

White House Interview Program

INTERVIEW 1 of 2

DATE: June 17, 1999

INTERVIEWEE: ANN LEWIS

INTERVIEWER: Martha Kumar

[Disc 1 of 1]

MK: In the project what we're trying to do is prepare an institutional memory so when people come in in 2001 they're going to know what the patterns are from the past. The empty desks being a problem. No institutional memory. So, hopefully, we'll put together some of that and try to put some stuff together showing between administrations what changes there have been, what the evolution is and then, within an administration, if there are phases that seem to reoccur, some kinds of predictable things.

Let's start off with the Office of Communication for how it works as an office. How many people does it have? What divisions does it have?

AL: I think it has twenty-five. That included speechwriting (domestic), research, events—which is a small sub-office—and after that individuals.

MK: Speechwriting has tended over the years to be in a lot of different places. Sometimes it's been part of the Chief of Staff's operation; sometimes it's been part of the Press Office. How is it decided what units would be within Communications?

AL: I will tell you, that is pretty much the structure as I found it and probably the only thing I did that changed while I was here was I built up our capacity on events because I thought that was the single most important way we proactively got our message out, events at which the President, in his own voice, was going to be delivering a message.

MK: Actually events, I don't know that it has been much of a unit in the past.

AL: My guess is that's the one change probably. And, again, it's two people but we would convene a message meeting for each event when I could, talk about what is it we're trying to achieve here, what's the setting, what's the audience. And then after that it gets carried out.

MK: What people—?

AL: Well, one, my deputy director, Stacie Spector had principal responsibility after that meeting for following up on events. I think Communications right now, the way Loretta Ucelli has it, she has two deputies, one of whom is doing events and one of them is doing more the strategy. Then we had George Caudill who we call sort of the big picture guy who really goes out and says what will it look like and how it should be done. Again, Stacie, George, probably one or two people working [together]. It was a cluster, let's say, that worked around how you put on an event for maximum advantage.

MK: And part of that is just decided with the schedule. So scheduling is a big—

AL: No. That's once the scheduling decisions were made. Once a decision has been made—we're going to do Medicaid on X date—sometimes that means you already know where White House Interview Program, Interview with Ann Lewis, Martha Joynt Kumar, Washington, D.C., July 9, 1999. Ann Lewis served as Director of the Office of Communications in the administration of President Clinton.

you're going to do it; more often it doesn't. It just means we're going to roll out X policy on X date. Well, do you do it at the White House? Do you do it at a children's hospital? Who's the audience? Who gets invited? How do you structure it to get maximum attention? My working principle was the most valuable resource we have is the President's time and we'll never have enough of it. I should say amplification as the second thing I added for the same reason. If we've got an hour and a half of the President's time, we better make the most of it. So every thing from where it's held to what's the signage to what's the picture to what's the language, the goal is to decide all of that to strengthen the message.

Then the second person I added was an amplification staffer whose role is to get the message back out once it's been done. How do we let everyone know it's happened: get talking points out; maybe the local government might get more information on this so they in turn can spread it; taking the information, taking the President's remarks and communicating them back out.

MK: Let's take an event. The one the other day, the Rose Garden ceremony, with the President with the members of Congress about guns and the legislation. How did that get set up?

AL: That got set up pretty quickly. There are two kinds of events. [The first are] those in which we have the most time to plan and on which we have the most control because we're proactively rolling out a message that we care about. The second are events that are put together more quickly to maximize something that's happening. Here you've got a gun debate so it was decided I think the Friday before we would do an event on guns. In this case it was pretty easy for the setting. It was going to be the Rose Garden because we don't need to tell the story of guns; everybody knows what it is. We wanted to make the case that it was a presidential event and we began it as an event where women members of Congress would step forward and talk about why this was important to them. Now, the day before we heard that their male colleagues wanted to be part of it so it got adjusted.

MK: Although they stood in the back.

AL: Well, there was some work in that.

MK: How did you decide who to invite on that one?

AL: Legislative Affairs. Once you do the meeting then you say, "Okay, Leg[islative] Affairs you'll tell us who the members are going to be." Again, because that was a concrete "here's the issue, here's what we're talking about, this is about members of Congress," that was simpler. A more complicated one might be a kind of community policing. We're still likely to do it in the Rose Garden because, again, for us saying this President cares about keeping you safe is important. We'll have police officers in uniform around him. And then who's in the audience? Local government might invite people in for getting cops grants; representatives of police organizations will be there. So it's a mix of people who are directly impacted by the announcement.

MK: In the event on guns, who was in that audience?

AL: You know, I don't even remember. I'd have to go back and look.

MK: I thought it might have been some staffers.

AL: I was going to say—I think it was put together very quickly and I think it was principally staff, including congressional staff.

MK: It looked like congressional staff. Now, when you do a Rose Garden event, is that aimed for television?

