

White House Interview Program

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INTERVIEWEE: PHILLIP BRADY

INTERVIEWER: Martha Kumar

[Disc 1 of 1]

MK: You're familiar with several of our offices. You've been in several of our offices: the Counsel's office for the vetting process, Staff Secretary, Chief of Staff's office. You're familiar with a lot.

PB: I've often flinched when I've heard myself introduced and an MC runs through my checkered career, and I always start my remarks by saying, bottom line, it just proves I just can't keep a job. I kept moving from one position to another. But, you're right, it was a fascinating period. I spent about five years total in the White House.

MK: Can you tell me what years and what jobs [you held]?

PB: I originally came to the White House from the Department of Justice in late, very late 1985-beginning of 1986, to be a Deputy Assistant to then-Vice President [George H. W.] Bush, with primary responsibility to help out on those areas on which he interacted with the Justice Department. Vice President Bush had been tasked by President [Ronald] Reagan with a specific issue involving the Justice Department, and other departments, which was at that time the very serious drug problem, particularly in Florida. Vice President Bush had been asked by President Reagan to set up a task force called the South Florida Task Force—I don't know if you remember that name—which was organized to coordinate all the various agencies that had some role in the war on drugs, to help with the interdiction of drugs coming into the country. South Florida at that time was very much in crisis because of the flow coming in, and the crime associated with it. There were almost two dozen agencies in the executive branch that had some piece of the war on drugs and it was thought that Vice President Bush with the authority he had as vice president would be the best person to try and integrate their efforts and coordinate those efforts to minimize agency jealousies and to maximize the expertise of each agency.

So the Vice President put together an organization called the South Florida Task Force, which had representatives from the Customs Service, for example; from the Immigration and Naturalization Service; from the Department of Justice; from the DEA (Drug Enforcement Administration), and from the military as well. That was an additional element. They thought the Vice President as Vice President could also help bring DoD (Department of Defense) resources to bear on the war on drugs which was a significant change. The Department of Defense had been fairly resistant to being too engaged in the war on drugs, concerned that it might impact on their readiness for their principal role. Through the Vice President's good offices, he was able to get them to see the advantages of using surveillance aircraft and doing different things that would be of assistance. The Vice President also had as his chief of staff Admiral Dan Murphy, who as an admiral had great connections with the DoD establishment, familiarity with their customs and priorities, and he was able to really pull together the South Florida Task Force and make the military an integral part of the operation. And they had great success.

Great success is always relative. But, in any event, the coordination success was recognized—this is where I come into the picture—and evolved into an organization that then went nationwide, called the National Narcotic[s] Border Interdiction System, that was to take the methodology that was put together in South Florida, mainly bringing together all these various parts of the executive branch that had some piece of the war on drugs, and get them to cooperate and coordinate. So you had a West Coast component, an East Coast component, a Florida component, a Southwest border component, etc. They had boards of directors that included members of all those various agencies from Customs to DEA to Justice to the military. And they'd pool resources and pool information and try to make a real difference in the flow of drugs across our border. Yet in late 1985, early 1986, Admiral Murphy left as [Vice] President Bush's Chief of Staff, somewhat I believe because a new era was dawning for the Vice President. The Vice President had been dedicated to serving as a very activist Vice President and advancing President Reagan's agenda during the first term. He was going to continue do that in the second term, but in the second term he was also going to be viewed increasingly as a candidate for President of the United States. So he was going to have a more visible role necessarily, like it or not. There was going to be more of a political dimension to his Vice Presidency.

MK: When did that realization come about for everybody?

PB: I think at the end of the first [term]. I think the Vice President viewed the first term as one where he wasn't going to let political considerations impact in any way, shape, or form. In the second term, that just wasn't possible, and he recognized that. As Chief of Staff, from my perspective, Dan Murphy served beautifully in that first term, because he was very respectful of the chain-of-command they had, which was exactly what then-Vice President Bush wanted to maintain through the first term, and also into the second term. In the second term he needed a chief of staff who was a little more attuned to the political ins and outs, and that was Craig Fuller. I don't know if you've spoken to Craig.

MK: No, I haven't.

PB: He'd be a good one to talk to. Craig had served in Reagan's first term as Cabinet Secretary. So he was very familiar with the political ins and outs of the Reagan White House. He was a Californian; he knew a lot of the Reagan people from California and nationwide. So Craig came in, and Craig was going to be focused a little more broadly than Admiral Murphy was, because Craig had this added dimension to his portfolio. So I was brought in to take responsibility for some of those things Admiral Murphy had been focused on. Those things included the war on drugs and, particularly, the vice president's role in the war on drugs which evolved into this National Narcotic[s] Border Interdiction System, which was this nationwide system to help on the interdiction side of the drug war.

So I was with Vice President Bush until early 1988, when A. B. Culvahouse as Counsel to President Reagan talked to me about coming in as Deputy Counsel to Reagan, actually moving across the street from the Old Executive Office Building into the West Wing. His previous Deputy Counsel was Jay Stephens, and Jay had been nominated by the President and was confirmed by the Senate to be U.S. Attorney for the District of Columbia. I don't know if you know Jay.

MK: No. His name is familiar.

PB: He became U.S. Attorney for Washington [D.C.]. A. B. Culvahouse said he wanted somebody who was already in the complex, somebody who already knew the players. So I

