

White House Interview Program

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INTERVIEWEE: W. HENSON MOORE

INTERVIEWER: Martha Kumar

[Disc 1 of 1]

MK: Can you tell me, first: when you came into the White House?

WHM: I came in February 1, 1992. President [George] Bush had just changed chiefs of staff, had asked John Sununu to leave and had asked Sam [Samuel K.] Skinner to come in—who had been Secretary of Transportation. I was overseas traveling; I was the Deputy Secretary for the Department of Energy. They had gone through an exercise. There was to be one Deputy Chief of Staff. There also had been one under Bush. Andy Card had been in that job; he left the White House and replaced Sam Skinner as Secretary of Transportation. So they were looking for a Deputy Chief of Staff. Supposedly—the story I was told was I was the best Deputy of the Deputy Secretaries, and they also wanted somebody with some political experience—somebody that had run for [public] office—because, indeed, we were entering the year of the re-election for Bush. I got a call that asked me to come back early. I was in [the country of] Oman when I got the call. So I did come back early from that trip, and went straight to the White House. I met with Sam Skinner, and met with the President and agreed to do it. So I started work on February 1, 1992.

MK: What did they tell you? What day did you talk to them?

WHM: It probably would have been near the end of January. I was on a three-week trip in the Middle East, for the Department of Energy, meeting with heads of state, any number of things, and also doing an assessment after the Gulf War in Kuwait. I got a call from Admiral [James] Watkins, who was the Secretary of Energy, saying the White House had called him, and what they wanted. He knew how to reach me, and so he did it for the White House. [He] said, “You need to come back. Cut your trip short and go do that.” I didn’t want to do it. I was very loyal to Admiral Watkins, and very committed to the work we were doing at the Department of Energy. But the Admiral was the archetypal career military officer. He said, “No. The Commander-in-Chief needs you at the White House and you have to do what he asks you to do.” So that’s what happened.

MK: What did they tell you they wanted you to do? What would be your portfolio?

WHM: I heard most of that from Sam Skinner. I heard little from the President. When I met with the President, it was sort of a matter of, “Henson, I’d like you to do this.” He had known me from years before, and even known my father before that, so he felt some familiarity with me. And, of course, he had seen me for three years in his administration. He said, “I need help. I would appreciate you coming to the White House and helping us run the White House and being the Deputy Chief of Staff.” Our conversation wasn’t very long; it was, like, maybe ten or fifteen minutes. It was sort of vague and sort of general. The details were between Skinner and myself. The details were: that Sam felt very strongly, as had the President—all of this is rumor; I wasn’t present for these things—that a change was needed. It was pretty well known the President was beginning to slip in the polls at that point, vis-à-vis Clinton. And I think that George W. Bush, now governor, had something to do with

convincing his father to let the existing chief of staff go. Indeed, he had gotten himself into some trouble. If you remember, [John Sununu] used a car to go up to a coin show or something, and had gotten himself in a little flap.

MK: Right. An auction; dentist.

WHM: I don't think the President was very happy about changing his Chief and Deputy Chief of Staff. I think he felt forced into doing all this. I don't think he was very happy about it. He didn't look very happy when he talked to me that evening. So I get the impression all of this had to be done to do something to turn the election around. And that's exactly the way Skinner presented it to me was the fact that the White House wasn't doing well. It was losing ground; it had to shape up and turn itself around; it had to re-invent itself; it had to really invigorate itself to win the forthcoming presidential campaign for re-election. So Sam was brought in to do that and I, in turn, was brought in to assist him in doing that.

I had known Sam and worked with him a little bit when he was Secretary and I was Deputy Secretary. We'd had some meetings together. I had gone to many a Cabinet meeting in place of the Admiral, and seen Skinner there. So we knew each other somewhat, not real closely, but we considered that we knew each other, and could work well together. So, what we decided [was] to divide up the duties: that Skinner would deal with appointments to offices and judiciary and handle all that. Skinner would deal with interfacing with the President on political questions, politics. He would be the lead with the campaign, the re-election campaign. I can't remember what else, but he'd probably deal with governors and people of that nature, that wanted to see the President, and couldn't. He wanted me to deal with the mechanics of the White House. Marlin Fitzwater was to report to me, the Press Secretary. The speechwriters were to report to me; scheduling was to report to me. I was to interface with the campaign on what should we be doing with the President, what should he be saying, [and] where should he be going?

As it turned out, Sam did not like to travel, so I did all the traveling with the President. Whenever we left the White House, for any reason—out of town, out of country or somewhere in town to give a speech—I was the one that went with him. When you travel with the President, you become the Chief of Staff at that point, because the staff is supposed to “move with the President.” For some reason, Sam did not want to do that, so that sort of became the area in which I worked: traveling with the President, overseeing what's going on; overseeing scheduling, speechwriting; overseeing press; overseeing congressional relations. Reporting came to both of us, both Skinner and me, as to what was going in the Congress. I spent a lot of time talking to congressmen, trying to assist the White House in every way.

So it was kind of a loose dividing of reporting responsibility. I don't remember there ever being anything in writing about all that, any kind of a written missal of some kind that Skinner issued to the staff. We had staff meetings. I've forgotten. They were Monday morning or whatever it was. Sam always presided over those unless, for some reason, he was not around. Then I did it. We would meet, he and I, usually—perhaps with Dick Darman or somebody else, Marlin Fitzwater—[and] would generally have breakfast in the morning at 7:00 or 7:30. We'd meet with the President right after the national security adviser, Brent Scowcroft, did. Generally the President would meet with him about 8:00 and then we'd meet with the President at 8:30, to go over what's going to be happening in the course of the day, to get any ideas or complaints or requests the President had. Then he would begin his scheduled day, which usually began around 9:00. Of course, the President usually had breakfast about 7:30 or 8:00. He was in his private office doing private

correspondence and writing his famous notes to people and things like that. He was in his office at 7:30 in the morning, doing that, and meeting with Brent at 8:00 and with us at 8:30.

Then, Skinner and I started meeting with the campaign every evening. We would meet with Bob Teeter, who was the campaign chairman and with the pollster—I've forgotten his name right now—Dick Darman, Fitzwater, myself and Skinner. The six of us met every evening at 7:00 to talk about the campaign, how it's going, and to interface the running of the White House with it. I know who else, the Deputy in the campaign—my counterpart, Fred Malek—also met with us. Anyway, we would meet every evening.

We would meet every evening, the six of us. And then Fred and I normally would do the interfacing over the telephone in the course of the day about where he ought to be going, where the campaign thought the President ought to be going, looking for events and setting up speeches, and then determining the message and speechwriting and all of that.

An election year, in a White House, when a President is running for re-election, is probably different from other years. I wouldn't know much about the other years because I was there for the re-election.

MK: I was going to ask you about them.

WHM: It's very tumultuous. It's a very difficult time, because you're trying to deal with the affairs of state and at the same time get the President re-elected. So you've got two demands on the president's time whereas, I'm assuming, if a president is lucky enough to serve eight years, that I would assume seven of those eight years he's not worried about those kinds of things; he's worried about his job. But, in that year, he's running for re-election, he's worried about getting elected, as well as doing his job.

MK: How does one do that, do both things? Is there a lot of conflict in it? How do you meet both demands?

WHM: It's not easy. It's very difficult. And President Bush didn't like it. He wanted to be President of the United States. He didn't like running for re-election. He didn't like any time being taken away from the affairs of state. He was very dedicated to being a good President and he was at his best when he was on the telephone talking to foreign heads of state. He just had a working relationship with them—I saw it in the Gulf War, when I was at the Department of Energy. I was over there briefing him the morning after the invasion, on what it meant to oil supplies and what Hussein was going to do. He's on the phone talking to a half dozen heads of state while I'm in there briefing him.

That was his strong point, and that's what he enjoyed doing, and he liked doing. Of course, there's always some event going on somewhere around the world to keep a president occupied and that's what George Bush, the President, enjoyed doing more than anything else. Because, of course, he had a Democratic Congress, so he was sort of in the same position this President [Bill Clinton] is in—as far as establishing any kind of legislative initiatives. They're probably just not going to happen. So you spend more of your time doing other things, and playing a defensive action with the Congress.