AL: Everything we do is aimed for television, virtually, that's a message event.

Let me back up. What you've got to do every day proactively is figure out how do you talk to people about what you're doing and why. This is the second half of the democratic contract. If what democracy says is based on the principle that people and their wisdom will make the right decision, that's based on how much information they have. So every day our responsibility is to give them information of what policies we're working on and why they should care. If we don't do it, it won't happen. Left to itself, the political system talks to itself. So my goal is, every day, how do I reach that audience? What do we know about them? They're busy. They've got a lot going on in their lives. They've got two jobs, two kids, two cars; they're worried about Johnny's Mom's getting her medicine. We are never going to be as important to them as they are to us. We've got to reach them wherever they are and whatever else they're doing.

My second point is how do they get their news? Most of them get it from television and they get it while they're doing something else. They're not sitting there taking notes. They're making dinner, eating dinner, talking to one another. So we're going to get, if we're lucky, a minute on the evening news. Everything about that minute ought to emphasize and re-emphasize the same message. That's why what the sign says, what the audience says, what the setting says, all of that is part of what they grasp as well as the words. So it's about talking to people on television about what we care about.

MK: The signs are something that I've noticed since 1998, particularly in pictures.

AL: I think we restored it in 1996.

MK: In 1996.

AL: Yes. It's very successful. We give you the opening paragraph, we give you the closing story and we even give you the headline. That signage is our headline. But it's all because we're talking to an audience where we're in heavy competition for their attention and we need to use every possible means to break through.

MK: Where do newspapers fit in and where do magazines fit in?

AL: Newspapers are where insiders and people who really care about issues read about them in depth. Insiders include members of Congress and policymakers, so they're very important. And they're also where a lot of television stories come from. So I'm not knocking newspaper stories but they reach a smaller audience, especially the stories that are covered on A-7. While that's important and I want it to be accurate and I want it to be full, it's second choice for how we reach the voters we want, the people we're trying to reach.

MK: So it's an indirect route in a sense.

AL: Well, it's two things. It's opinion leaders, which is important; I'm not trying to knock it. But you're going to get a newspaper story if the President of the United States talks about an

issue seriously and at length. We're likely to get a story; sometimes we don't. We're likely to get a story. But by hard evidence I'll tell you the cumulative effect of those stories do not inform as many people as I'd like.

Now that is less true about local newspapers. I take local press very seriously. Whenever we can in our events, we include people from local communities and we get them involved in how we're going to tell the story.

MK: Are there some newspapers or are there some national organs that you can get to that, get to the locals? For example, *USA Today*.

AL: Wire services and *USA Today*. Wires and *USA Today* have that effect and are very important.

MK: What kinds of things would you give to the wires?

AL: Sometimes the afternoon before you might give the wires—for example, if we're going out with the story on community policing and here's what it's going to mean state by state, you can give that to the wires and they will run in each of their regions a story about what it means for this community.

MK: What about in *USA Today*? What kinds of things do you give them?

AL: Very important because they like stories that are real and that have a real impact where they can show how it matters. In that one there's kind of a rotation, if we get a story in *USA Today* by sort of giving them some information—I'm not sure it's a particular kind of story so much as it's just high on our list that we placed it.

Again, I don't have to sit and plot how to do an event in order to get the attention of a newspaper. You can sit down and give a newspaper story, work with them on the story, have the President give a speech. The reason I pay attention to events and the kind of setting I talked about is pictures for cameras. It's a different strategy in reaching newspapers. Joe Lockhart's briefing the day of an event in which he says the President's going to speak and sort of walks people through what it's going to be about will reach the newspapers. The combination of the President's speech and a Lockhart or [Gene] Sperling or somebody coming in and briefing on the issues, that reaches the newspapers.

MK: When you do the scheduling for the events, how often are scheduling meetings held?

AL: Once or twice a week.

MK: And who attends them?

AL: A significant number of people. The Director of Communications, now Loretta; scheduling; head of scheduling—who walks us through what's available and what's doable—and then representatives from all the policy shops.

MK: What about politics, like political affairs?

AL: They'll have somebody there.

MK: What kind of timetable do you work on in these meetings? Do you have things that are sort of short-range, medium-range, long-range?

AL: Mostly short to medium. The only things that are really long range might involve State visits or foreign trips.

MK: State of the Union?

AL: Well, that doesn't count because you know you're going to do that. But, yes. Once a year.

MK: In scheduling is there any attempt to look at a year, say at some point maybe in the fall or something, the end of the summer, look at the coming year and figure out what kinds of things you want to accomplish within the year?

AL: Yes. There are regular attempts but I could not tell you that we come close. It's a very useful exercise but the fact is no matter how many times you sat there last year, you wouldn't have known we would be dealing with guns in the way we are. You wouldn't have known it. We certainly would not have known about Kosovo. So you try, but again, in my experience, there's a great desire to do long-range planning. It's good discipline but rarely are you able to carry it out.