- came in as Deputy Counsel to President Reagan and I was there until the end of the Reagan Administration.
- MK: In the Counsel spot?
- PB: In the Counsel spot. One of the principal responsibilities of the Deputy Counsel was to assist in the vetting of Presidential appointments and working with the FBI [Federal Bureau of Investigation] and with other agencies doing the background investigations and that sort of thing.
- MK: Now, did you do that for both people for the judgeships and for presidential appointments to the executive branch? Were you involved in both types?
- PB: Yes. And [there was] actually a third type as well. I don't know if this is still the case; I assume it is. As you said, the Counsel's Office was very involved in the Presidential executive branch appointments. Those would be presidential appointments either involving Senate confirmation or not. It was also for the White House staff itself. By that I mean political people in the Executive Office of the President. So that was part of the process. Those were more internal investigations that were conducted. And then, significantly, as you note, judgeships: a thorough background investigation, several inches thick because it includes, for example, the American Bar Association and local bar association input; you're also getting input from lawyers on both sides in the local communities. It was a very rigorous process. The Justice Department was very actively involved in that effort.
- MK: Would that be the Office of Legal Policy at the Justice Department?
- PB: It was then. I don't know if it still is. As best you know, it still is?
- MK: Yes. I think so.
- PB: They would compile a tremendous amount of material and submit that to the White House. The White House convened a Judicial Selection Panel which I served on during the Reagan Administration, and we'd then make a recommendation to the President.
- MK: Who would be on it?
- PB: The Attorney General, the Deputy Attorney General, the head of the Office of Legal Policy whoever that was, the Counsel to the President, the Deputy Counsel to the President, [and] maybe another attorney in the White House Counsel's Office. The Chief of Staff could or could not sit in. It was mostly a legal review and a recommendation that came from the legal side of the White House and the Justice Department.
- MK: How often would you meet?
- PB: That was a little bit cyclical, depending on the number of vacancies and also depending a little bit on the Congressional calendar, because you want to submit nominations in as timely a fashion as possible, but at a time when you realistically could press for hearings in the hope of getting your nominees out. There's a political year consideration, too; as you get closer and closer to presidential elections, the Senate becomes less and less receptive to confirming nominees for lifetime appointments, depending on what happens in the next presidential election.

MK: What would the calendar be?

PB: Well, there's the four-year calendar and, as you're getting closer and closer to the political presidential election, you're going to have less receptivity to confirming people for lifetime appointments.

MK: Would you get into it the first year, because the first year you're doing so many other kinds of appointments?

PB: You'd like to, but the reality is that so much—as you suggest—is going on, it's tough to complete the process. Now, that could be a contribution your project will make. I think the earlier people can get involved in the organizing process and the substance of a new administration, the better. I recognize that's complicated by the fact that at the end of a campaign there's something of a burnout factor for all the participants. But it's a critical responsibility. Whatever else your project contributes, [you should] encourage that administrations take, that political campaigns take, a week off—but thereafter evolve into a shadow administration as quickly as possible.

So that was the judicial selection committee. They made a recommendation to the President. The President would make his selection. Thereafter, my particular position became further involved because—when the President decides this is the person he wants to nominate—that person is then subject to the background investigation process, a very thorough background investigation. That's overseen, at least it was in the Reagan administration, by the deputy counsel to the President.

MK: What kind of work is done—say you give them the packet of forms to fill out? The judgeship forms, I guess, are different. Did the ABA [American Bar Association] have a form at that point, that was part of it? The Justice Department currently gives out a form that's an ABA form—

PB: Right.

MK: —in addition to other forms.

PB: All those forms, yes, are provided—this again is where you all can make a contribution. You can recommend reduction in the number of forms, or at least the incompatibility of the forms—you laugh and I do as well. The forms I was most familiar with were the financial disclosure forms and the FBI background forms.

MK: Now the financial disclosure for judgeships is different, because the Office of Government Ethics does not deal with judgeships.

PB: No. It's a very substantial form. I don't know what it is now; at the time it was a very thorough form. I have a copy of it here. And the FBI form similarly was a very thorough form, taking you all the way back. And the FBI was constantly pressing, understandably, for additional questions to be added to it.

MK: So were they added? Would they come back and say—?

PB: Go back an additional five years on addresses, those sorts of things.

MK: On individual people?

PB: No. On the basic form. But in further answer to that question, the FBI did and I'm sure still does, come back on individual people and say: "We'd like to do a supplemental investigation in this area that came up from our initial review. This question arose, so we'd like to take a little more time to do more thorough vetting..." in this area or that area.

MK: Does that happen often?

PB: Not really. By and large, the forms were so comprehensive that pretty much everything was there. But the issue comes up; in responding to all the questions that are there, new matters come up. Say someone's got a lot of foreign travel. So that could really delay the investigation, because the FBI will contact its offices overseas and have them do whatever review is necessary. And then, there's prioritization that goes on within the FBI, other projects and commitments. The FBI has a group called the spin unit which is a specific unit whose responsibilities are processing these forms. So it was a very interesting but time-consuming and very important responsibility of the Counsel's Office.

I was there through the end of the Reagan administration. When I first came in, Howard Baker was Chief of Staff and then, at the end, the last six months or so, Ken Duberstein was Chief of Staff to the President. Then upon President [George H. W.] Bush's election, I served as the Director of Cabinet Affairs for the first number of months.

[Interruption]

MK: —trying to figure out for the future [inaudible].

PB: Now, will your interviews include people in the current White House?

MK: Yes.

PB: Good. John Podesta, who took my place—I'm not up to that point in my checkered career—would be a good one, because he came in as Staff Secretary.

MK: I've talked to him in my research work, actually writing on the White House and the press.

PB: He's very good. He had a great background. He worked on the Hill for Senator [Patrick] Leahy, who was on the Judiciary Committee, which ties in to some of the questions you're asking.

In any event, President-elect Bush was kind enough to appoint me the Director of Cabinet Affairs, working with David Bates, who was the Assistant to the President for Cabinet Affairs. David would be someone you should talk to, too, because I think David was George's Bush's first hire, back in 1979, when George Bush was first looking at running for President. He's a super individual. I was there until June or so, when I was confirmed to be General Counsel at the Department of Transportation, which is beyond your scope. I was General Counsel for the Department of Transportation for approximately two years. I like to say I've sought lots and lots of jobs in my life, but my next job was not one I necessarily sought. I was asked to come back to the White House as Assistant to the President and Staff Secretary. I don't flatter myself at all. It was simply halfway through the administration, they wanted somebody who knew the President, knew the other members of the White House staff, knew the process, and was able to hopefully hit the ground running.

So I came in as Assistant to the President and Staff Secretary, taking Jim Cicconi's place. Jim left to go to the private sector. You should talk, if you haven't, to Jim.

MK: Tomorrow.

PB: Tomorrow, great. That fits in beautifully. The staff secretary position turned out to be one of the most fascinating jobs you could ever have. I've told the story often that, at the end of the Bush administration, I was interviewing with lots of law firms and, invariably in the interview process, they'd skip the Staff Secretary position and go to the General Counsel position at the Department of Transportation, presuming I'd have an expertise in transportation issues, potential client base, etc.