He did not like to campaign—I would assume. I was with him all that year when he was doing campaign things: certainly he did his best at it; certainly he enjoyed it; certainly he put on a good face. But if you asked him what he'd rather be doing, he'd rather be attending to

affairs of state. I can understand that. I've run for re-election in my career, too. You sort of feel a little resentful for having to do that. If you're a good president and doing a good job, why do you have to go through all this stuff? That was particularly true in the early spring of 1992, when we were having to deal with Pat Buchanan in a Republican primary. There was a great deal of resentment in the White House toward Buchanan and toward this whole "...why do we have to do this?" It was taking away valuable time from running the country, and also, valuable time of dealing with the real opponent, Clinton. Because, you couldn't do that. You had to deal with Buchanan until the President had enough primaries under the belt—Super Tuesday I remember being the key one in the south—to where he locked up enough delegates, and there really wasn't a primary challenge anymore.

In terms of the staff running this, all of the staff wants to be involved in the campaign; it's only natural. And only a few of them were. I would say there were only three or four of us that interfaced with the campaign. However, we needed to work closely with the campaign to be sure that, where we could, we were maximizing the President's political efforts. When he wasn't dealing with a foreign matter, or whatever, and he wanted to make a point about a certain issue or a certain initiative or something he was doing in the executive branch of the government, then we would begin to think about: "How can we use that politically? How can we find the right audience to deliver that message to, the right town, the right state important to us politically, the right people on the stage?" All of this became critical, probably a little more critical than in a non-election year, of where the president would go.

You do the same thing; you're always looking for photo ops [photographic opportunities]. You're always looking for opportunities to get the President before the American people on the tube [TV], and to present him in the best light, and have him getting across his message to the American people. But, in a campaign year, you do it a little more acutely, and you do it in the sense that you really want to be sure you're getting this message across. Your choices of messages sometimes are developed by the polling data, as opposed to something a president wants to talk about, that may not even be an issue in the polls, but he wants to talk about it—to educate the American people, or to exhibit leadership. You spend your time worrying about the things the polls tell you [that] you ought to be worrying about, and then, secondly, your backdrop is where you ought to be doing it to get votes, key states. Like, we spent time in Michigan, Pennsylvania—states that were very key to the President winning re-election. So, there is extra pressure, a great deal of extra pressure, on a re-election White House staff.

MK: Did you deal with party people, at the state level, and at the national level, as well in your job?

WHM: I didn't do much of that. If they were high enough up, or they were really, really very important, Skinner might very well see them. Every White House has political affairs. Ron Kaufman had that job. Generally, that was left to Ron to do, to interface with party functionaries and whatever. If it was somebody really key, we'd get them in to see the President. But that was pretty rare.

MK: How many people were in the office?

WHM: Which office?

MK: The Chief of Staff's office?

WHM: The chief of staff had an assistant, formerly known as a secretary. I was right across the hall from him, and I had one, the one I had in Congress and the one with me at DOE [Department of Energy]. Between the chief of staff, deputy chief of staff, that's four. Then he had one additional aide in a little office across the hall. That would be five. And there may have been an assistant in there, part-time or full-time. So, I would say, between five and six, counting the chief of staff and the deputy chief of staff.

MK: When you were dealing with members of Congress, what would it normally be about?

WHM: We had a good—I'll tell you his name in a minute [Nick Calio]. The guy that was the Assistant to the President for Congressional Relations was in charge of that. While he reported to me and to Sam Skinner, there was not a lot going on in the Congress—except we were trying to keep things under control, and not let something get away from us or embarrass us for the re-election campaign. Generally, we'd talk about these things in staff meetings, or he would come down. He was upstairs. He would come down and we'd sit around and talk about it. Where there were key people involved, and I knew them and had served with them, I would volunteer to make the calls to them, and call them. So I was used probably as an additional lobbyist, in that regard, to make a call. I would get calls from Congress, too.

Newt Gingrich was relegated to me. Sam Skinner didn't want to talk to him and, if you know Newt Gingrich, Newt Gingrich is a brilliant individual, but also abrasive. He's got an idea a minute. And out of the sixty he has in the course of an hour, probably two are worth listening to, but you've got to listen to all sixty to find the two. So, I was the one that would take Newt's calls. Newt, of course, was at that time the ranking Republican in the House. So people like that had a direct line to me. Key senior Republicans would call me directly if they knew me or had served with me. It was, "Hey, I know somebody in the White House I can get through [to]...", kind of thing—rather than going through Congressional Relations, which was considered formalistic and went through steps. "If you really want to talk to somebody close to the President, get hold of Henson...", kind of thing. So I would field those incoming calls like that.

MK: Did you talk to governors, as well?

WHM: Not particularly. Later, after the White House made yet another change in chiefs of staff, that became an assignment of mine. So I did then. I don't remember talking to many governors before that. In the time I was Deputy Chief of Staff, again, most of that was done by the Government Relations Office or the Political Affairs Office, or whatever. So we didn't do a lot of that. Every now and then, if one was coming to town, or was in town or something like that, we would work it in. If it was an important state, or something like that, we'd try to get them in—to tell the President hello or something. It became my issue then.

Also, every meeting the President had, I would attend. Either Sam or I, or both, but generally, always me. No matter who he was meeting with, one of the two of us was always in the Oval Office with the President, unless he decreed it otherwise, and wanted it to be a personal meeting.

MK: What was the purpose of it, and what was the value?

WHM: The purpose was several-fold. One was to be there to run interference for the President, if necessary. Secondly, it was to see that the President was staffed, that he knew right before the meeting what this was all about. You'd go in and tell him that, or whatever. And it was

also for continuity, so that there was another person there, who heard what went on in the meeting. If this person [i.e., visitor] would go out and say something to the press or whatever—he had been all by himself with the President—you don't want the President to go out and correct what's in the press. You want somebody else to be able to do that. I would say: you never want anybody meeting privately with a president. It's just not the way you best serve him or protect him.

MK: Did you find there were instances where you would have to put out corrections?

WHM: No. I don't remember any specific example. Most of the people we got in to see him, particularly in a sensitive year like an election year, we didn't really have any problems. But we would talk to them a little bit ahead of time and warn them about the press, and that sort of thing. Then Marlin Fitzwater could sometimes visit with them—sometimes after the meeting—to make sure they could handle the press. If anybody of any notoriety came in to the West Wing, they passed the press corps sitting out there watching; the press corps would love to pounce on them on their way out, and try to get something out of them that would make the news that evening. So, between Marlin and I, or between Marlin, Sam and I, whoever went in to see the President, we always sort of counseled them to prevent anything from blowing up, or any kind of flap from occurring. The group you can't control very well are members of Congress, because they come in, and they want to go right to the cameras, and they do it every time they come in and visit. But, as I say, in an election, we tended to have the people in seeing the President who could be trusted and who, in fact, would handle things fairly well.

MK: Were there times when you had to run interference for the President?

WHM: Every now and then there'd be somebody in and they might—not running interference, it's protecting him in some way. It's just that they might say something that was beyond the scope of what the meeting was, and the President might look a little perplexed. At that point you'd step in and say, "We're really here to talk about such and such here today. The President is really not prepared..." or, "This is not a subject he really..."—you do something like that to steer the thing back away from something tangential, back to the subject of the meeting.

MK: Do people try to get in to see the President, perhaps with something they think they can get in with, and then bring up something else?

WHM: I never really saw much of that. I would assume there are cases like that, but that's pretty unsophisticated, because you'll do that just once. You'll never get into the White House again. Getting in to see a President is an extremely difficult thing to do. It has to go through all kinds of levels of staffing including, at the end of the day, me. There are all kinds of screening levels. Somewhere, this request comes in from somebody; it comes in from a business group and there's an Assistant to the President for Business Relations, or whatever, that looks at it. Or it comes in from a veterans' group, or it comes in from some politician. And there's somebody there would run that trap first, and looks through it and looks into that individual, and carefully looks at it, and whatever. Then, it will go to the scheduler and they'll do a second check. And then, probably, Marlin Fitzwater's office, if it's any kind of photo-op or press thing, he'll look at it. Then, ultimately, it comes to me, finally at the end of all that screening. It's been recommended by A, B, C and D that we bring so and so in to see the President at a certain time about a certain subject. I could veto it or approve it. So it goes through a lot of checking. If somebody can get through all of that and then pull

something surprising in a meeting with the President, then shame on us or shame on him, or both. But it sure won't happen but once; that person would never get in the door again.