MK: Would the long range in say a yearly kind of thing, would that come up at a residence meeting? Would that more likely be a subject—?

AL: No. I don't discuss residence meetings.

MK: In looking at scheduling, how long do the meetings last? How many events would you discuss in any one meeting?

AL: The meeting would last about an hour and the number of events to be discussed may depend on how many days we have to fill. We can look at a month and have 10 open message opportunities; we can look at a month and have three. It depends on what else is there. The President is going to be in Europe for eight days and three days are already filled in; you don't have much time left. Or you can have a lot.

The second thing that makes it difficult is how much competition there is, how many of the policy shops have announcements that they are trying to put on the schedule.

MK: I guess, particularly with the congressional session, that that drives certain kinds of things. There are maybe going to be more policy things done during the time when they're in session.

AL: Yes.

MK: Well, in going back—

AL: Actually you're a little more likely to do policy announcements when they're out of session because there's a little more space but you react to policy when they're in session.

MK: Would the reaction be different, say, at the beginning of the year? It's more likely you'd be putting out initiatives at the beginning of the year so you—

AL: Well, what we've been doing the last three years is announcing items that are going to be in the State of Union and doing that really for a month leading up to the State of Union and then rolling some of them out later.

MK: So in the fall then, because of the nature of the congressional process, you'd be more likely to be in negotiations or [inaudible] at that time.

AL: You want to be very flexible in your scheduling in September because it may turn out that there's a debate or there's something happening on the floor that the President needs to talk about that day.

MK: In amplification, the person on amplification, can you tell me more about what that person does?

AL: Well, the role is really to take whatever the President is doing today and get it to the largest number of people. Again, maybe that's through intergovernmental, through state and local elected officials; maybe it's back to a Cabinet agency like HHS [Health and Human Services]. But it's every other way of communicating the message other than the press. The press has its own operation.

MK: So it's working really within government—

AL: Within networks.

MK: —and getting them to use their resources.

AL: Yes.

MK: Is that something that's been done before? Is that something you've put in?

AL: I did it and I don't know if it's ever been done before.

MK: What's been done before is just basically the PIO [Public Information Officer]'s and dealing with them. I don't think there's been anything that's as quite as organized.

AL: I suspect that's true but I don't know it.

MK: In the [Ronald] Reagan White House they had the public affairs unit put together materials for surrogates when they were going out so they would be coordinated. Do you all do any of that?

AL: I think they do a lot of it. But it's usually done either through Cabinet Affairs or in conjunction with Cabinet Affairs, put packages together, and sometimes for intergovernmental. But a lot of work is done to be sure. Thanks to our web site, for example, we get talking points up every day. We call it the White House at Work which is something we started. So if you're going out as a surrogate, you can just pull down what the President has done for the last week or two weeks and it's there.

MK: Do cabinet people talk about that, having used it? Do they tend to do that?

AL: I don't know. Cabinet Affairs I think would probably be a better source.

MK: In what ways is the web site, and has web technology, been important?

AL: It's extraordinary because you can get people such a depth of information. You can put up your budget and people who care can take data from the budget on the issues they care about as they'd like.

MK: Is there any evidence that it's been used? Do you have a sense of how it's been used?

AL: Anecdotally, I get evidence. People will send a note and say I can't tell you how helpful it was to get this information. I know that the press office, for example, will tell you now that if people call and want text of a radio address you just tell them to look it up at the web; it's faster than my sending it to you.

When the President went to Africa where he worked in partnership with the Department of Education, they sent the information to teachers so you could follow the President's trip to Africa in the classroom. Every day, every country, we had geography; we had a trip site.

MK: And did people use it? Did you hear from schools?

AL: We heard from schools that that was very popular.

MK: I've noticed that sometimes somebody, particularly from the Press Office—I think David Leavy did it one day—was on the [*Washington*] Post web site answering questions. I forgot what the topic was.

AL: I don't know.

MK: It just seems to me—

AL: I think [inaudible] is doing MSNBC's chat line today.

MK: —that there's much more integration into current technology and that's one of the things this White House has been particularly good at.

AL: It's just enormous. Let me just see where we are at the moment. Let me find our web site. I think we have the European trip up. There it is; President Clinton's trip to Europe. President's trip with visits; itinerary, city profiles, speeches, photo gallery, fact sheets and briefings. You get everything about his trip. And the White House photographers now bring a digital camera so we can put the pictures right up on the web site.

MK: I guess people can download them.

AL: Yes. On the China trip we were also prepared because everything the President says goes up on the web site within hours of his saying it. If they had blocked out or censored his speeches we would have been able to show people in China using it by pulling it up on the web site. As it turns out they broadcast them widely.

MK: Including that press conference which was a fairly amazing press conference.