And I would always comment: By far the more significant job was Staff Secretary in the White House, particularly during the time period that I was there. It was a fascinating time, with the dissolution of the Soviet Union, the Persian Gulf War, the Middle East peace process, Germany reunited in NATO [North American Treaty Organization]. Worldwide events were just phenomenal. President Bush was uniquely suited to be President during those times and managing that world change because, through his long career, he'd been Ambassador to the United Nations, Director of the CIA, and a lot of foreign leaders he was dealing with were people he'd known for decades. So much of what happened on the foreign policy side was influenced by personal relations he had.

MK: Did paper, in dealing with foreign policy, come across your desk, too?

PB: Yes.

MK: As Staff Secretary, did you control the paper flow?

PB: Let me describe the Staff Secretary position, and maybe I'll be able to respond better to your question. The position of Staff Secretary oversees three different offices; essentially including the Staff Secretary's office, it's four. The Staff Secretary oversees the Office of Correspondence, which is presidential correspondence, presidential messages, presidential proclamations, and all that. It's not an insignificant office in terms of size. The White House has relatively few employees, but the Office of Correspondence has maybe 100 employees, and might have as many as 300 volunteers. A woman named Shirley Green headed that office, and now works for Governor [George W.] Bush in Austin [TX], overseeing his correspondence office. Shirley had quite a number of employees and volunteers that she coordinated, and she needed all that to meet her responsibilities, as President Bush was receiving 35,000 to 40,000 letters a week. Particularly during the Persian Gulf War, that correspondence flow ticked way up and, during other crises, it ticked way up. They also put out maybe 100 proclamations a month, or messages to different groups.

MK: Does that include the video messages?

PB: I would think so. I would say it's maybe 100 or 200 of those proclamations, in essence, to Kiwanis Clubs, to groups, that sort of thing. They also have as part of the correspondence unit a presidential comments line. I assume they still have that.

MK: Yes.

PB: I don't know. We had quite a number of volunteers in that office.

[Interruption]

PB: So that office also had a presidential comments line and it could get as many as 300,000 calls a year, and the individuals in that office would tally up what the messages were about. President Bush put great stock in correspondence, including the phone messages that came in. He received weekly compilations of all the messages.

MK: Did you put that together?

PB: Shirley Green and her office would put together both the comments that came in on the presidential phone lines, as well as a compilation of the correspondence coming in, and maybe some examples of proclamations that had been issued. The President would review those religiously. He would put postscripts on many of the letters. He would rewrite some. He stayed very much in touch with it. I think that varies with presidents, but that was something President Bush was very keen on. And he'd periodically pick up the phone and call somebody. He kept his finger on that pulse very much.

One of the other offices that reports to the Staff Secretary is Records Management. That's an important one for you. It serves as the basis for every Presidential Library. It's all the presidential documents. Presidential interactions of any type become part of the Office of Records Management, and can be retrieved as necessary.

MK: Are people given instructions about how to keep their files? What's personal?

PB: That's a good question. Yes. The Counsel's Office is responsible for that. I don't know if you've talked with Boyden Gray—

MK: Not yet.

PB: —or John Schmitz, who served as the Deputy Counsel. They'd both be good people to talk to about that process. They tried to be very careful to ensure all new employees were given a Counsel's Office memo that would articulate what [were] presidential documents and what needed to be preserved, and that sort of thing. Then, at the end of an administration, they would again remind everyone that these are Presidential documents; you're not permitted to walk out of the White House with them; these are things that become part of the permanent record.

It's fascinating to visit a Presidential Library to see—I don't know if you've done this yet. For example, the Bush Library—I'm on the Bush Library Advisory Council. In one of our first meetings we had in College Station [TX], where President Bush's Library is located, they took us into the Archives Room, if you will, and they pulled out boxes with our names on them. So there were Phil Brady boxes and there were stacks and stacks of them. I flipped through some of the materials just to get a feel for what's there and it was, "Oh, my God, that's preserved; that's preserved." Some of the messages were a little more candid than you like to recall they were. Because of the hustle of the day, many times you're writing notes to someone: "I think that's a stupid idea," putting an exclamation point on it and sending it off to someone, and finding that handwritten message in the Presidential Library's records is a shock. So an awful lot more is preserved than you would imagine, and the Office of Records Management was responsible for that. It's a Civil Service career office, but oftentimes someone from that office will then become involved with that particular president's library. David Alsobrook was somebody that I hired while I was Staff Secretary

and he is now the head of the Bush Presidential Library, working for the [National] Archives. That makes sense. He has a feel for what's where and how things fit in.

The third office is the Executive Clerk's Office. That's a fascinating office because it's the institutional memory of the presidency, which I know is something your project is involved in: trying to institutionalize, to a greater degree, what works and what doesn't work, what to recommend, what not to recommend, to incoming administrations. The Executive Clerk's Office is also the official White House voice to the Legislative Branch. You see on TV someone coming into the well of the House saying, "Mr. Speaker, a message from the President" and either bringing back a veto or bringing back a message of some kind from the President. That someone is from the Executive Clerk's Office.

MK: So he's the one that's announced, or does the announcing?

PB: He is the one who does the announcing. He actually comes into the well of the House. The House provides privileges to that individual office, the Executive Clerk's Office, and that is the official communication link from the White House to the Congress. That person also handles the congressional transmissions to the President. The most obvious of those are bills. During the Bush administration, you'd maybe see a thousand bills a year; the President could act on them, or veto them, etc. That office also handled other formal matters. The Medal of Freedom, which you saw in the paper the other day—President Clinton had awarded the Medal of Freedom to twelve people, including President [Gerald] Ford. That Office oversees that process, maintaining the records of who's received the Presidential Medal of Freedom before; minting of the medals themselves; and the Citizen's Medal, another medal the President gives out. Formal communications, beyond bills that the president would have, include a Declaration of Emergency of some type—that would also go through that office. Again, it's a very, very important part of the administration, because it is the institutional memory, and is viewed by each president coming in as something that is critical; you can see what's happened in the past. Presidential commissions also come out of the Executive Clerk's Office. So you have a record of the people whom President Bush has appointed to this job or that job.

MK: How many people are in it?

PB: Well, that varied to some degree. I'm going to say eight or something like that, maybe ten.

MK: How is it determined how long it takes? Say on a presidential appointment, a press release is made say—

PB: They also do those.

MK:—say on a Tuesday, that somebody is going to be appointed; the President wants to nominate somebody to a position. But I went to talk to the Executive Clerk in the Senate—

PB: You did.