In an election year you're especially sensitive to those things, because you don't want anything to turn into an embarrassment to the President. You're trying to get him re-elected, so you watch that even closer. Sometimes you have press come in with the meeting with the President. Heads of state will come in; they'll bring the press into the Oval Office for a photo-op. They'll take pictures of the two sitting in these two chairs like this, and they're visiting with each other. They [the press] might shout some questions. And, generally speaking, both heads of state can refuse to answer any questions unless they've agreed ahead of time that they'll address a certain point. Then, the press is herded out of the office, and they have the meeting. So, there are times when the press is actually in there for a portion of the meeting, but very seldom would you have the press covering an actual meeting with the President. I can't remember ever seeing it happen.

MK: I can't either. Are there times when people come in—they come in for a specific purpose and they want to tell the President a particular thing? Say they want to tell him they think his legislation is not good, for some particular reason. Have you found instances where they came in and they just couldn't say it, that there's a certain impact—?

WHM: Absolutely. Well, it's more with the staff than I've found with people [outside]. But you have hit upon something—the emperor has no clothes—that could be applied to a president of the United States. People will gather right in the anteroom, right before you go in to the Oval Office, and they will be very demonstrative: "...the President has to be told that speech stunk... the President has to be told he has to come out and do something on this...we're going to go in there and do it." Of course, I'm going in with them, having staffed the President ahead of time that, "You're going to have this meeting; these people want to talk to you about this, either your staff or supporters...", or whatever. They'll get in that Oval Office and, I mean, the whole thing just evaporates. It just evaporates. Something about going into the Oval Office with the President of the United States, they just suddenly lose all the demonstrativeness. It just evaporates. I've seen it happen over and over again. I've come out shaking my head.

I kept a diary of the year I was in the White House. I've never done that in my life. But an old friend of mine, an English teacher, urged me to do so as a gift to my grandchildren some day. I'll never let the press look at it; it's not for writing a book or anything else. It's just something that's so painful I've never opened it since I wrote the last line in it. I wrote every day; I kept a log every day, of what happened. There are things in there that I think historians might have an interest in, because, sometimes, it was just me and the President, and the one or two people on the other side there. I was probably the only one that went back and recorded really what happened that day. "I bet I recorded this kind of a result." I don't know how many occasions I've seen that.

MK: Can you think of some of the occasions and just how they played themselves out?

WHM: One of them. One of them is at Marlin Fitzwater's expense. I'll never forget this as long as I live. We had a staff meeting in Sam's office. Those meetings were of the senior White House staff. So that would be Marlin Fitzwater, me, Sam Skinner, Dick Darman, head of OMB [Office of Management and Budget]. Who else? There might be one other person in there. We would decide on a course of action we really want to recommend to the President.

MK: Would it be Congressional Relations?

WHM: Sometimes. If it involved Congress, obviously. I've forgotten what the incident was. We agreed; we all agreed strongly to go in and tell the President, "He needs to do such and such."

So we decided this is what's going to have to be done. So Sam said, "Okay, Henson, you and Marlin go in and tell the President." So off we go down the hall. Marlin says, "We've got to do this, got to do this..." whatever. Marlin is a funny guy; funny funny. We got into a flap somewhere and Marlin once told me, "Henson, I guess, in a tough fight, don't count on me." He said it flippantly. Anyway, we go in to see the President and present this.

I'm laying it out and laying it on thick, "You've got to do this." And I learned something about President Bush. I had gone over and had a private meeting with Jim Baker after I'd been on the job about two weeks, because nobody knew the President better than Jim Baker. I said, "Jim, how do I do this job?" He had been Chief of Staff to [Ronald] Reagan and he knew all this stuff. I'll never forget. He said, "Henson, he doesn't like being handled. You can't handle George Bush like you would a candidate, tell him where you want him, what stage, what to say, what to do. He just resents that. He rebels at that. The only time he'll ever do it is when he's looking over an abyss. When he knows: If he doesn't do it, it's a free fall into obscurity."

So I learned, that day, what Jim Baker was trying to tell me. I can't remember if I had the meeting with Jim before or after this incident. Anyway, I learned that day. So I'm laying it out to the President. He's sitting back in his seat. Bush never cursed, never abused anybody, was the finest gentleman I've ever run across in politics or any place else. He just looked up, "I don't think I'm going to do that. I don't want to do that." I kept pushing. I turned to Marlin and said, "Marlin, give me some support in this, because we just left this meeting where everyone agreed." Marlin said, "I agree, Mr. President, I think you're actually right about that." I just about exploded. I kind of bit my lip. The answer was no. We went back out in the anteroom; I turned on [Marlin] and was just about ready to eat him alive, and he said, "Henson, I told you: never count on me," and he walked off laughing. So it was a perfect example of that evaporation. I can think of other examples.

The President was close to [James] Brady who was Secretary of the Treasury at that point. He was close to a number of people. And they'd come in, "We're got to tell the President we've got to do something," or whatever. They'd go in there and the conversation would just drift off into, "Great speech you gave yesterday!" and never really make the point they made in the anteroom.

It's just something about the Oval Office; there's something about a president being in the Oval Office, there's something about the aura of the power of a president, that people just won't say what really needs to be said to a president—except a very choice few people who are so close to him and were so close to him before he was president that they can overcome it—or they have such a position of trust and respect held for them by the president that they don't feel intimidated. But just about everybody I ever saw go in there—I never went in there with him with Jim Baker, who was the one person I would say clearly the President had respect for, clearly he had known the President forever and clearly would probably tell the President what he needed to hear. He may have been the only one. I don't know who else would have been in that category. But all the people I ever went with to the President, I never saw it.



MK: Did you then have a role then of telling the President, “Mr. President, while the people who came in indicated maybe mild support or whatever, outside their viewpoint was different?”

WHM: Sometimes. If it was really important, or if we really knew enough in our own right to underline it, to go back and underline and go back and do it. I did that on occasion, and I wasn’t successful at it. I tried several times with President Bush.

Another example was Boyden Gray—who was the Counsel to the President—was convinced the President needed to veto something. I think it was on a line-item-veto; [he needed] to veto something and just test it, go to the courts. We thought that would be a great thing to do with conservatives; it would demonstrate this President was tough. Subsequently, I think the Republican Congress under Clinton passed a line-item-veto that’s in existence now; back then it wasn’t. It was something that all Republican presidents were talking about. I remember they made an effort, and it wasn’t a very good one, to convince the President of that and he said, “No, I don’t want to do that.”

So I took occasion—I was traveling with him. In fact, we were in my hometown of Baton Rouge, Louisiana. We were holding, waiting either before or after a speech he was giving. I brought it up—unfinished business because they didn’t do a good job—to my detriment. He turned to me and he said, “I’m not going to do anything that cheapens the Office of the Presidency. If you can give me some good legal opinions that indicate we’ve got a chance to win on this thing, then I’ll consider it. But if all you’re trying to do is get me to do something that—Let’s just go see what happens, let’s just take a flier in the dark and it will make conservatives happy and help us in the re-election again but ultimately we’ll probably lose the case—I’m not going to do that.” He said it in a pretty forceful way. We were kind of careful about what we’d take back to him. If somebody didn’t do it right—it had to be something we really felt strongly about, and maybe even had been urged by other members of the staff or the White House to do, to bring it up again.

Sam Skinner and I were not that close to the President. [In] neither one of us, I don’t think, did the President have that close respect for, like a Jim Baker, to where he’d sit and listen to us. We were staff and he listened to us politely but, if his initial instinct was different from mine or Sam’s, he’d go with his initial instinct. We did not have the ability to turn him from that. I think that’s why, at the very end of the day, Jim Baker was brought back in as Chief of Staff: there really was only one man the President probably would listen to.

MK: Do you think that a president is aware of the impact of bringing people into the Oval Office?

WHM: Yes. I’m sure he is. Excuse me. Is he aware of that element, of people not saying—?

MK: Yes.

WHM: I don’t know. It’s hard for a president to understand that. Bush had been around the Oval Office for so long—eight years as Vice President—that I’m sure he saw it. I’m sure he probably did. I think somebody like President Clinton coming into office, not having that experience—it might have taken him a long time to ultimately come to that conclusion.

MK: Were there times when you could use the Oval Office as a resource in a political situation—

WHM: Absolutely. We did it all the time.

MK: —with members of Congress?

WHM: Sure. All the time. That was the ultimate weapon a president had, to have somebody come to the Oval Office for a meeting. That's something few members of Congress ever get. I've got a picture up there of Reagan and [me]. In the first three months that Reagan was President, I was invited over to do that very thing, just one-on-one. Ken Duberstein was in the meeting as the Deputy Chief of Staff. He was Deputy Chief of Staff then, I think. He was sitting in that meeting, not in the picture. But you're darn right; that is something you use politically. So we would use that. The campaign would let us know who they thought in a campaign year was important to get in with the President. We'd go through all this screening and then we'd find a time to do it and get them in.

