other people who were White House chiefs of staff, and almost all together said, "Where's Roger?" Because Roger Porter was one of the key actors in every one of at least six or seven of those chief's success in the White House.

So this is a really fantastic panel you have before you. It's a wonderful repository of knowledge and experiences. My job is really just a job of data analyst. I'm the guy who brought the computer up on the stage and worried about getting it started up because I've got data sitting here in case anybody wants to have a data answer to a question.

[Laughter]

What I'm doing is looking at these wonderful records that are preserved by the National Archives, the minute by minute accounting of what the president does all day because the fact of the matter is nobody knows what that job is. Nobody knows what the president does all day. So there's some patterns that come out of that data. This is data generated by the--well, paper data generated by the National Archives and has taken me and several graduate students 10 years to put it together into something that can be analyzed, and here are sort of some of the basic findings. First thing is presidents see lots and lots and lots of people during their first 100 days and they see no one in particular.

If you were to ask the question, "How many people see the president at least once a day?" that number is uniformly from Dwight Eisenhower through George H.W. Bush, which is essentially all of the diaries that are currently available because of the Presidential Records Act, if you ask that question, "How many people see the president at least once a day?" that number is uniformly five. If you ask, "How many people see the president at least three times a week?" that number is only 11. Between seven and 11. There literally are thousands and thousands of people that the president interacts with during 100 days, and he interacts with none of them on a regular basis. So in a sense, no one sees what the president sees. If you ask the question, "Let's divide up the various responsibilities of the president. How much time does the president spend in a day on each one of those responsibilities: commander in chief, chief diplomat, chief legislator, leader of his party, chief communicator, all those things?"



Essentially the answer is again, the president in an average day does lots and lots of things and nothing in particular. For example...

[Laughter]

For example, we all think of the president as sort of the chief communicator, but in general and on average among all these presidents, they spend in an average day about 5% of their time in preparing speeches, giving speeches, participating in events in which they talk with the press, engage with press or have press conferences or prepare or practice for those press conferences. Communications is an extraordinarily miniscule part of a president's day. Presidents spend--the most time presidents spend on any one responsibility is about--well, there are two presidents in this data that were actually engaged in shooting wars during their first 100 days, and that was President Eisenhower and President Nixon, and those two presidents together on average spent less than 10% of their day involved in things that we would call commander in chief responsibilities. Presidents spend almost no time on economic management. They spend almost no time on law enforcement as the chief law enforcement officer of the government. They spend almost no time on decision making in the White House. They spend almost no time on anything.

The most time they spend on anything is about 15% of their day is spent on diplomacy. So when you ask, "Who is one of those five people who interacts with the president at least every day?" and it is invariably regardless of president, the secretary of state is one of those five people.

White House chief of staff is another one. Press secretaries aren't usually. The national security advisor is usually one of those people and after that the numbers begin to vary in terms of who they talk to. But invariably secretary of state is one of the five people that regularly interact with the president every day during a week. And so when President Obama picks Senator Clinton, his chief rival for the nomination to be secretary of state, that is not in any way, shape, or form a trivial pick because President Obama will spend more time with Secretary of State Clinton than any other person. White House chiefs of staff, on average spend 5% of the day with the president. So I guess one last thing. Presidents--the one skill that presidents need to be able to do is be mentally nimble because they are moving from one thing to the next.

If you are a fan of "The West Wing," you know that probably the most common thing that President Bartlet says in "The West Wing" is "What's next?" And that is essentially the definition of the president at work: "What's next?"

KUMAR: Well, let's begin some questions, and while people are getting up to the microphone, let me ask you, Roger, what difference did you see that it made to have a



good transition? What difference did it make to governing that the presidents had a good transition?