MK:—and got copies of the things that are filled out, that are sent over, but there is a difference in days. It may be two weeks after the press release before, actually, that piece of paper goes down there.

PB: To the Senate?



MK: Yes. What, exactly, is the process?

PB: Well, the difference is this: this Executive Clerk's Office will put out, "The President today announced his intention to nominate so-and-so to become the General Counsel for the Department of Transportation." That press release comes from the Executive Clerk's Office; they put it together and it goes out through the Press Office. That isn't the same as actually making the nomination itself. Subsequently, after the background investigations are conducted and financial disclosure forms are reviewed by the Counsel's Office, then the actual nomination itself will be sent to the Senate. So you'll frequently see delays -- Richard Holbrooke is a very recent example. The President had indicated his intention to nominate him a long time ago; thereafter, there were some issues that came up that needed to be worked through; and then, finally, they formally submitted the nomination to the Senate, and the Senate took its time going through its process.

MK: That's right. His financial disclosure stuff—

PB: —raised some questions. So they went through those, worked them out and then the nomination was sent to the Senate. The Senate, for their part, protects its prerogatives, too. Its perspective is: "Yes, you, Mr. President, and your folks have concluded this nomination should go forward. Now we have all our forms to review and we have to conduct our hearing." So, there're all those delays. But, basically, the answer is the intention-to-nominate press release is not the same thing as the nomination itself. So, in any event, that's the third office.

The fourth office that oversees those offices is the Staff Secretary's Office. The way I've described that office is: it serves basically as the in-box and the out-box for the President. Everything going into the President goes through that office and, as you asked me at the outset, that is everything that goes to the President. Now, there are some NSC [National Security Council] matters, some highly confidential matters, that would go to the President more directly, through the National Security Adviser to the President. In our case, it was Brent Scowcroft; in the Reagan administration, when I was in the Reagan administration, it was Colin Powell. Those individuals may take things directly into the President with others, Cabinet secretaries perhaps, where highly confidential matters are involved. But, by and large, the Staff Secretary process was observed very well. Once materials get to the Staff Secretary's Office the vetting might be reduced, depending on the sensitivity of the material.

The vetting—[which] means that on the way in to the President, the Staff Secretary and the Staff Secretary's Office are responsible for making sure whatever it is that's being proposed to be sent to the President is "ready for prime time." That means, has it been legally reviewed? If it's a policy document, are the options laid out for the President? Do they truly reflect the variety of opinions in a clear fashion, that senior officers want to make sure are brought to the President's attention?

If it's a speech being sent in to the President: is it a speech that truly reflects administration policy, that's consistent with previous statements the President made? Has it been vetted? By that I mean, if a speech comes in to the Staff Secretary's office from the speechwriting office, then it was our responsibility to circulate it around to those who would have a substantive interest in the speech. So it would go to the Counsel's Office, absolutely, for legal review. It would also go to the Chief of Staff. Perhaps if there are some national security-type issues, foreign policy issues addressed in it, it would go to Brent Scowcroft and his office, to take a look at it. Significant administration policy statements would go to OMB [Office of Management and Budget], Richard Darman or Roger Porter who was the head of

- OPD [the Office of Policy Development]. It would go to those various offices with very quick turnaround times. Sometimes, speeches came in and the turnaround times were really short, so there was a lot of follow-up responsibility in getting people's comments. The comments would come back in, and then the Office of the Staff Secretary had the sometimes-difficult job of reconciling comments, because you'd get comments that were 180 degrees apart, or really "did a number" on the flow of a speech.
- MK: So what would you do when there's a difference between people's viewpoints? Say Richard Darman and Roger Porter. If their comments were very different, what do you do then?
- PB: Lots of different things, depending on how substantive. In some cases, if it's not all that substantive, you'd just make a call. If they are tremendously substantive, and really are administration policy matters, then you'd convene a conference call, a meeting. If consensus couldn't be reached, that's when you bring in the Chief of Staff and say, "We've got these two conflicting views. These are equally serious positions that are being taken," the Chief of Staff makes the call. If the Chief of Staff can't make the call, the President makes the call. That might be where you have an options paper that goes to the President.
- MK: What about the speech—you probably weren't there then, in that particular position, but it undoubtedly was something that came up for discussion, and that was: when Bush came out to the Press Room as President and announced "...no new taxes."
- PB: I know where you're going with this.
- MK: What was the process there?
- PB: I wasn't there. I'm delighted to defer to Jim Cicconi. You're seeing him tomorrow, I think you indicated. That's an excellent one. Lead with that, just to put him on his heels a little bit. I wasn't there. I'm not even going to speculate. I've heard reports of what occurred but I'll let you get it directly from him. But that sort of thing can happen every day. So speeches were a huge part of the operation, because that's what a president does—is use the "bully pulpit" to make statements. President Bush made a lot of speeches, but he also gave a lot of statements from the White House Press Room. In those cases, it might be Marlin Fitzwater and his office who would put together talking points for the president, suggested talking points for the president. Then they would be vetted through the process I just described; there's negotiation back and forth.

With respect to speechwriting, President Bush wanted to see his speeches early and often, because he wanted to add his own very complete and substantive comments. I can speak to that personally, because the speeches then would come back with President Bush's comments on them, to be then retyped and put onto speech cards, the teleprompter, or whatever else was going to be utilized. Then, sometimes, the President's comments or edits created questions themselves, that required further follow-up and interaction. It was a very positive thing. President Bush would periodically have meetings with the speechwriting team, tell them what his thoughts were, to try and help them get his rhythm and to make the remarks that come to him, reflect his thinking as much as humanly possible. He was a very, very disciplined president, in that he did not let a day go by without having dealt in some fashion with every piece of paper the Staff Secretary sent in, which was a wonderful thing for the Staff Secretary, because your job is to get things in and out. When they came out your job was to put things in the implementation chain so that's the in-box and out-box aspect of the position.

MK: Did you ever notice that there are more things coming out than went in?

PB: You mean, like through the NSC?

MK: Well, that people were finding routes around. What do you do in that [case]?