The other thing, of course, was for the President to go out to their town and do a fundraiser for them, or some kind of political event. But the White House—definitely the same aura that causes people to have tribulations or hesitations about saying what they really think, the opposite side of that coin is: it's a great tool to get somebody in there. They are flattered beyond end, and you always have to have a picture taken. How many people's homes do you go in, and there's a photograph like that, sitting there, with the President in the Oval Office. It's a trophy. It's something everybody loves to have. The truth of the matter is, we probably did that, on an average day, five or six times a day. Figure how many days a year, there's a lot of them out there. But when you look at how many people there are in the country—

MK: At the end of the Reagan administration, I was doing some interviewing. I was sitting in the lobby and there was just this long line of people waiting to go through and do the pictures.

Can you think of some times that the setting was used for some kinds of negotiations with members of Congress, perhaps, or with some others, where some actual deal-making was done, discussions of hammering out compromises?

WHM: I'd been in those meetings when I was a member of Congress, not often. Usually it was very high-up people, chairmen of committees, Speaker of the House, ranking people on committees, that kind of thing. But I've been in a couple of these. I was in one with President [Gerald] Ford. I was in one with Reagan on taxes, and then I was there in the White House in the Bush years as Deputy Chief of Staff, and I think I saw it once. Yes, it's done. But that, again, has to be carefully orchestrated. It has to be something that Congressional Relations pushes very hard; they feel like they can control it and then recommend it very strongly. And then, of course, scheduling and I would get involved in it. On something like that the chief of staff would probably get involved in it as well. The effort has to be to try to make something happen, or break a log jam, or you wouldn't put the President in that kind of a position. It didn't happen much in 1992, because that was a presidential election year, like next year is going to be; not a lot is going to happen, except political posturing in the Congress. So there weren't many bona fide things going on. I can think of a case where that probably happened.

Under the Bush Administration the Clean Air Amendments were passed. Very controversial. Republicans didn't like it. The Democrats were pushing for it. Bush came out in favor of it and I'm confident—. I can't remember; it may have been a meeting like that, as an onlooker from the Department of Energy. But I'm pretty sure there were meetings like that, on the Clean Air Act. I know of no others, and I can't remember any when I was Deputy Chief of Staff, for the simple reason: there was no legislation moving to amount to anything.

MK: What other venues did you use with the President, and what kinds of circumstances, when you were setting up meetings for a president?

WHM: Well, obviously you had the big east room for big events. And we did some of those.

MK: What kinds of purposes would you have for those?

WHM: A bill signing or a major announcement of a speech, or something like that. We would have small groups lunch with the President in his private little luncheon quarters. That occurred on several occasions.

MK: What kind of groups would be brought in there?

WHM: No so much groups, but individuals. It's a very small dining room. It seated like six people. So it would be the President, again, the Deputy Chief of Staff or Chief of Staff, maybe one other of the White House staffers. So you're down to the other side being one, two, three other people, max. It might have been key members of Congress, or there might have been a key governor coming to town, some key political figure, or something like that. Then we had the White House mess. That was always a neat thing: to invite somebody over for breakfast or for lunch at the White House mess. The President didn't generally join you in those things. He generally took his meals in his private dining room right next to his private office.

The office layout when I was there, is in the West Wing: on the southeast corner was the Oval Office. Then, right next to that was a very small office, half the size of this one, which was the President's private office. Next to that was this dining room which was probably a third smaller than this room; maybe half the size of this room. Then, I think, next to it was his private secretary, and then—next to it through a major wall—was my office, then a receiving area, and then the Chief of Staff's office, which was on the southwest corner. That was the line up of that southern wall of the west wing, when we were there. I think I read somewhere that the private dining room has been converted by Clinton into something else.

MK: There's a little kitchenette that's there now, where people go for coffee and what-not.

WHM: I don't know if it is still there or not. The White House chef would serve and, I remember the food was excellent in those luncheons we'd have with the President in that private dining room. Very often, the President would eat at his desk or in his private office, or something. But we tried to use as much of that time as we could with him for political purposes in a campaign year. And he was always good about it. He never raised hell about his schedule. Bush was not a complaining, abusive person. He'd put his foot down on some things, all right, but his scheduler — Kathy Super — had been somebody who had been with him a long time. So he trusted her: anytime she suggested something and I signed off on it and it came to him, he generally went along with the schedule.

MK: So you didn't have a large meeting on schedules?

WHM: The scheduler might. She and I would meet and, sometimes, with a representative of the campaign—to talk about where we want to go, what we want to do, this kind of thing. She is the one that received all the requests, and could go back through those to see what fit, what our needs were. From time to time we'd initiate one. If we had to get into Detroit and

do this or that, and there was no request, the scheduling office would make inquiries about initiating a meeting there.

MK: How did the chief's spot work? You were there under Baker as well as—

WHM: How did the chief's spot work? Yes. It was very different; it was very different.

MK: Can you compare the kinds of ways in which the place worked, and the way it's organized?

WHM: Skinner was open. He was collusive; collaborative is a better word. He would have the staff in his office for meetings. He would preside over the full staff meetings in the Roosevelt room. And he was really open about what was going on with the staff and talking about it. He did not enjoy, as I say, that relationship—while he had a good one with the President, it wasn't the same kind of relationship Baker had with the President. I don't think anybody had that kind of relationship except Baker.

So, when things really deteriorated further by June, July and August when the President kept sinking in the polls and it was obvious that something again had to be done to save the presidency or to get it re-elected, everybody knew there was only one person who could do that. It wasn't that Skinner had failed. It wasn't anybody's fault. Of course, I got some blame for that. Skinner got some blame for that, and various people that write articles and columns—that's the way Washington works. The President is never at fault; it's the staff around him. They failed him, and whatever. So when you're staff, you accept that; you fall on your sword for him. You take the blows for him. The fact of the matter is that the campaign wasn't being run well, the President was not addressing the economy, and people were worried. Our kind of voters were losing jobs. Mid-level managers were being laid off through mergers and all that stuff, right-sizing. That term was developed about that time. There was this great fear that the economy was going over an abyss.

Now, all the real economic data said that wasn't true, and it was going to turn around, but ultimately, it didn't turn around in time. You remember that, right after the election, it did start turning around. So the economists were right; the timing was off. What kept the timing from happening before the election was this fear, the psychological factor. People just couldn't accept the fact it was getting better, because everything they saw around them was getting worse. I've forgotten; the Conference Board was doing their consumer confidence numbers which were way down, whereas the economists are saying, there's no problem here, everything else is turning around the right way, and whatever. But consumer confidence was still low. It was a combination of all these things, that the President was not doing well. It wasn't the fact that he had a bad staff, or an incompetent staff, or changing the staff was going to change it. Changing the staff didn't change it. They changed the staff twice from Sununu to Skinner and then from Skinner to Baker, and it still didn't change. So it really wasn't staffing. Having been there, I'll accept my share of the blame. We were to go there to make the place run well enough to get him re-elected. Did we do that? The answer is, no; he wasn't re-elected. In the business world, you either make a profit or you don't; in the political world, you either win a race or you don't. That's the bottom line. The bottom line is: we failed.

When Baker came in, he didn't want to. He absolutely didn't want to. He enjoyed being Secretary of State. The last thing he wanted to do was go back into this. I don't think Bush wanted him to come over, because Bush didn't like the idea of once again getting the man [Baker] close to him who could save him from himself, and all that sort of stuff. That was flying around. And from the best I could see, there was some truth to it, that neither one of

them wanted to do this, but they both realized that if anybody could do it, it would [be] Baker. So the President asked Baker to come in, and he did, about the first of September, as I remember, right before the election. You never saw Baker as Chief of Staff. The staff never saw him. Never did he attend a staff meeting; never did he confer with anybody. He brought in with him two or three people that had been long political associates of his, and those four ran the whole thing, and everybody else took orders. Nobody else was asked, "What do you think?" Nobody was asked for their opinions. It was, "Here's the order of the day; now go do it!" I'm not being critical. This is an observation. That's the difference in the two styles.

Now I don't know how Baker operated when he was Chief of Staff to Reagan.

MK: It was different.