One of the things I've wondered about is a White House is always so moment-oriented and there's always so much that flows in that you have to deal with on a day-to-day basis that it's difficult to look backwards. One of the people I talked to recently who was in the [George

H. W.] Bush White House was talking about how that was one thing they simply did not do very well, that there's so much crashing in on you all the time it's hard to look backwards. Is there any attempt to do that built in to look backwards, see where you've been, what lessons have been learned? It's today and forward. Do you think anything's lost in that?

AL: Undoubtedly. But there's only so much you can do and you don't have time to sit around and say "Remember last year." Who remembers? I believe Satchel Paige's old saying, "Never look back; something may be gaining on you."

MK: It's hard. It's like measuring success. Often it's something that's very difficult to do.

AL: We measure success by whether we get things done.

MK: How do you measure it?

AL: You achieve policy or you don't. You move forward or don't. The policy works or it doesn't. People have jobs or they don't. This is real life.

MK: What about in specific operations within a White House, for example, in communications? How do you measure success in the communications operation?

AL: It's a little bit more anecdotal than I'd like but you try to test—there's a lot of public poll data available and how well people think you're doing and what they know about what you're doing, that's useful. But the other is you can get clippings; is it being used? Is it appearing? Do people know what you're doing? It's anecdotal but it's sort of trustworthy because people ask for more of it. When you do something that works, you're going to hear that they want a lot more of it.

MK: How do you hear it? Can you give an example?

AL: I'll go out some place and give a speech and people will talk about what they've heard that we're doing, what they think, what they know about, how it is they're getting their information.

MK: What about polling? In what ways is polling used?

AL: Like most institutions, polls can tell you, if you read them right, what people know about what you're doing, what they may not know and you want to work harder to get the message out.

MK: What things has this White House been particularly effective in getting across and what things maybe less so?

AL: I think we've been particularly effective in getting across a commitment to making a difference in people's day-to-day lives. People believe that; they know that, that we care about them.

MK: And that's pretty much been true from the start.

AL: I think we've been less effective in getting across the scope of this administration's achievements which are, I believe, transformative in a nature. It's not just from a deficit to a surplus, the highest home ownership in history and the lowest unemployment in history, but

the number of ways we're making sure that every kid can get the first two years of community college; that education is going to be more available; that health care is more available. In an ironic way, we've done so much that's a very large piece out there. Now I do believe we've seen consumer confidence go up; we've seen people's confidence in their own economic future go up but there's not a lot of interest in talking about achievement overall. You always want to talk about what your agenda, how are you moving forward? Now you can build it in and say we can do this because look at what we've already done. But I think we still have work to do when you talk about the scope of what's been achieved.

MK: The interviews that I've been doing for my book, going back to 1996, people I've talked to have said that same thing, that that is something that has not gotten across. In spite of many individual successes, it's wrapping up the whole package. Why do you think that happens? Why is it so difficult to get that across?

AL: I don't know. I think it is simply easier to—people are more likely to know what you're doing to do. It's easier to break through on a story about a new policy, a new goal, a new agenda. It is impossible to get press attention for something that's already been done, virtually. Aside from the stock market figures. And, if you can't communicate it, people aren't going to know about it.

MK: Can you build in something that's future-oriented but draws on the past? One of the things I've got in my head is, at the end of the [Dwight D.] Eisenhower Administration, [James] Hagerty wrote a memo to Eisenhower recommending that he spend part of the last two years traveling abroad under a theme of man of peace and in a sense pulled together their administration and its achievements in that way but provide something new also because they'd be traveling worldwide. He did that; Eisenhower took him up on that. It was very successful until the U-2 [incident] and then you might say it plummeted. But up until that time it was a way they could wrap some of the things they had done, their farm initiatives anyway, in one package.

In the Reagan Administration, they had a legacy campaign that went for, I guess, pretty much the last two years where they did it issue by issue. So they'd do a thing on education and pull that together. Try to do some of the others.

AL: I don't think that was very successful—it's harder. I'm not sure he had much impact but that's for a number of reasons, including the fact that there was a lot of competition about what was going on.

MK: One of the things that I wonder about is with [Al] Gore running for president and with Hillary Clinton, if she runs for the Senate, the degree to which the President's stage is going to be more crowded. One of the things that most presidents have not done—Eisenhower did not do it for [Richard] Nixon and Reagan didn't really do it for Bush—was to share a stage. And that is something Clinton has done for Gore is share the stage but he's going to be sharing it also with, if she runs, Mrs. Clinton. That will reduce the opportunity in a sense that he's going to have to put together, to pull together the legacy communications or publicity operation.

AL: I think that's true. But I also think it's true that he's going to have an agenda until the last day he's in office. Bill Clinton doesn't feel he's working on his legacy. He's got a year and a half to go. He's still got ideas and he wants to keep moving forward.

MK: It becomes difficult especially with the Republican Congress because they look at that time clock, like on appointments, and look at the way they're holding up the confirmation of officials.