PB: That's a battle. I can tell from the question, you've heard that already, as well. My own experience was, that was not as big a problem as you've perhaps heard it was. Others might say the Staff Secretary didn't know all the things going in, but I think he frequently did know. As I said, on the NSC side, there were instances involving Brent Scowcroft—the Persian Gulf War being an example, where you're not going to circulate information on when bombing will commence, or when forces will be committed. Those things are not going to go through any sort of a vetting, so it's not necessary to go through the Staff Secretary's office, quite frankly. Then you'd have instances where one of the other offices, as you suggest, would be interested in getting something directly to the President. Cabinet secretaries certainly were not shy about handing the President a note at a Cabinet meeting or a joint event, or anything else. But President Bush, for his part, very much respected the process, because he realized the process was there to protect him, the administration, administration policy, and to make sure he had the options presented fairly. So, many things would come back out from the President, saying, "Put this through the process." So, in other words, he may be handed something at a joint appearance, and he'd send it out for vetting. But, for the most part, the Cabinet officers and the other assistants to the President observed and respected the process.

I think, as I mentioned earlier, you certainly should talk to John Podesta, who took my place as staff secretary, about his time as staff secretary, because he and I had lunch in the White House shortly before he left the White House for the first time, to go to Georgetown to teach—that was after two years in to the Clinton administration, perhaps. He commented that the one mistake we made at the outset of our administration is, we didn't put our arms around the process part—of making sure things had to flow through one office.

It was no personal desire for aggrandizement; it was just that President Clinton would have been very much advantaged if material hadn't come to him from every quarter—over the transom, every other way. They'd rather it come through one office. In fact, the origins of the Staff Secretary's Office—I have this in the article—is that General Andrew Goodpaster came in as a Staff Secretary in the [Dwight D.] Eisenhower administration because President Eisenhower was used to having things come from one source, rather than over the transom. He very much respected the need for there to be an appropriate process, because that protected him, protected the decision-making. So he said, I think the expression was that "...he didn't want to be his own sergeant major"; he wanted someone else to be the sergeant major. His sergeant major in the White House was Andy Goodpaster, who came in as Staff Secretary. When I came in as Staff Secretary, I sought to have lunch with all my predecessors to get a feel—kind of [like] what you're doing with this project—for the job, what they felt didn't work, what were things they would have done differently? With Andy Goodpaster, it was particularly interesting, because he was literally the origins of the office. I think he's the one who told me the story that Eisenhower told him: "I don't want to be sergeant major; you're going to be my sergeant major." So he created the Office, and I think later on took on the added responsibilities I identified: the Correspondence, the Executive Clerk's Office and the Office of Records Management.

MK: At what point did it take on that?

PB: I don't remember.

MK: I remember many years ago, on an earlier project, talking to Jim Connor, and I don't remember that as being part—.

PB: [Inaudible]

MK: —paper flow. Part of it depends on just how much paper and whatnot you're dealing with, is going to relate to the chief of staff and the chief of staff's role, what kind of positions he takes. I would imagine, if you have a chief of staff who has strong policy positions of his own that, maybe, there are going to be people that are going to be coming to the staff secretary with ideas like, say, cabinet secretaries. What I'm thinking of is, in [John] Sununu's case, he had strong policy positions, which is not something that is necessarily the case in most chiefs of staff. Most chiefs of staff coming in [inaudible] with a policy process viewpoint.

PB: In my experience, chiefs of staff can have more or less interest in all the various substantive areas, but all chiefs of staff have interests in some particular areas, areas [in] which perhaps because of their background they have an expertise. So, Governor Sununu for his part had certain areas that he felt he was more familiar with than others, and had stronger views on them. Obviously, [Richard] Cheney, when he was Ford's chief of staff, was particularly interested in matters that had a legislative component—given his time on the Hill. But the basic answer to your question is: that's why the chief of staff and the deputy chief of staff were always included in our vetting process. So the chief of staff would then have an opportunity, not exercised all the time, to comment and to convene a meeting, if desired, to say, "No, this is the approach we should take." That's why the mechanism is in place, to make sure the chief of staff has an ability to weigh in and, as I say, I think John Sununu, as you point out, was one who had strong opinions—but not in every area.

MK: Did cabinet secretaries then deal with you, sometimes, in presenting their views, because they were concerned about—?

PB: Sure. However, they mostly came through the Office of the Cabinet Secretary. The Cabinet Secretary relates out to the Cabinet, to the members of the President's Cabinet, and also to the Executive Branch agencies. And the Staff Secretary's Office relates inward to all the White House offices. However, anything the Cabinet Secretary received for presidential attention would go through the Staff Secretary's Office. So, the first contact that the cabinet officer typically would have would be with the Cabinet Secretary, Edie Holliday, while I was in the White House. As I mentioned, David Bates was the Cabinet Secretary for the first two years, and then Edie Holliday for the last two years. But that isn't to say there weren't many, many times when, for one reason or another, the Cabinet Secretary would hand me or Jim Cicconi, my predecessor, this position paper or that position paper. For example, on educational initiatives from Lamar Alexander as Secretary of Education saying, "Get this to the President right away...", or the like. Of course, then, our job was to make sure in our vetting that the Cabinet Secretary was also brought into the process, and so the Cabinet Secretary could then determine if another cabinet agency should also be given an opportunity to comment. For example, "This has Labor Department implications, so we've got to get the Labor Secretary involved." And then, also, the Cabinet Secretary would take responsibility for whatever other circulating was necessary outside the White House.

MK: Yes. Let's take an example of something, and look at all the different places something needs to be vetted, say an education initiative of some sort.

PB: Right. Well, that's a good example. This is a specific example. Lamar Alexander did have some education initiatives, as he was a very thoughtful, thought-provoking guy. He had suggestions that he'd want to get into the mix soonest, so sometimes they would come appropriately to the Cabinet Secretary for initial vetting, outside of the White House complex. By that I mean the Cabinet Secretary would look at it perhaps in consultation with me or Jim Cicconi, my predecessor, and say, "Gee, who else do you think should see these?" You say, "Well, these education initiatives, as I suggested, could implicate the Education Office within the Department of Labor," or, "There's a legal issue as to whether or not that's something the Federal government can do or can't do, Justice Department." So, then, the Cabinet Secretary, Edie Holliday, would seek to get them out through contacts she had in each one of the departments. She had a White House contact who was her liaison in each one of the departments. She'd fax right away a copy of the Lamar Alexander proposal saying: "Any comment on this? Comment has to be back by five o'clock today!" Then that person within the department would have to say, "I don't know the answer on my own," and have to go to the Education Office of the Department of Labor, or call an assistant secretary, or that director, and say, "Does this strike you in any way that we have to comment?" Yea or nay comment. So, turnaround times had to be real quick.