WHM: I think Baker felt, "Look, we're down to two months to go before the election; I haven't got time." At that point Baker was running the election, too, really from the White House. He said, "I haven't got time. I've got to focus. I've got sixty days. I've got to focus on these few things." And he had a few aides around him who would take care of, and do, the other things. So it was a very different but also a real pressured time, where there really wasn't time to run things normally. So I don't know if that's Baker's normal way of running things or not, but that's the way he did it those two months he was there. I had no trouble with him whatsoever because I, too, had known him for a long time. I'd known him back when he was campaign manager for Ford. I was a member of Congress and Co-Chairman of the Ford campaign in Louisiana, so I've known him for a long time, and have great respect for him. He is one that called me and convinced me to stay in the White House, and told me what he wanted me to do for him, and I did it: which was to deal with all the politicians and the governors and whatever and try to line them up behind the President, and, "Do what you can do." So I did that. I went over and took over that operation and reported back to Baker about once a week. I would get a reply back every now and then, but the news I was giving him was bad. It was corroborating the polling numbers and everything else. You talk to the leading Republican member of the Missouri House of Representatives, and he tells you that Missouri went for Bush the first time, but it doesn't look good from everything he sees; you're talking to the governor and all these people. I called them each week. I had a list I went down, of the key states, and I would call these guys once a week: "What do you see this week? What's going on politically? What do you think? What can we do?" I'd feed that back in to Baker.

MK: How did the place work? Since it's so meeting-driven, and things tend to be integrated.

WHM: At that point in time, there was no agenda but the election. There was nothing going on in the Congress; there were no administrative acts or new programs, or anything else. It was strictly politics. This is all following the convention. I went to the convention in August in Houston as the Deputy Chief of Staff with Bush. When we came back right after Labor Day or about Labor Day, whatever it was, it was about that time-frame Baker took over. So it wasn't but two months. There wasn't anything else going on; it was strictly, one hundred per cent, politics. That's all anybody was thinking about.

MK: In looking at the way in which the various units were organized and reported in to you, as far as communications was concerned—that seems to be one of your areas—how did you deal with them? With Fitzwater, how often did you talk with him?

WHM: Fitzwater was such a pro. Fitzwater had such a rapport with the President; the President loved him. Fitzwater could get whatever he wanted with the President. Him reporting to me was largely ceremonial. In fact, he would deal with the President and, generally, Fitzwater would talk to Sam and I together about any kind of major thing going on. Fitzwater wouldn't go do that behind our back, or around us, with the President, but the President wouldn't call me about a press matter; he would call Fitzwater. When Fitzwater and I really would work together would be when we decided we were going to take the President to some place out of town to do something. We'd call Fitzwater in to say, "We're going to go to..." wherever it is—Detroit or New York City—"we're going to do this speech on this subject; we need to get some press. We turn it over to you." Then he would contact the campaign press people and see to it [that] things, like press lines, were set up. We had a good working relationship, but Marlin really didn't work through me, except in those kinds of instances.

MK: What about David Demarest, and Communications?

WHM: He was really speechwriting at that point, as I remember it. Yes. David did work through me. As we would try to decide what the message was going to be to work it. David was the chief of that; he was the head of all of that, of trying to build the message. I envy presidents who have great speechwriters, and can give good speeches, because "it ain't easy." Reagan was good at it, and Clinton is very good at it. I'll watch Clinton give a speech from a new viewpoint, having been on the inside, trying to get those kinds of speeches produced. And we, for all the reasons we've talked about why the President lost, we just never could find the right kind of message that resonated. We never could find the right kind of speechwriter. We went through a whole bunch of them. Tony Snow, who was doing extremely well, was brought in by Sununu. And Tony was good, but what Tony had an interest in, at that point, was not what the polls were telling us we had to really go talk about. The people that we had were good speechwriters but nobody that could turn those phrases and the President was not that good a speaker. We just never could deliver a speech—as a matter of fact, I even met one day with the woman who wrote his speech at the convention. What's her name? Famous woman speechwriter.

MK: Peggy Noonan.

WHM: The one and only time I met Peggy Noonan was in my office. We were trying to bring her back in to help do some speeches for the President; [she] had a substantial ego and wasn't interested in being involved. Needless to say, nothing ever happened to that. But we were trying to find somebody that could do those kinds of things, and we were never able to do it.

I hate speechwriting. I'm not a speechwriter. I have to deliver speeches here, probably three or four a month, and I hate it. I hate having to read a speech, work on a speech and think through a speech. I'd much rather go do something extemporaneously. I think, while Bush was always very nice about it, he was a great speaker for as little time as he spent preparing a speech. We would get the speech to him after it had gone through all the speechwriting, and all of us going over the speechwriting, and all of it, to make sure it had the right message. We'd give it to him, and he would work on it maybe a half-hour, maybe an hour, to make edits and changes in it. Then we would redo it in final form. On the day of the event he would look at it, maybe once or twice, to read through it before he would deliver it. He might make a few more edits and changes to it. But he didn't spend a great deal of time working on a speech, in terms of delivery or content.

I'm told by Marlin—on Air Force One, the senior staff office had four chairs. There were only ever three of us. There was Marlin, me and, generally, Brent Scowcroft, the National Security Adviser. That's where we were. Marlin and I would talk on these flights because the President's office was just up by the bow of the aircraft. I would go up with [the {President}] to his office and try to get him to work on his speech, and he wouldn't do it. He was doing things he wanted to do, writing letters to people or things he considered very important. I'd come back and sit down and he [Marlin] would say, "You didn't have any luck, did you?" He'd laugh and I'd say no. He said, "That's just President Bush. That's his style." We'd be an hour out, forty-five minutes out from landing, to get in the motorcade to give the speech, and the President would, maybe fifteen minutes out, would get the speech out to look at it and refresh himself. Fitzwater said Reagan would spend that whole hour working on the speech, on delivery. But then Reagan had been an actor. Reagan knew the importance of delivering a line properly, and all that. Marlin said all Reagan's mannerisms were things he had very carefully thought about and rehearsed. With Bush there was none of that, absolutely none of that.

Bush was a good speaker, considering how little time he spent preparing for a speech. But we were never able—we didn't hit any home runs on my watch on speeches. We all felt badly about that. I don't know whether it was because the speaker wasn't that good, I don't know whether it was the fact that no matter what he said it wasn't going to score, because he was sinking in the polls, and the people were already making up their minds that the President didn't care about their problems, and they weren't receptive to what he was saying. I don't know what the reason was. I can just tell you that I look at a number of the speeches Clinton has given, and I don't remember any Bush gave that were that memorable other than the famous speech at the 1988 convention which was the best one he ever gave: "A kinder, gentler country" and "Read my lips." That was probably Bush's best speech. We never rose to that level again.

MK: I guess, also working in that is, in both Clinton's and Reagan's case, they liked to show in their speeches some emotional vulnerability of themselves, which Bush did not.

WHM: That's right.

MK: Bush never wanted to put himself in that position. A radio reporter was telling me about the speech he was giving to the families of the people who had died in the U.S.S. *Iowa*. He said he had gone through the advance text of the speech and he had marked out the one section that was an emotional section. So he said he had his recorder ready to hit it at that point because that's the cut that he wanted. He said it got to that point and Bush skipped right over it.

WHM: And that's maybe one reason we weren't very good, because the speechwriters knew or wouldn't write, those kinds of things. Bush had a very high sense of principle of what a President was to do and not to do. I respect the man greatly for it. He would not do anything to cheapen the office or to use the office or to play politics. He just wouldn't do it. He never would talk about his daughter who died of leukemia. He wouldn't talk about it publicly. That was something private.

There were a couple of things that we knew were—. I never will forget one night I was working late, and a groundskeeper knocked on the glass door of my office that went out onto the south lawn. I opened the door and he said, "Is the President here?" And I wondered about that: why is a groundskeeper asking for the President? It was after dark so I knew they weren't groundskeeping. I said, "I don't know where he is. He may have gone to

the quarters.” He said, “Oh. We were waiting to play horseshoes with him. He usually comes out and plays horseshoes when he’s in town.” So I said, “I don’t know.” The next day I said something about this to Bush: “Mr. President, you play horseshoes out here with the groundskeepers?” He said, “Yes. We’ve got a league out there. It’s down behind the tennis courts, behind some bushes.” I later saw the sign up there. He would play horseshoes with the groundskeepers, not staff, of the White House. Him and three other members—they had a little league going, of people who mowed the grass and cut the hedges. I said: “Is that a political gold mine?”