PORTER: Well, I think it's appropriate that the overwhelming majority of Americans want the president to succeed. And if you look at public opinion polls that are taken of presidents when they very first come into office, they tend to have very low disapproval ratings because they haven't done anything that people can complain about and fairly high approval ratings. This reflects to a large extent the attitude that's found in the Congress. I remember leaving the inaugural stand at the beginning of the first President Bush's administration and overhearing a conversation between two Democratic senators, who I will not name, and one of them asked the other, "What did you think of his speech?" And the other turned to him and said, "I thought it was magnificent." And you will recall that this was the speech in which he extended his hand and said that he planned on working with the Congress and that he wanted to have a good relationship. So right at the beginning when somebody comes into office, the public wants them to succeed and generally the Congress wants to work with them. And that is not necessarily the case one year, two years, three years into an administration. So recognizing--and I thought President Reagan did a remarkable job at this--recognizing that you have what I call a moment of opportunity available to you means that if you do what he did, which was to focus your agenda and figure out the things that matter most and separate them out from the things that matter least and present a limited specific set of things that you want the Congress and the country to do, then you have a lot of wind in your sails right at the beginning. Now, you can't control what's going to happen ultimately in the end because the legislative process is understandably a very long one and Congress wants to play an important role and presidents end up having to do a lot of negotiating.

I remember when we were negotiating the 1981 Economic Recovery Tax Act and the Omnibus Budget Reconciliation Act. There's an enormous amount of give and take that go on, but at the end of the day, the president was able to get them put into place, I think in large part because he had that wind in his sails. Now, November 1982, lost 26 seats in the House of Representatives, totally transformed his presidency because you no longer had that working coalition and that's--so one of the things that presidents need to recognize when they very first come in is it's probably not going to get better than this in terms of the context in which you're governing, and you need to seize that opportunity.

KUMAR: Very good. OK.

MAN: I want to thank all of you for coming out tonight. My question is specific to President-Elect Obama, who as you all know, of course, came from Chicago and his family resided in Chicago while he was here in the Senate, and he tended to commute, as I recall, pretty often back home in Chicago to see his family and then there was the campaign trail of the last two years, so what is the role, you think, of someone who is relatively new to Washington, DC, as we've seen in the last couple of weeks the president



exploring the city with the mayor and so forth, exploring the monuments, like President Reagan, who came from California, someone who doesn't have much experience with the ways of Washington, people to connect to and establishment. How does the transition reflect that kind of tension between the independent but also at the same time recognize the ways of Washington?

KUMAR: Well, one of the things that I would say on that is that when Reagan was in the transition period and when he came to Washington, he gave a party. He gave a party at the F Street Club, and he gave it for Democrats as well as Republicans. In fact, one of the accountings that I was reading of it recently said that there were more Democrats than Republicans and he talked about the importance of working together. And he also said that the difference between "president" and "resident" was one letter and that he intended to be a resident of Washington and a supporter of Washington as a community as well as president of the United States, and he saw that as something that was important to do and was part of the transition from being a partisan candidate to being president of the United States. And he did it in that way. And you can see that President-Elect Obama has wanted to make sure that people understand that he is interested in the city, too. He didn't go to the F Street Club, but he went to Ben's...and got a half smoke. So maybe he had been there before. Would you all like to add to that?

BURKE: Well, I think on the positive side, you have to remember that this is the first president since John Kennedy to come from the United States Senate into the White House so that the president-elect is bringing personal legislative experience. The second thing, and I don't have an exact count, but just a general sense is that both in terms of cabinet and White House appointments, we do see a lot of people either coming from the Congress or coming from congressional staffs. So I think there's going to be a much tighter linkage and awareness between the Congress and eye on the White House that we sometimes don't see in administrations. The downside, of course, is that Barack Obama doesn't have much in the way of executive experience, decision-making experience, which I think for a president is different from the kind of things that a senator does on a daily basis. So I think that potentially could be problematic.

MAN: Martha, I want to commend you and the panel for a fascinating presentation.

KUMAR: Well, let me tell you who Brad Patterson is. Brad has studied the White House and worked in the Eisenhower administration in the personnel office and has written several books on White House staff, one of which he's going to talk about, I think, in a couple weeks.