Now, if Lamar Alexander handed me the proposal at some event, and said, "Will you get this to the President soonest?" then I also would go to Edie Holiday, the Cabinet Secretary, and say, "You take care of the external vetting, and then I'll take care of the internal vetting." Internal vetting meant going to the Office of Policy Development, or perhaps OMB. OMB has a section dedicated to educational issues. All of this sounds cumbersome except that, as I suggested, there are very short time frames put on it and there are individuals within each of these offices with responsibility. That's their job.

MK: So you'd know who to go to in each?

PB: That's right.

MK: What about Political Affairs?

PB: That's a good question. Is that being included as one of your Offices?

MK: No.

PB: That changes with administrations, because it's necessarily something much more personal to the president.

MK: I suspect within an administration it changes, depending on the cycle when you first come in—

PB: It does. And who the individuals are, and the strength of the personalities of those individuals. I think that's one area that's less able to be institutionalized. But again, if the Office of Political Affairs has an event its putting on inside the White House—here's the guest list and it's sent to the Staff Secretary's Office—then our job is to make sure the Counsel's Office has signed off on it. That's very important. "Is this an event that's appropriately utilizing the White House complex? Are there any issues there that have to be resolved?" The President's remarks, again, need to be vetted, because the President is the President. No matter what group he's addressing, anything he says could rock the stock market, or cause international concerns. Everything, again, needs to be consistent with Administration policy set by the President.

MK: In matters that related to financial statements, did you have a policy of letting everything come out through Treasury, and statements that actually could affect markets, was that something that was treated differently, that people were very careful—

PB: Very careful.

MK: —about what happened? For example, I know it was true when [Michael] McCurry was press secretary, and I'm sure it's true with [Joseph] Lockhart, as well, that they just don't say anything that could affect a market. They just say, "You have to go to Treasury...", or whatever.

PB: I think that's consistent.

MK: Sometimes, I've noticed Clinton in his remarks, having all sorts of hedge words because he, too, seemed afraid of affecting a market, and they just let [Treasury Secretary Robert] Rubin make statements.

PB: Well, for example—this fits in to the whole picture—the President would receive the labor statistics from the Department of Labor, and different financial data information. That would come to the Staff Secretary's office—which answers one of your questions. But, we'd send it in in a red folder to the President, directly and privately. It wasn't vetted in any way, shape or form. It was something which we were very careful of. Sometimes, other documents would come in, with restrictions on them, saying, "This should go the President with a copy to the Chief of Staff and the National Security Adviser only." If I had some question on the restrictions, I would get on the horn with whoever had sent it in and say, "Don't you think so-and-so should also be aware of this? Don't you think the President would also like advice from so-and-so?" And we'd work it out. So those things were judgment calls.

That's an overarching theme I'd suggest your paper should reflect. What you really want to have in these various positions is people with judgment, because you have to make these calls on a very expedited basis, frequently with inadequate information. That's one of the qualities you're looking for in these folks, as the President staffs up.

MK: How do you find those people? How do you know that people have those kinds of qualities? That they can deal with those kinds of situations? What do they need in order to be able to deal with the situation, where there's a tight time frame, or where information is also going to be inadequate?

PB: I guess one thought is: that it's often a mistake to have folks who are too junior in these positions, even though there's a temptation to do so. There's a natural desire to use a lot of people who worked in your campaign, because of their youthful vigor. Tremendous campaign aides that might not be the right people to bring in to a White House, where suddenly you have to be much more careful about what you say and what you do. You used the example of the Treasury Department kind of things. The only thing I think you can look at is a track record. You're looking at people who have demonstrated, over a period of time, an ability to make thoughtful decisions, and to do that in an expedited way. Once a presidential decision is made, it has real-life repercussions. We used to kid about those repercussions, using as an example that a president had to careful not to note out loud that he wished a room was blue, because the next day it would be blue. Whatever he says becomes writ.

MK: What's the pool of people that one can draw on, in addition to people during the campaign? Where do you go, once you're going in to an administration, and you want to get people who are going to be appropriate for governing? Where do you look?

PB: That's a very good question. Obviously, the campaign is one. Your Director of Policy Development is probably somebody on the campaign who has had to really understand policy choices, and recognizes that policy cannot be making snap decisions based on good politics or bad politics, now that the president is President. So you have some people in your campaign that are very good, and you trust them; they know you; they know the positions you took during the campaign, and they know your commitment to implementing, et cetera. I would suggest that there is another pool of excellent campaign workers, folks that have helped you get elected, that may not be the right people for senior positions in government, at least not at that moment. They're coming in with more of a political mindset that may or may not be appropriate for the true governing process.

Who are the others you look toward? People in past administrations obviously are one source. It might be that they were credentialed to a degree in one administration and [have] proven themselves very able, and now—with some additional experience in the private sector or working elsewhere—they are now appropriate for a different position or a more senior position in your administration. Those are people, again, that you know; you know their ability to make decisions, their work ethic, and that sort of thing.

Another group are people who work in the legislative branch. Most of the committee staff folk are long-term, committed public servants, more senior than the typical congressional staff office, although they are very good people in those offices as well. But committee staff are frequently a very good source of identifying people who are experts in defense, experts in immigration, experts in legal issues, experts in various things. Frequently, those people are good recruits, and some may well have served in advisory capacities in the campaign.

Then you have people in the private sector who, again, you perhaps have familiarity with, because they worked on this task force [on] your campaign set up to look at transportation issues, for example; and to make recommendations to the candidate on what he or she should be suggesting be their policy on the national highway system or airport noise issues, something of that nature. So that's another group.

Then academe. You'll be happy to hear this. Someone from the academic world, someone who has done very thoughtful writings on a subject could be another good recruit, in appropriate areas.

MK: But generally, the kind of time requirements in a White House tend to be somewhat different than—

PB: Yes. But I say, for some positions. The Assistant to the President for the Office of Policy Development, in my time Roger Porter, that person has a large staff, and I think it's healthy to have on that staff some people from academe who are going to take a much more measured, long-term look, do independent research. Now for Roger Porter himself, he was a professor at Harvard, so he was certainly from academe. He was in a different position. He had to make much quicker decisions and judgments, more in the mode that I was talking about, the people you need to have in your senior positions.