I said something like that. Everybody thought the President was a rich kid and a silver spoon in his mouth. I said this is the kind of stuff we’ve got to get to the public. He stopped me and he said, “No, you don’t. These people are my friends and this is something I do with them, and we’re not going to use that.” That was his attitude so that’s why he would never talk about Navy experiences, and the loss of two of his crewmen. He would never talk about the loss of a daughter; he would never talk about those kinds of things. He thought that was improper, that he was violating something for political gain. He just wouldn’t do it. I respect the man for that. Had he done some of those things, might he have been [re]elected? I don’t know. But I respect him for that. That’s why he did this.

MK: Those kinds of pictures are a lot better than pork rinds. The pork rinds was something from the first campaign that had something of a hollow ring, whereas that does have a true one.

WHM: In many ways, he was a bit of a paradox. He absolutely had that Connecticut patrician background. I never saw it except he was a gentleman. This was not a crude person. He didn’t curse. He went to church regularly. He was very sophisticated in the way he dealt with people that were around him, and close, and whatever: almost a noblesse oblige kind of attitude. He would remind me of somebody two centuries ago in Europe, who had a real sense of obligation to serve, and to do what’s right. Yet he did go to Texas and get his hands dirty, and go to work, and make something of himself. So there was that side of him. That was real. That was not something that was affected; that was real. So I saw that with him. He did like pork rinds; he did listen to country music. It wasn’t something he did for the public. It’s just something he did.

He had a favorite Mexican restaurant he loved, in Houston, that was a very middle-class—that’s putting it on the high side—kind of place where he ate. He loved the guy that had that place; the guy loved him. You couldn’t take cameras in there. Bush wouldn’t let that happen when he’d go down to Houston, to do that. He was that kind of a guy. There was a definite wall between what he thought was personal and improper and what he felt he could do to win the re-election for the presidency. That was just him as a man. As I say, I respect him for that. I never saw him use somebody or use something. That’s pretty rare for a politician: to say they’ve never done that.

MK: What about the protection of his office, of the presidency? You were talking about the veto issue. Can you think of others where he saw issues there and his role of protecting the institution of the presidency?

WHM: He flat wouldn’t do anything—. There were several instances; I’ve mentioned one. He wouldn’t do something that was just political, to get some headlines, or whatever. He wouldn’t do that. I can’t think of any other instances—. Because we knew how he felt, we wouldn’t set up some sham thing in the Oval Office for photographs, to make him look like something he wasn’t, like bring in children sick with leukemia, and have him empathize, because he lost his daughter. He wouldn’t do that. If we did that, we really would have paid



- a price for it. Because we all knew that, we never even considered it. These were things that people might have done, other presidents might have done. His staff, by the time I got there, the people around him knew exactly where that line was. I don't even remember anything other than an issue kind of a thing, I don't remember any other things like that, that we even got as far as suggesting it to him.
- MK: When you come into a White House, how do you learn the rules? Most of the rules are unwritten rules.
- WHM: They are unwritten rules. I think Clinton suffered greatly in the first six months to a year because it had been so long since [Democrats had] been in the White House that they didn't have anybody who had been there who knew what those rules were. I think that your effort would be helpful in coming up with something to help a future White House understand. I think you need to have people in a White House who have been in a previous one, who know what the rules are, and what the rules ought to be. But, you're right. There's no textbook on this; there's no memorandum on this. There are no guidelines on this that are published anywhere. It's generally just word-of-mouth from one group to the group that succeeds them. Now Bush had less of a problem, because Bush and his staff had been around for eight years, with Reagan watching this, and knowing exactly what they wanted to do and how they wanted to do it.
- MK: Say even in your own case when you came in, there are going to be certain kinds of unwritten rules that perhaps are even personal to the President: like things he likes to do, and doesn't do, when you can ask for face time with the President and when you can't. How do you learn that?
- WHM: That's a matter of judgment. I'm not sure you learn it. That's a matter of judgment you've got to have. I found the White House a different world, and there was definitely a learning curve. [It's] awfully bad being in a learning curve in a crucial time—
- MK: In an election year.
- WHM: —when you're trying to get the President elected. That's not a time to be learning on the job. That's exactly what I was doing. You learn, in instances like you've mentioned, to use your own judgment, and to listen to the staffer who is making the recommendation. You've got the scheduler talking to you; you've got whoever it is represents that element of the public in the White House, they're talking to you. You learn to just listen. And then, by going to the campaign—we worked with them in the evenings—you understand how that's really important politically or not. That's just a matter of judgment. I think the president needs to select people around him who have judgment, judgment skills, because you can't learn that. If you don't have it, you're going to get the president in trouble real quick.

I can think of an example that I'll never forget. This was in the spring. We're still dealing with Buchanan. I had been very close to the Vietnam POW-MIA operation as a member of Congress, even going over there, even raised money for an operation in Laos trying to determine the fate of any live POWs. [I] was even part of the seven congressmen, the first Americans, back into North Vietnam. I was one of them. So I had a history of this. Ann Griffiths, who was head of the national organization had a national gathering over in Virginia, wanted the President to be there [for a speech] very, very much. She called me directly, but it went through the staffing and it came up as being something the President ought to do. Even Brent Scowcroft had signed off on it. So, we agreed.

We took the President over there. Four or five people stood up in the audience and began to raise hell. The President got into a shouting match with them. He got into the car afterwards and he asked the question, "How did I get put in this position?" And I had to answer, "Mr. President, I put you in that position." You have to take it. The staff did it. Me and all the people under me who brought this up, along with Brent Scowcroft—he just weighed in and said, "Yes, I think it's something you ought to do." That was a judgment call.

We were looking at where we had to get votes and this was a group of veterans that ought to stick with the President. Clinton wasn't a veteran, had been a draft dodger. We just thought: "This is something we really ought to do." We didn't have good enough intelligence, evidently. Ann, of course, was very apologetic, and she didn't know this incident was going to happen, these people were going to jump the President, or whatever. It was a judgment call. It was a judgment call I made, and I'll never forget it because the President felt we let him down. We got him into something a president shouldn't have been involved in. He should not have been in a shouting match with some goofballs.

MK: It's certainly hard to keep them out.

WHM: I realize that. When you're in the position of doing those things, you have to understand that you're the one, that I'm the one that ultimately made the decision to do it. So I have to be the one who ultimately takes the fall for it being a mistake. It was a judgment call. I think back over it; I probably would have done the same thing again. I don't know what I would have done differently. That's what you want: somebody that has the judgment to be able to see these things, sense these things and say, "Yea" or "Nay". That's not something you learn; that's something you've got to have the instinct for.

MK: Besides judgment, since the White House is a somewhat different workplace, what are some of the qualities of people who are effective there?

WHM: It depends on what level you're talking about. If you're talking about a chief of staff or a deputy chief of staff, I think that, first of all, the president has to know them and have high regard for them; otherwise they're going to be very limited in how useful they can be to him. Secondly, they really ought to have some political experience. This is no place to have on-the-job-training in politics. Maybe not elected office, but appointed office, or on the staff, or in campaigns. They've got to have some political instincts because you've got to be able to sense what is the right thing to do and also consider the political point of view. It is a political institution with all kinds of political pressures going on. Thirdly, you've got to basically have no agenda but that of the president. And there are people in White Houses I've run across that have their own agendas, and that does not serve the president well. So, you want people there whose only agenda is to see to it [that] his agenda is executed upon and, where you can be, [are] successful doing that.

Then as chief of staff, deputy chief of staff, you have a function to see that all levels of the White House are working at the highest possible level of quality, whether it's speechwriting, whether it's press, whether it's scheduling, whatever it is. You've got to watch that staff and be sure they're at their best, and [you] have the courage to go in and tell a president someone he's picked, that one of his old buddies that worked in the campaign, ain't cutting it and needs to be replaced. So you have to have that ability. You have to be a manager, because the White House staff has 2,000 people, 2,200 people. It's a pretty big organization. So you've got to have some managerial ability. You've got to have some common sense, to be able to deal with people. People skills. I think all of these things are critical.

The chief of staff and deputy chief of staff jobs are very difficult jobs, and it requires people that really have all of these skills. You can have lots of jobs in the administrations with less skills than that, and probably do fine, but you can't do that in the White House.

MK: If people have run for office—for example, in your case, you've run for Congress—don't you come in with a set of issues that you have been interested in?

WHM: Yes.

MK: How can you park them at the northwest gate?