AL: It's stunning. They have melted. They're in a little pool of water [inaudible].

MK: I think Daschle said the other day there were 173 that are on hold.

AL: That's right.

MK: There's going to be more of that in a lot of areas. So the areas—

AL: That doesn't mean we should give up or acknowledge a stalemate. We'll keep moving forward and eventually there will be a budget process and an appropriations process. [Inaudible] and I think increasingly we look for places the President can take executive action.

MK: But say in an area like appointments, it becomes one if people are acting interim it doesn't have the same kind of—the person doesn't have the same kind of clout and it's difficult.

In looking at the operations of the office, what are the offices that you work most directly with or did you work?

AL: I think everybody. There's really not an office you don't work with if you're doing it right.

MK: In setting up an event, what are the offices primarily you'd work with there?

AL: Everybody. It's the policy shop that comes up with the ideas; they come to tell you what you need to do, scheduling and advance, for literally what the timing will be of the day. Intergovernmental because they're going to talk to their constituents; political so people know what you're doing and Cabinet Affairs because there's always a cabinet officer. So you're literally going to have—

MK: Legislative because you're going to have members of Congress.

AL: And legislative. You are literally going to have every shop sitting in that room if you do it right so that everybody walks out of that meeting knowing what you want to achieve, what their responsibility is to make it work, and what they're going to say to their folks.

I'm supposed to be in a conference call. I'm sorry.

[End of Interview 1 of 2 and Disc 1 of 1. Interview 2 of 2 continues on the next page.]

INTERVIEW 2 OF 2

DATE: July 9, 1999

INTEVIEWEE: ANN LEWIS

INTERVIEWER: Martha Kumar

[Disc 1 of 1, Side 1]

MK: One of the areas we want to give people a feeling for is what White House life is like because, sometimes I think when people come in from a different kind of environment, it's something that can be pretty stressful. After all, people don't stay in that White House job as long as they might stay if they were in a corporation. What would do you think are the pressures of White House life?

AL: I wouldn't even know how to say that without being obvious. That's what everybody knows. It's the—

MK: Everybody who's inside knows it but people who are outside don't have quite the same—

AL: I don't know how to say it without sounding stupid. Let me give you two parts. One is simply there is a physical stress which is grinding, every day. You come in at seven-thirty in the morning and you don't leave until after seven o'clock at night. The time constraints I think are grinding for people. You have to assume you're going to put in part of your time on the weekend, almost every weekend. That's a lot of time. And if there's a meeting or something comes up later in the evening, you're going to stay as long as it takes. So it is both tough physically on you and, for people with young children or young families, it is a very tough set of choices. It's very difficult.

MK: When does your day typically begin?

AL: [It begins at] seven-thirty.

MK: Well, before you come in, do you read the newspapers? Do you listen to NPR [National Public Radio] or that sort of thing?

AL: I read a couple of papers in the morning and then I read the rest of them when I get here.

MK: So in a sense it really begins earlier because it begins—

AL: Wherever I was, I would be reading newspapers at breakfast so I'm not going to ask for extra credit for that. But surely I would just say that the fact that you do that day after day—it is quite true that on the campaign the hours may be even longer. But campaigns, while intense, are finite and they end. Here there is never an end. There aren't down days, if you will.

The second is the emotional strain I assume when everything you may say and do is enormously important, is watched so closely, and has potentially the impact that a White House statement does. You add to that being in, as we are, a hostile political climate in which the danger of lawsuits, special investigators, having your notes or papers called in on any particular issue is ever present.

MK: Do you think there is any way that's going to change unless there is a change—if one party was to control both houses of Congress and the presidency, do you think there would be changes in that, in that atmosphere?

AL: I do not know.

MK: You wonder whether it has become so ingrained.

AL: I just don't know.

MK: Certainly one of the things that's happened is certainly government is more transparent. So to combine the transparency with the partisanship has been simply a deadly combination.

AL: Yes.

MK: I guess part of it too is just carping from one's adversaries, the ways in which one's adversaries are getting—

AL: I also think it's fair to say one's adversaries go beyond carping. They use all the weapons of congressional investigations to lawsuits. This is not about getting complained about. This is about having to stop and answer to interrogatories.

MK: Is that felt all over the White House?

AL: I don't know. I'm only going to speak for myself.

MK: In your day, can you go through some of the other parts of your day? You start out with meetings.

AL: There's a 7:45, small senior staff meeting. I think it's eight people. We then go to a senior staff meeting, larger, at eight o'clock. After that senior staff meeting about another dozen people go off into [Joe] Lockhart's office to talk about sort of the press lines, who's talking to who, what are the points we're trying to make today and tomorrow basically. After that, every day varies.

MK: What kind of rhythms are there to the rest of the day? What would be the different kinds of days one could have? I guess some maybe are driven by foreign policy events.