MK: Is it possible, do you think, that one of the things for somebody who is chief of staff, that the chief of staff is going to be somebody initially who comes out of the campaign? With

some of the top people, if you have a planning operation in place beforehand, you have some sense of who you want to bring in if you win. And you're going to be governing, that you can take some of those people and fold them into the campaign at some point, in some way, so they will have knitted together with people in the campaign, and so when they come into the White House, they'll have those kinds of relationships. I was thinking, for example, in James Baker's case. Baker did not have a long history with Reagan, but he did go back to the campaign, as far as the debates were concerned. He was involved in that. So he had a relationship during the campaign, that then once he became Chief of Staff, even though his history was with Bush and with Ford, he still then knitted in, in some ways. Is that realistic or is that just an unusual case?

PB: I'm not even sure that it makes the case. I think it's more that you have to recognize that candidates are very careful to not appear in any way presumptuous that they're going to succeed in getting elected to whatever office they're seeking. So, for them to be seeking to knit into their campaign folks that they are going to have in the next administration is not something that's really occurring. There're always suggestions that the transition should start on or before the election, so that they can truly hit the ground running.

There's great, great caution in doing that in any campaign, because if that became public—that so-and-so was assuming the election and putting together his or her transition team and had already decided on the various cabinet officers—I think it would have a negative impact on a campaign. I think it's more, in the case of Jim Baker, that he was viewed by the Reagan campaign as a particularly effective advocate for candidate Bush, running against Reagan, and his talents were such that they wanted to bring the most talented people possible into the campaign. That's how he became part of the Reagan team, while still a very close friend of President Bush's, a great ally of President Bush's.

MK: But don't you think, after the Clinton administration, where they got off to such a wretched start—and it makes a difference having a poor start—that in a sense within at least one community, perhaps with the news media, in this coming campaign that it might be different in looking at the beginning, of how an administration starts, that there would be more of a sensitivity to start out well?

PB: Yes.

MK: Because they start out—

PB: After the election.

MK: What do you think—?

PB: That isn't to say it doesn't occur. I mean, I well know that there is some internal thinking going on. Human nature being what it is, if you're way ahead in the polls, you're going to—

[Interruption]

MK: I wanted to go back to the vetting process on paper in the Staff Secretary's Office. You've got vetting inside, with the various White House offices. You have vetting outside that goes through the Cabinet Secretary, that goes into government departments. Who does the vetting with Congress, with interest groups, and with local parties?



PB: Good question. Very good question. I should have actually mentioned that. There is an Assistant to the President for Public Liaison. So that individual, that person's office, he or she, is supposed to have an appreciation of what the various interest groups' views might be on this issue or that issue. So, the educational initiatives that Lamar Alexander proposed, to go back to your example, submitted and wanted to get to the President right away, suggestions for White House policy or administration policy; perhaps the impact on the VFW [Veterans of Foreign Wars], so in the vetting the proposals would also go to the head of the Office of Public Liaison, and that person, he or she, would be responsible for staffing out internally. I guess, going to your question: I don't believe that individual would typically call the president of the VFW and say, "What do you think...?" about some internal matter.

That person, or that person's staff, are already going to have a sense for the group's views. David Demarest, who was head of the Office of Public Liaison, would have someone who had responsibility for veterans' issues. That person might discreetly make some inquiries around, to get a feel for something in a particular instance but, typically, they'd have a pretty good feel already, and could quickly say whether or not that's a hot-button issue for the VFW. And you better take that into account, because that's the kind of thing the President will need to be aware of.

That's where the president is not well served, if you don't adequately "roundtable" proposals. The President would say, "Don't you think it's relevant for me to know that what you're proposing to me, White House staff, is something that's going to set the veterans' community on their ear, and they're going to denounce me in the press and go crazy? Don't you think it would have been helpful for me to have that information before I made my decision?" So that's why, when you sit down with any assistant to the president or any cabinet secretary and explain, "This is the process, and here's why we have the process," invariably their heads would nod and say, "I agree." That's why, as I've suggested, they had some of the problems you mentioned at the beginning of the Clinton administration because things were coming into the President from every quarter. Despite John's best efforts, they weren't going through a more well-defined process. So the opportunity to make sure you know the ins and outs—you can still make the decision if you decide that's still the way to go, but you want to be aware of what the implications are.

MK: And prepare for it. So, in a sense, the inside checks within the White House are really sometimes external because, if you're doing Public Liaison, you're looking at what's going to happen with groups. Political Affairs would give you a sense of what's going to happen at the local level, and Legislative Affairs is going to let you know on the Hill.

PB: Right. But by internally, I do mean internal. You're not vetting stuff outside. Otherwise, the President isn't being given an opportunity to make a decision, because things get out in the press, and questions are asked prematurely, prior to full analysis. Is it something the President has decided to support or not support?

MK: Does the Staff Secretary have any control over the schedule?

PB: The Staff Secretary's Office oversees the schedule. I should have mentioned that, and I didn't, because we had a unique situation—I don't know if it continues today or not—in that the Office of Scheduling is also under the Staff Secretary's Office for administrative purposes. That was the case in the Bush administration. But for the actual establishing of the schedule in my time, Andy Card, as Deputy Chief of Staff, chaired a Scheduling Committee which included the Staff Secretary and included the Director of Scheduling who reported to the Staff Secretary. But the Director of Scheduling had two reporting lines: one

was to the Deputy Staff Secretary, Andy Card, because Andy Card chaired the Scheduling Committee and then had a line also to the Staff Secretary for evaluations, reviews, administrative issues, hiring issues, that sort of thing. We had an actual Scheduling Committee that the Deputy Chief of Staff to the President chaired.

MK: Who else was on that committee? Was there anybody else?

PB: Sure. NSC would have a representative, and that individual was there to comment if a proposed event had some foreign policy implications, or required something from State or the Department of Defense as to the appropriateness of an event, advisability of an event. So NSC would be represented. The Office of Communications would be very much represented; very important to how we were communicating. The Office of Public Liaison was under Communications and commented on events that were being proposed by interest groups out there, saying, "We want the President to address our convention..."; "We'd like the President to attend this meeting." That's Office of Communications. The Press Office would also have a representative. So the major offices in the White House would serve on that committee. That committee would meet weekly, and then on a crisis basis as necessary.

MK: What was the President's role in reviewing the schedule of what he might be doing?