WHM: It's difficult, but you have to do it. It is very difficult. I'd come from the Department of Energy. I had been right in the midst of the national energy strategy and the Energy Policy Act of 1992, which became law. I was one of the guys quarterbacking that whole thing. One of the first meetings I set up with the President was with independent oil operators: for him to meet with them in the Roosevelt Room. And I had to watch that. People were saying, the Chief of Staff said to me, "Henson, watch yourself that you're not getting into your old agenda. Be careful about that." I don't think those incidents happened again, and I'd have done it again in this case, because these were people the President was close to. He'd been in that industry. We were in a primary fight and we were trying to shore up our base, strengthen our base to defeat Buchanan, to go and take on Clinton. But I was accused of—I'm sure people raised their eyebrows over that. So you do have to watch that. It is difficult.

MK: Now, that was an issue with Sununu, I believe, that he had some strong policy preferences.

WHM: Sununu was a strong personality, much more so than Skinner was. Skinner approached the place without an agenda. He was there to serve the President in every sense of the word. He would have done anything the President asked him to do. I say that with respect. He was there to save this presidency and get him re-elected. I want to believe I was of the same ilk. I don't know. Sununu did have some issues; he did have some pre-dispositions; he did have some things. It was very hard to sort that out from his personality, which was a very strong, overbearing personality. Skinner wasn't that way. He was very different.

MK: In that kind of situation you just have to set up a different structure, I guess, of getting information to the president that's balanced.

WHM: Supposedly nothing goes to the president but by the chief of staff or the deputy chief of staff. I'm pretty sure that, on our watch, information did get to the President around us from staffers who felt like they knew the President better than we did. I'm confident some things did.

MK: How do you stop it?

WHM: Kathy Super, that was the scheduler. Kathy Super. Go ahead.

MK: How do you, number one, find out what's happening in terms of what's going in to the president?

WHM: You get a decision from the President on something, that's different from the one that you were staffing him to come up with. I found it on scheduling. It would be agreed that the President was going to a certain place. And that I think the scheduler disagreed with me,

and felt like she wasn't going to waste her breath with me. She'd just bring it up to the President in one of the private conversations, because she knew him better than I did, she felt. I'd send the schedule in, and it would come back with that X'ed off. There was no discussion. So I knew exactly what happened. I had evidence of that happening. I don't know if that goes on in every White House or not, but it did on our watch.

MK: [Richard] Cheney was saying, I think when they first came into the White House, they noticed there was more in the out-box than the in-box, and so there were things that were coming in that were going beyond them. So they tracked it down.

WHM: Face time or attention with the president is, without a doubt, the most important thing on the mind of any staffer in the White House. A lot of them come there with agendas. They're extremely bright. "If they weren't that bright why are they inside the picket fence and everybody else is outside?" I've found that more than any other place in politics I've been, this feeling that "I don't care what you say, I hear what you're saying; I know what's really right and I'm going to get that to the President." They'll never tell you that, but that's what's going on in their mind. I even did it. I did it one time.

I kept trying to convince the President to deliver a major speech on his economic program. I sat down and worked it up myself. In fact, he had an economic program. I picked all the pieces of the things he had done, things in the education area, things he had done in the energy area. He had a pretty respectable platform of things he had initiated, or had accomplished, and it came out to about thirteen points. I said, "The way you fight fire"—Clinton had a ten-point plan—"is with your own Thirteen-Point Plan." I worked the whole thing up. I couldn't get the White House staff to agree with it. The economic advisers didn't like it, and Brady and Darman and the Chief of the Council of Economic Advisers, Boskin, who had all been telling the President—and Sununu when he was there—that the economy was going to get well before the election. "Any kind of economic plan you've got is going to entail sending something to the Congress, and they're out to screw you. So they'll screw it up and send you something you have to veto and hurt you." Sununu told me that to my face when I went to see him in October 1991 before I got there in February. Never knowing I was going over to the White House, I went over to make an effort and the admiral encouraged me. I was sitting over there raising hell one day in the office. [The admiral] said, "You've been in politics; go tell him." I got in the [Department of Energy] car and drove over to the White House, got in to see Sununu and told him. The President had to come out with an economic plan; he had to do something to offset this, he had to do it before the election began. Sununu looked at me and told me just that very thing. (Can't, because of the Democratic Congress).

So, lo and behold, about the mid-part of August or sometime before the [Republican] convention, I'm sitting there saying I've tried to do it the way you're supposed to do and I'm not getting anywhere: "The hell with it." So I just wrote the damned outline of the program, took it in and put it on [the President's] desk and bypassed even Skinner. I did it myself. So I can understand how—I get the thing back from the President with a note, "Henson, this looks good. Let's do something with this." So I took that and showed it to Skinner and everybody and they began to think, "You sonofabitch, you went behind our back" and blah, blah, blah. Well, needless to say, nothing got done with it because the convention was coming up, and whatever. But I had my day, because right after Labor Day the President spoke to—when Jim Baker became Chief of Staff—the President went to the Detroit Economic Club and gave a speech—and it was what I had written! It was that plan. I kind of looked at Bob Zoellick, who had taken my place then as the deputy. We had a staff meeting and Bob was presiding and I just said, "Bob, congratulations on the speech in

Detroit. That's what we need to do, more like that." He looked at me and smiled, "We had a little help with that." He was telling me, "That was your speech," which I damn well knew it was. The problem was: it was six months late.

So even I did it. It does go on in a White House. I think every chief of staff has to be the traffic cop, has to control it as best he can, and see to it that everything comes through him so he can properly staff the President. I think, in practical terms, the only way that's going to happen is if you have somebody who is so close to the President, like Jim Baker, that he will have your head, and the president won't be able to protect you, to stop something like that from happening.

MK: What does an effective White House staff buy for a president?

WHM: Well, that's a good question. There is tension, at least there was in the Bush administration, and I think it's true in most modern presidential administrations, of the White House trying to duplicate all the departments, trying to duplicate the whole government in the White House. You can't do that. But there are efforts to do that. So you have them second-guessing the departments and the departments rankled because they have all the experts, they've worked all the issues and now some group of White House staffers are screwing it up, or fooling around with it, or determining whether it gets to the President or not. So that's a good point of debate.

I think what a White House staff is supposed to do—he has the Council of Economic Advisers. That's very important. That's where all the departments who have a say or a piece of an economic problem can come together with the senior White House staff and hash it out. I've been in those meetings, and that's the way to do it. You have the National Security Council, same thing. That's a group where all of the key Cabinet members who have some piece of a national security problem come together with the president and hash it out. That's an important function. The White House has to have those two bodies to be able to corral all of the departments and get them in and, with all the disparate views that occur, get a consensus to the president. I think that the president's personal staff needs to be devoted to things like his scheduling and his speech content, and dealing with contacts with the White House: who to see and who not to see. I think all that kind of staffing is important.

I am a little less infatuated with policy development in the White House. I think that's what your departments are for. To try to duplicate all that in-house, maybe some rudimentary thinking, and then ship it out to the departments for perfection, but to duplicate all of that in the White House—I think is a bit of a problem. You run into the same thing with foreign policy. Who initiates that, National Security Council or the Secretary of State? There have been legendary fights in previous administrations over that. So I think that there's a very clear role, undisputed role, unduplicated role, for a White House staff, and then there are some areas where there is duplication. Those are the areas that need to be looked at a little more carefully. The people in the White House want to run that and, of course, the people in the departments want to run that. So you have a natural tension—at least I saw it—and it's something—I'm not terribly sure—. I look at it more from the point of view of my three years in the Department of Energy. I didn't particularly appreciate people second-guessing what we were doing on energy policy. Now, when we came forward with it, bringing it to the economic council and having it whacked out by, whatever, and taken apart by other people, that's fine. But having somebody in there dealing with it, working with it, some staffer—and bypassing all of that in some way, and going to the president before we even had a chance to go to the president on it, or bring it before the economic policy council to the president, I didn't think was particularly the right way to run a White House.

MK: Can you think of any instances, when you were in the Energy Department, or when you were in the White House? Where does it come from?

WHM: It comes from a White House psyche of protecting the president. It comes from, we're smarter than the departments, or they'd be here and we'd be there. It comes from having agendas. It comes from too big a staff. It comes from bright people having nothing to do except getting into things. It comes from—. You do have some duplication of expertise in the White House and they have to have something to do. So they second-guess what the people in the line of authority, the department or the regulatory agency, are doing on it. Also, it comes from perhaps the department not having a particularly good relationship, or close relationship, with the president or the chief of staff. I think all of these things are the factors that breed this. We [Energy Department] didn't suffer too greatly from it, because Watkins felt like he had a good relationship with the President and would call him, and kept the President abreast of what we were doing on the national energy strategy. The President, because he knew energy, felt a familiarity with it. Sununu didn't like it and Sununu did succeed in taking a couple things out of our strategy, at one point, by seeing to it that it got took out. He didn't care what we didn't like.