AL: I'm not sure after that that there is a particular rhythm which I suspect is something you get used to. Days will vary. When Congress is in and you're close to the legislative session, you're working on budget and legislation and that's going to drive your day. Earlier in the year you have more freedom to sort of initiate and set the agenda. You try to get out most of the issues you want to make the case for early if you can. I find it hard to say—it's not as if every Wednesday is like this or every Friday is like that. After that they vary a lot.

MK: You get into an interesting topic here which are the rhythms of a year, the ways in which you can predict some of the things that are going to happen. You use those as pegs for different aspects of presidential leadership. For example, the congressional session starting in January and that's a time to initiate. Then in the spring commencement addresses, you can deal with broad themes; then in the summer G-7, G-8, foreign policy also going through the UN [United Nations] session and then into budgeting in the fall.

AL: Right.

MK: So are you all conscious of that kind of cycle at the beginning of the year?

AL: The only cycle I'd say I'm much more conscious of has to do with the congressional session. I think we are sort of like the moon and the tides in that way. At the beginning of the year we spend our time laying out our agenda and you know that by the fall we will be in the season where there will be action on it. In between we try, whenever possible, to call attention to the agenda and to get interest in it and action on it. As I say, the closer you get to October, November you're going to see more action. I'd say that's the season that means the most to me. I think that while we try to lay our broad themes in the commencement addresses, my sense is they don't significantly impact beyond the day they're given most of the time. So I wouldn't rate them as high in terms of the seasons of the year. Foreign policy and foreign trips now are likely to take place any time of year.

MK: But the summer ones are ones where the President is meeting with a lot of heads of state so it gives an opportunity to emphasize the President as a world leader.

AL: I don't think you'll find a significant difference between trips he might take to Northern Ireland, let's say—it depends on what's the agenda and what's the level of public interest rather than how many leaders are there at any time.

We had the NATO [North America Treaty Organization] summit here in April. That was certainly the President as world leader. I doubt if you checked before and after that we got as much as we should have about the significance of his leadership.

MK: Do you think that's people just aren't tuned in to foreign policy?

AL: Probably. That's much of it. It's hard to get their attention to it. They're tuned it less to foreign policy and for sure meetings about foreign policy are far less interesting.

MK: And particular issues. I guess also with news agencies, so many of them have folded up their foreign bureaus that that's an indicator in their case of less interest in a post-Cold War world.

AL: I think that's right.

MK: One of the things that you all have really been masters at is making use of the congressional recess. You've been somewhat lucky that the Republicans haven't been able to make any use of it themselves and you have been able to get in and take advantage of that. Are you just pretty aware before one comes up of what kinds of themes you're going to do or what kinds of issues?

AL: Generally. The real difference is we have an agenda and they don't. If you have an agenda then you're always thinking about how to get attention for it, how do you do events around it [and] how do you call attention to it. They've had trouble coming up with an agenda, which makes it hard for them to command attention for very long. So, yes, we use every opportunity we can to call attention to the agenda. We've learned that one of the best ways to do that is, for example, during a congressional recess.

MK: When did that operation become as effective as it is today?

AL: I'm not sure I could tell you. I think it's something I take for granted so I don't know.

MK: Not the State of the Union but the one before it seemed to me that you all were able to work that State of the Union for almost two months. You started with the *New York Times* interviews and then moved on to the—

AL: Putting out the agenda. I think it's true that two or three years ago we realized that there is so much in the State of the Union that rather than save everything for the State of the Union we could roll out some of the individual events leading up to it. And we've done that ever since.

MK: And it's become so effective because you get the attention on every individual—like education week and Social Security.

AL: And it's really important because you may have twenty-five or thirty good ideas in the State of the Union. There's no way that they're all going to get attention otherwise. So this has worked out really well.

MK: Even better because Congress is in recess during that time period. So you've been able to get publicity that is basically favorable. They haven't been able to get in to the story. They haven't figured out a way of getting in to the story.

AL: As I said, if you don't have a positive agenda, it's hard to get in to the story. They get in to the story when they're here because whatever it is we come out with they will have a negative reaction immediately and that will guarantee they're in the story. But left to themselves until now—and we're now going to see they're going to try to have their agenda cohere around their tax cut—until now they haven't had one.

MK: You mentioned earlier campaigning and that the hours of campaigning are longer than governing. While the hours may be longer, the days are focused in a somewhat different kind of way in that you have sort of one central thing you want to do, show that your candidate is positive and the other person in a negative light. You sort of focus on that kind of thing whereas in governing you have so many different kinds of things that you have to do each day. There are so many other decisions that have to be done in a White House day than in a campaign day. Do you think that is a fair assessment?

AL: I suppose it is.

MK: So a part of the White House day is the very complicated nature of all the decisions that one has to deal with because they go over a broad variety of areas.

AL: I think that's probably why I haven't given it enough thought to be very wise on that.