PB: The committee would put together a proposed agenda in some organized fashion. The Staff Secretary's Office would then make sure it accurately reflected what the thinking was. For example, if NSC hadn't participated in the meeting, for whatever good and sufficient reason, and the schedule that's being proposed had some national security implication, you'd make sure you had some input from the NSC, and then make sure that what was being sent to the President reflected that. Then you would send it the President for his review. President Bush was very active in reviewing those suggestions, for what events to do or not do. You would have instances where there would be disagreement about this or that. Then the first step would be: the chief of staff; the chief of staff says yea or nay on the proposal to the President. If the chief of staff says, "This is something let's let the President make the call on," the President would make the call and say, "Is it a go or not a go?" So, it was fairly collegial, recognizing that there were strong opinions, frequently, and strong personalities involved at many times. But it was always done in a collegial fashion. If, ultimately, there were disagreements that needed to go to the President's attention, you'd go forward in an orderly fashion with the pros and cons as clearly laid out as possible.

MK: One thing I was thinking about on items that would go directly to a president that may have a small circulation: would public opinion polls fall into that category? Polls that were generated by—I don't know how you all came up with them, whether you do them through the Republican National Committee or—

PB: Those things would come in largely through the Office of Political Affairs. So the circulation would be as I've described. The Counsel's Office was always involved. As a former member of the Counsel's Office, Deputy Counsel, I was very solicitous of the Counsel's Office, to make sure they saw everything, and President Bush supported that.

MK: So it wasn't a particular routing. It was a very narrow routing for polls.

PB: Chief of Staff. It was. I'm saying Counsel's Office, the Chief of Staff's office. That might be me, or another office. It would really depend. The Chief of Staff would always be included. [Inaudible].

MK: How often did polls come in?

PB: I don't recall. Did you meet with Ron Kaufman?

MK: I did. But it was a couple—

PB: [Inaudible]

MK: —sort of like that because I'm writing on the press and that sort of thing.

PB: Ron would be a good one to talk to about that.

MK: Can you go through a day? Give me an idea of what would be a normal day, when would you get up, and what's the process of preparing for a White House day?

PB: That's a good question. The Staff Secretary's Office—this was a surprise to me when I came into the office—was open until midnight every night. And it was open on Saturdays until five or six. So it was literally a six-day-a-week, very full day. I say midnight, because it was officially open until midnight, and I had another crew that came in for the graveyard shift, if you will.

MK: That's for the Staff Secretary, or for the White House generally?

PB: Well, the White House works very late. But the offices aren't necessarily officially open; it's just the Staff Secretary Office. The reasons are obvious, because things are coming in at any time of night. You could have something coming in from the Situation Room [when] you'd have to get to the President right away, maybe an overseas event of some import. You have legislation that needs to be signed. There are times when you walk across at midnight or later to see the President, to wake him up, to get him to sign this authorization or this continuing resolution, to keep the government running the next day, or something overseas.

Also, as I noted, the Staff Secretary's Office oversees scheduling. Beyond administration, we were the ones who put together the formal schedule itself. The schedule would come from the director of scheduling to the staff secretary. The staff secretary had to put together the book for the President for the next day. That book would include the schedule. Behind the schedule would be briefing papers for each of the events. If there was a speech included with one of the events, the schedule would also include the speech, and speech cards. So the schedule would be a book that would be put together, and frequently that's what kept the office open later, because briefing papers were coming in late, speeches are still being refined, and things are still occurring. So the book would be put together very often by the second team, that would come in later in the afternoon. Then that book would be taken over to the residence and left for the President there, so the President could wake up in the morning and have in front of him the schedule, and the back-up materials for the various events. It gives the President another bite of the apple, too – he has an opportunity to look at the book and say, "No, that speech doesn't say what I want to say; this event I want to change this way or that way." So the scheduling book was another large function of the office, that I didn't mention, that I should have. You reminded me by asking about the hours the office kept.

But a typical day, going to your question—John Sununu, as Chief of Staff, convened his senior staff meeting at 7:30 every morning in the Roosevelt Room. Frequently he would have earlier meetings in his office at 7:00, a smaller group, which may just be the deputy

- chief of staff and John Sununu, and perhaps the director of OMB. It could be a varying group.
- MK: Depending on the issues.
- PB: Depending upon the times. But 7:30 would be the senior staff meeting, which would be the assistants to the President.
- MK: How many people would be in the room for that one?
- PB: Probably, whatever the number of assistants to the President was. Maybe ten. There may be a couple of directors of various offices who also—like the director of scheduling—who worked for the staff secretary would also be attending, because the schedule is such a big part of that meeting. The Chief of Staff would say remind me again why are we doing this event, why are we doing that event. So, to be ready for a 7:30 meeting, typically, White House senior staff members and others would come in at seven, or before, because you'd want to look at what came in during the night, particularly in the Staff Secretary's Office.
- MK: What kinds of things would come in?
- PB: Things from the NSC. They would come in and need to go to the President. Things that may have come in; the economic reports may have come in in the night.
- MK: Would intelligence reports come in that early, or would they come in later?
- PB: That's an instance where some things would go directly to the President—President Bush particularly, as a former director of CIA, took very seriously and appreciated very much the daily intelligence reports that were given directly to him by somebody from the agency, very shortly after he got in. So a number of things would come in. You'd want to look at those; you'd also want to look at the paper.
- MK: What papers would you look at? Which papers would you read each morning?
- PB: Personally I looked at the *Washington Post* and I glanced at the *Wall Street Journal*. What I particularly would look at, and it was true of everyone, was a White House compilation of newspaper stories that were put together by the Press Office. You asked what would come in, that was one of those things that would come in as early as possible so we would get it before the staff meeting.
- So, seven thirty, you had the staff meeting and that would begin with the schedule. Everyone around the room would have a copy of the schedule. We'd look at it and have comments, additions, deletions, suggestions, modifications, all the kind of stuff you'd imagine would go on. Then there would be more of a forward look: "What's coming up that we should talk about as a group here?" and get the benefit of the cross-talk. So, often, things that come to the White House are not the easy decisions, or the decisions that are compartmentalized. Things that come to the White House are things that are cross-departmental, cross-office, and thus are more difficult. It might also be that they can be compartmentalized, but they are very difficult decisions and can benefit from lots of sides.
- MK: So, in a sense, that's how a White House is organized. If it's an effective White House staff, it's organized in such a way to deal with things that are multi-layered.