PATTERSON: The 23rd, right. Martha, in looking at the current transition, I was impressed with what I would term an astonishing innovation which received no publicity except maybe some of us saw it on television, but nothing in the "Post," nothing in the "Times." This was the session they had the other day with about, it looked like 20 or 30,



maybe 40 people of the outgoing administration sitting down together in the same room at the same table with the incoming administration discussing homeland security--the issues and the problems and presumably the three Ps you spoke of: process, policy, and people--right there together. I was surprised it got no publicity in the newspapers. Has this kind of an innovation ever occurred before in the presidency? Is this quite an interesting model for future transitions? Have you been involved personally, perhaps, Martha?

KUMAR: Roger, have you been involved in any similar operations?

PORTER: I'll share with you a brief experience with respect to this in the 1992 transition, 1992-93 transition. President Bush was very eager--the senior President Bush was very eager to be as helpful as possible to the new administration coming in. He met with the staff the day after. He said, "Thank you very much for your help. I appreciate everything you've done. I'm disappointed in the results of the election, as I suspect you are, but we are going to leave this place in as good a shape as possible. We're not going to leave any ticking time bombs. We're not going to try to make it difficult for the new people coming in, put in a bunch of things by executive order that they're going to try to overturn or have to overturn later. We're going to help them. I want you to be as helpful as possible to the people who are going to be replacing you."

And I spent three hours with Bob Rubin, who was coming in to take the job that I had in the White House, and I told him everything I could that I thought would be helpful. Well, I got a call with about...I guess about three weeks--no, about two weeks before January 20, when the transition was going to occur saying, "Some of the Clinton people would like, they've selected eight people from the current administration that they would like to meet with out at Wye Plantation for a weekend and just pump you for everything that you'll be willing to tell them. Would you be willing to do this?"

Everybody said, of course, happy to. Prepared lots of materials, etc. Two days before this was going to occur, got a call saying, "Oh, we're sorry, but we've got so much to do getting stuff ready that we would like to postpone this session. We'd like to do it. We think it's a good idea, but we just don't have time now."

And I smiled as you might suspect and said, "Well, I'm not terribly surprised that there's a lot to do now, but if they think there's going to be less to do later, I'm not going to hold my breath." And of course it never got rescheduled because when you are there, it is like drinking from a fire hydrant. You've been there, Brad. The amount of things that are coming at you every day are just immense and I'm very impressed that the meeting that you described took place. And it's not the only one. I talked to Josh and he's had a number of meetings with his--with Rahm Emanuel, who's coming in to take this place. So in terms of the atmospherics of it, this administration is doing as good a job as they can to help the incoming one. But the reality is, when you get in there, it still is just like getting hit with a ton of bricks and you're often placing calls to people who've been there saying, "We



could use a little help on such and such an issue. Where did you find it, etc." I did that. I made those kind of calls and I received those kind of calls.

KUMAR: Brad, one of the things that happened here is that President Bush created the Transition Coordinating Council much earlier than was the case in President Clinton's administration that his executive order went out on October 9, creating the council. And the council had its last meeting, its fifth and last meeting, and actually they were talking about the preparations for that meeting, and they brought the Obama people in in meetings four and five. So they worked on it early and the Obama people were organized early so they could take advantage of it. They knew how important those sessions were. In President Clinton's case, he did have a Transition Coordinating Council, but it was created on November 27 and of course President Bush became president-elect only in mid-December, so it was hard to do that. Yes.

SULLIVAN: I'd also like to say one thing about that in that there really is this amazing feeling among the people who have had the position that they have a camaraderie with the people who are coming in, but it's often very difficult to communicate that camaraderie across the partisan divide, especially when those guys have spent the last two years trying to get you out of office. And that's a difficult thing and one of the steps that has been taken in the last 10 years is that many of these organizations have turned to the White House Transition Project to be that conduit for organizing this opportunity to do good by each other.

KUMAR: Last question.

WOMAN: Hi. How are you? For those of us who are young and have only lived in maybe three administrations...

[Laughter]

I want to thank you for hosting us. It's been very informative, and I'm sure all of our group here has loved it. My question has to do with two of the three Ps that you talked about. That would be "people" and "process." As we've seen in recent news, now maybe this was a media exaggeration, but I would say one of the only hang-ups that Obama had is with the Panetta appointment, and maybe the media did blow up the thing with Diane Feinstein being upset that he didn't go through certain channels.