MK: What seems to be the average stay of a White House person?

AL: I don't know.

MK: I think it tends to be somewhere around two years.

AL: That wouldn't surprise me.

MK: When you came in, did you have [an] idea of how long you wanted to stay?

AL: No.

MK: As long as the job is interesting?

AL: As long as I think I'm doing something of value. I didn't think about it. I don't think about. I am remarkably unimaginative on the topic.

MK: What do you find are the payoffs of working in a White House?

AL: I get to work with people I admire, whose values I share and who participate in making policy that's making this country a better place to live in.

MK: I think generally people find that the nature of the work is different than anywhere else. No matter what the stresses are, it's worth doing.

One of the things that we've been looking at the kinds of people who are effective in a White House, both in terms of the background that they have and some of the personal characteristics they have? What are some of the qualities? Like being flexible enough to deal with all kinds of things that come up and different sorts of schedules. What kind of background, first, do you think is important for people coming in?

AL: I don't know how to answer that. It goes without saying you need to be smart, quick, flexible and principled. After that, I would assume the best White House staff would have people with lots of different backgrounds. It's that mix of different experiences that can allow you to be really effective.

MK: Do you think in this White House some of the different kinds of backgrounds that people have that come to the mix?

AL: Whether they've worked on the Hill, worked in an advocacy organization, worked for a labor union, worked at a university or worked in the private sector, each of those brings you a different set of experiences on how the real world works. And you're most effective when combined, you know how the real world works and, therefore, what the levers are and what it takes to be effective in reaching them.

MK: Is there some commonality among people in how decisions are made, that no matter what their backgrounds are that there is something of a common understanding of what goes in to a good decision?

AL: I don't know what you mean.

MK: Like a process. Well, in terms of a process what kind—I was thinking that even though people may have different experiences and know different kinds of things that there are some things that can be in common, like what's an effective process, for example; how to make sure that you have touched all the bases? That no matter whether you've worked in a labor union or whether you worked in a party—

AL: Isn't that self-evident?

MK: Not necessarily. There are times—

AL: I really don't know how to answer that question because that's basic common sense whether I'm in the White House or I work for Planned Parenthood or I'm chief of staff for a senator. Those are the same elements. That shouldn't be really different.

MK: Well, it can be. It can be if somebody is in a position as a chief of staff and their interest is in a policy. So they sort of short circuit putting together all the different kinds of viewpoints. That obviously doesn't work out well. I was thinking of John Sununu, for example. One of the things that he tended to do [was] he had some strong policy interests and because he didn't get some of the other points of view.

AL: I don't know how to say this but whatever your job, it seems to me, that kind of behavior is dangerous wherever you are. The stakes are even higher in the White House; the scrutiny is even greater and if it blows up it's going to blow up even louder. It's not dissimilar in kind from what you ought to do to be a good decision-maker.

MK: That's true. In looking at the kinds of characteristics, one of the things that a lot of people have talked about is how important it is to have served in a campaign with the President, to have known him from one campaign or another. White House staffs tend to be picked out of campaigns. On the one hand, I can see where it's positive; but one worries, on the other hand, that the qualities in governing can be different than campaigning. What is your experience? And how important is it that somebody work in a campaign?

AL: I really like when I have to make a decision to hire someone that they've worked on a campaign because that tells me right away that they met a couple of my goals. They share the values. They share them enough to get into a campaign. They are used to working hard and long hours, sort of intense spurts of time. They are flexible because campaigns weed out the rigid people pretty quickly. Now that's all very helpful. It also means they already know a lot of the people they're going to have to work with because they come pre-connected to a network. That's very valuable. You have somebody get the job done who has existing relationships with people in some of the other offices. So, for that reason, I find campaign experience very valuable. I don't think it is either the only value or that I would not consider somebody who hadn't had it.

MK: Are the needs of governing—

AL: The other thing about a campaign is you have to meet time lines; you have to meet time deadlines. Too often, otherwise, you can meet people who are really smart and have done a really good job but they take too long to produce. They don't let go of the information; they don't give you a product. In a campaign, you have to meet those deadlines.

MK: So it really is a fair test.

AL: I find it a very fair test for being effective.

MK: I guess in some ways that people have thought about it in terms of just loyalty. But it's not a question of that.

AL: No.

Mk: What about the issues that one works on in a campaign? Are there major adjustments that have to take place from going [from] a campaign to governing?

AL: Well, the difference is that in a campaign you almost always work in a broad spread of issues. Very few campaigns can afford people who work on very small issues. The single exception is foreign policy. If you work on domestic policy in the campaign, you're likely to work on all of them. Once you get in to government you get to specialize. The good news is I think you get to take something you care about and believe in and do it more intensely and in greater depth. I don't know what would happen if you did the reverse, if you had somebody who has been a great specialist. It can be hard for them to get in to a campaign or in to an experience where you have to be very quick and very general about a wide range of things. It's easier to go from being a generalist to taking some specialties.