MK: What were they?

WHM: One of them was light-bulb efficiency. It sounded like a Jimmy Carter idea, but we'd met with the light-bulb manufacturers, and they were saying, "Every state, like California, are all screwing around with this; give us a national standard to manufacture light bulbs by and we'll do it." In fact, that would save some energy and, in fact, that was something we thought that made some sense. Well, Sununu went to great lengths and enjoyment in deriding that idea, and ultimately got it eliminated because of his strong opposition. But, for the most part, we got pretty much to the President and his approval what became the National Energy Policy Act, one of the few things Bush passed into law. We got it passed into law and signed by him, with little alteration by the Congress. It did some important things: like starting this whole competition in electricity. That started in that bill, where we broke down the barriers, and created competition at the wholesale level, in electricity generation. That started in that legislation, among other things.

Anyway, the HHS [Health and Human Services], Dr. Sullivan, was a bit timid, didn't have that relationship with the President. He got nothing through the White House. Everything he wanted to do—some things to have the administration relate better to some of the social issues of the day—either Sununu didn't agree with those things, or somebody got those things killed. I was in meetings with he and Watkins when he was complaining to Watkins about it. So it does happen. If you were talking to Sununu, he would say: "They're dumb ideas and I'm smart enough to know they were dumb ideas and I was protecting the President." That would be his side of it. The way you deal with that is an economic council meeting or some organized structure, where the department brings the initiative to the White House, along with other departments, and other senior staff people, and it's discussed. We would have abided by—I say we would have. We wouldn't have abided by their—if they had said no to the national economic strategy, it's a bad idea. We wouldn't have stopped there. Watkins would have gone straight to the President on it. On most things, however, you ought to be willing to abide by those meetings.

MK: Is there a tendency, in an election year, to go to the departments to see what kinds of things are bubbling up there?

WHM: Yes.

MK: The policy shops.

WHM: There's a regular reporting process to the White House that goes on. The White House hates surprises; all politicians do. So anything that's going to happen, good or bad, or anything you're working on, you're supposed to keep the White House constantly informed of that weekly, of what those things are.

MK: How did you do it? And was that throughout the administration, do you think?

WHM: It went from the Chief of Staff of our department, I think to the Cabinet Secretary. Then, later, as we got into the campaign mode, they would contact us. When I was in the White House, we'd contact the departments. "The President is giving an education speech. Is there anything he can announce, he can deliver, any money grant or something?" You go back to the departments with that. It's a two-way street. You're keeping them informed; they're contacting you with questions. That works pretty well.

MK: And that's during the election year, or is that all the time?

WHM: That's all the time. And that seems to work well.

MK: One of the areas we're looking at is White House work life. The average life span of a staffer is about eighteen months; at the senior level, it's maybe two years. What do you see the pressures as being, and compare the pressures there with the other pressures that you've experienced, in Congress, and then also working in a department? As well as working in the corporate world?

WHM: Public service isn't easy. I think the pressure is probably the greatest in a White House, because that's the most important and powerful job in the world, in the world of politics. The hours are very long. The pressure is very great to succeed for the president, to have him be successful. The internecine warfare and backstabbing is more acute there than I ever saw in the department, or ever saw in the Congress. If something goes wrong, you don't want to be blamed for it; you want to put the blame on somebody else. You want to have an exit strategy that you leave as a hero not as a dog.

All those things are swirling around a White House, that I didn't see in Congress, and didn't see in the departments. Skinner and I didn't, and there were others in the White House who didn't, operate that way, but there were definitely some who did. One way you do that is you become a source for the press. Bush made it plain to me when I got there, even though I'd spent a lot of time talking with the press in my political career, that he only wanted two people talking to the press: Marlin and Sam. I said, "That's fine, Mr. President. I'll do it." And I never did. I refused to talk to the press. I became abused, because you become either a source or a target—you have a choice—with White House reporters. If you're a source, nothing bad is ever said about you. I can give you example after example.

[Off the record]

Having said that, the hours are longer, the pressure is greater, the fact is everybody is looking for the right time to exit, so they [will] exit on a high note. They know if you stay around there long enough, somebody is going to get you, and you're going to be a dog and exit on a bad note. So that's why it's so bad there. I never have looked at how long people stay in

departments. I can't compare whether people stay in high levels of departments longer. They tended to, at DOE, when I was there.

MK: What were the work hours? What was your average day?

WHM: I would be picked up in the morning at 6:30 by car and I'd read the paper and all that stuff coming in, reports. I would get to the White House by 7:00. Then Sam and I would start meeting at 7:00, at the latest 7:30. Then I didn't get home at night before 8:00 or 9:00, because we had a campaign meeting that started at seven in the evening that would last until eight or so. It was definitely a twelve-hour-a-day job and that was generally Saturdays and Sundays as well. If you were traveling with the President the hours were even longer than that. So it was a minimum twelve and, some days, a lot longer than that. That was day in and day out; that was the routine you followed. You had no home life, no family life. Most people would look at it and say, "You're not going to get out of this alive," in the sense of your reputation. So you think, "Why in the hell am I doing this?" The only reason to do it is because it is an honor, and it is certainly a challenge, and it certainly is a rush to be in a White House. But, boy, you get past that real quick. Then it sets in, this isn't a fun place to work.

I am writing a book, on my family history, and I say in the book on the chapter about me, about that part: Every time somebody asked me about the White House, the *Tale of Two Cities* opening line goes through my mind. And it is so descriptive: "It was the best of times; it was the worst of times." It was the best of times to be so close to a president, traveling with him every day, overseas, and being with him, and seeing how that works. It was the worst of times, because it was absolutely a snake pit in which to work. Pressure is not descriptive enough. I never felt that way about Congress; never felt that way about the department. Part of it was because I became a target for those who wanted to shield themselves from blame for a White House that was not doing well—and it didn't do well. The only measurement was, re-electing Bush. So we all share in that. But I'll take my share of the blame in that. There are people who didn't want any blame in that, that wanted to have themselves viewed as wonderful people who fought the heroic fight, and if people had listened to them things would have been different.

MK: How can you tell when it's time to go?

WHM: I don't know. In my case, it was very easy: we lost the election. I literally turned the lights off in my office on January 20, 1993, the day of the inauguration. So I can't answer that question. I know this. I would not have stayed in the White House much past the President winning and being re-inaugurated. I had no plans to do it going in. I had plans to go back to the Department of Energy. I would have done that, or left government. After one year in the White House, I had no desire to serve two years in the White House. The only reason I would have done it was to have stayed on for two or three months, for a transition period, or something like that. So the right time for me was right after the President won re-election and we could find a replacement. I had no desire to stay.

MK: Was there any time spent looking backward, looking at things—I guess in a campaign you have to look at what things are working.

WHM: There were a couple of things. I can answer that question. Sam and I commiserated with each other at the end, and several times—before the end—when we saw things not going well. We did not have that personal trust, again, of the President. He liked us; he respected us. He knew us. But it wasn't a Jim Baker relationship. A chief of staff really has to have



something very close to that, if he's going to be successful. Either the president has to be an unusual person or you've got to have that. We recognized we didn't have that, and that it put us in an awkward position with the President. We would tell him what he needed to hear, but he wasn't hearing it, because he didn't view us as having that kind of stature to where, what we were telling him, that he didn't believe, he should believe.

Secondly, we did not have hire-and-fire authority. The President had his staff; he had been goaded, pushed, convinced into getting rid of Sununu and Card, people both of whom he liked, and he wasn't going to hear of anybody else being replaced on that staff. So, once that word gets out to the people who are supposed to be reporting to you, and taking orders from you, that you can't touch them, you have limited authority to really make things happen. In looking back, those are the two key elements to us being able to have done a better job. Had those things not been present, could we have made a difference? Could we have won the election? I don't know. That's really leaping in terms of, could we have made a difference? I just knew what we couldn't do—I would never put anybody in that position in a future White House. It ought to be understood, going in, that those two limitations we had aren't there, or it's not going to work. The president is not going to be well served and, ultimately, end up making a change in who his chief of staff is and who his deputy chief of staff is.

MK: Well, thank you very much.

WHM: I enjoyed talking to you.

MK: I enjoyed it every much.

[End of Disc 1 of 1 and Interview I]