Now, my question is what are the proper channels of access, advice, and approval that a president-elect should go through to maybe make an appointment or not at all that would be seen as acceptable by the Congress that's in place?

KUMAR: Roger, how would you like to take that one?



PORTER: Well, it will not surprise you that people like to feel important and they like to be consulted. They like to be consulted early, and they like to have their advice considered and hopefully taken. I don't think that members of Congress can fully appreciate all of the pressures that are going on during a transition for a president. But they do believe that if they're a committee chair or ranking member that before an announcement is made they will have heard about it in advance, in part because they're going to get asked immediately by someone in the press, "Well, what do you think about this?" and at a minimum they want to have had some time to reflect on what that answer is going to be. People do not like to be surprised. Most of the time, president-elects do a great job of touching bases before they make appointments.

The process that they use for vetting people almost always includes checking with a large number of people and inviting a large number of people to make suggestions. This often slows down the process. This is one of the great problems. "How am I going to check with all the people who feel like they have a stake in this and if they require Senate confirmation are going to be working with the person, and at the same time get my team put together?"

Remember, when presidents come in, it's not just the cabinet officers, but the deputy secretaries, under secretaries, assistant secretaries that have real work to do and all of those are going to require Senate confirmation and senators are going to be very interested in who is in those positions, so it's a very challenging task for presidents. In my experience, most presidents do a pretty good job. They are sensitive to the fact that they're going to have to work with these people over an extended period of time and they want to at least start out on the right foot. But it requires a lot of effort on their part and on the part of the people around them to make sure that the bases have been touched and that people are not surprised. And if they have a real concern, you want to know about that before you appoint them rather than obviously than after.

KUMAR: John, can you tell us along those lines of cases where appointments have turned sour, and what are some of the reasons that they have done so, where a president-elect will have difficulty with an appointment?

BURKE: Well, let's see, in the George Bush, Sr. presidency, it was John Tower's nomination for secretary of defense. In the Clinton administration, two potential nominees for attorney general got into difficulty before president--then-president. He was actually president when he selected Janet Reno. George W. Bush had a problem with his labor secretary nominee, his initial one, Linda Chavez. And then--actually worked rather quickly to move to somebody else. I think the key thing is good political antenna, recognizing that perhaps this nomination was a mistake, and then pulling it very quickly if it looks like it's going to be problematic, which I think the George W. Bush people did with the labor secretary nominee, whereas Clinton, I think, perhaps stayed a little too long in terms of keeping his attorney general.



KUMAR: So in a way, you can anticipate that there's going to be a problem. You don't know where the problem's going to be, but what you have to have is a process in place that Roger talked about as being important, that you have to have a process in place so that you know when you're in trouble and that you can get rid of it because what you don't want to do is spend a lot of negative time talking about things that you don't want to talk about. And so in President-Elect Obama's case, the Richardson nomination, when it got into trouble, that nomination went away very quickly. But in order to do that, you really have to have a system in place, a process where you've set up how decisions are going to be made and bring in all of the people, your counsel and personnel, so that you have to have your White House staff in place early on. And in Clinton's case, he did not select his senior White House staff or name them until five days before the inauguration. So in a way, what happened with him is he didn't have that decision-making structure in place that could have warned him that he had a problem and then figure out how to get rid of that problem. And what George W. Bush had and what President-Elect Obama seems to have is a process in place. Well, I want to thank you all very much, and Sharon Fawcett.

[Applause]

PORTER: Some very good comments.

SHARON FAWCETT: One of my favorite moments in this presidential transition was seeing that picture on the front page of the "Washington Post" of all the presidents together. I used to say that former presidents and an incumbent president would get together for the dedication of their presidential libraries and their funerals. So wouldn't it be a wonderful tradition if they now get together for their transitions and for incoming administrations? I want to thank all of you for coming out tonight, for the wonderful questions that you and the moderators posed to our distinguished panel and for their thoughtful reflections and scholarship on the answers today. We're living in history and we're here, we're documenting this transition. Maybe we'll all be back for the next one. Thank you very much.

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