MK: Do you think that it's valuable for an administration to have people from earlier administrations in their White Houses?

AL: I think there's a certain continuity. I am surrounded by the staff secretary's office, people who know how the paper flow should work, for example. There are certain offices in which that's valuable. But that's probably the exception.

MK: It looks like often an administration comes in and it has campaign people right at the beginning and then you begin to get Washington hands coming in; then at the end you begin to get deputies. There seems to be a rhythm that goes in that fashion. But maybe there's a mix too.

AL: My guess is there is always something of a mix but what you just said makes sense. To start with—the core is going to be the people who just worked together in the campaign; that's who you know best. You have the greatest sense of their ability. Then, as you broaden out, you bring in people you've been working with, you've met. You realize what you need and you go after it. Then at the end of an administration people start leaving. That rhythm sounds about right to me.

MK: Do you think opportunities exist at the beginning of an administration and during a transition—take the transition into the first hundred days or even the first six months—that there are opportunities that exist then that evaporate later, that there is somewhat of a suspension of partisanship at the beginning?

AL: I don't know. There certainly was no suspension in 1996 and I can't see—what was the suspension in 1993? Bob Dole told Bill Clinton he wouldn't give him a single Republican vote for his budget.

MK: It seems to me pretty much of an exception that in earlier times—but the nature of Washington is different. That was a signal of what the level of partisanship is.

AL: I think so.

MK: If you go back to when Reagan came to town, Tip O'Neill went to some length to say that they would certainly make every effort.

AL: I would like to think that Tip O'Neill would be the standard but I have no continuing expectation of it and I think it depends on which party operates the Congress. I've seen no evidence of the Republican Congress that they are prepared to be more bipartisan, less partisan, however you want to put it; I just don't see it.

MK: Do you think that their impeachment move is something that's going to be repeated in the future, that will be pulled in to other kinds of areas? For example, the impeachment of judges; that they would move for the impeachment of judges.

AL: No. I think they rightly gave impeachment a bad name and they won't do that again. But I think the ongoing hostility, the use of all methods of partisanship, the constant campaign, I think they just do it but they do it short of an impeachment process.

MK: When a President is putting his staff together what do you think that an effective White House staff is going to buy a president? What can he get from it?

AL: That's your ability to be effective.

MK: And why is it? What does the White House staff offer that it can do that?

AL: Well, for one thing he can't do everything himself so you have to have a staff. You don't make all your calls, answer your mail, and do your own policy papers. That just isn't real; it's all the functions that a staff plays. Presumably a President in order to lead is going to initiate policy, try to be effective in managing the government, in reaching agreement with Congress in affecting legislation, in carrying out executive actions, again, along the lines of his policy and conducting foreign policy and in maintaining conduct with your constituents, the people. The staff performs all those functions.

MK: That gives a broad outline of what all those functions are. In the area of policy, people come in with a set of policies that they're interest[ed] in. In what way is a White House staff important in pressuring for policy but not actually creating the policy itself? Like say a policy on welfare is really going to come out of your cabinet secretary; mostly it would come out of there.

AL: It depends. Sometimes the policy actually initiates with White House staff. Sometimes it comes out of the Cabinet. Most often there is a kind of blend where White House staff helps to initiate and keep the process moving forward. But in the best world—for example, the Domestic Policy Council (DPC)—you work with cabinet agencies to take their ideas that are bubbling up there and move them along. Where policies can require more than one agency working together, you do that. And lots of times the ideas begin at the White House level and then you go to the Cabinet and say, "Can we do this? What will it take to get it done?"

Mk: Can you give examples?

AL: No. You would have to speak to DPC people for specific examples.

MK: So in a lot of ways what a White House is able to do is bring parts of the government together. It's a facilitator—

AL: That's right.

MK: —between different institutions and help make a President's administration more effective in that way.

Were you involved in the transition at all in this administration?

AL: In 1992-1993, no.

MK: What about after the election in 1996?

AL: My sense is there wasn't much of a transition. I came in in January of 1997 but the biggest transition was Erskine Bowles became Chief of Staff. He began working in November, December. Preparing to take office as chief of staff, he made a number of his own staff changes, chose two new deputies, for example. There were some changes in the Cabinet. But it was much smaller in scale. It was really more a continuation than a transition.

MK: What difference does it make who is chief of staff? How is it felt throughout a White House?

AL: It makes a big difference. They set the tone. They have somewhat different priorities. The fact that Leon Panetta had been a member of Congress and a budget chief meant that he had those strengths and directly engaged in the congressional negotiations a lot. Erskine, coming out of the business world, would tell you he didn't know anything about Congress. In fact, he wound up being a very good negotiator but he got into it much later. John [Podesta], again we go back to somebody whose experience has been on the Hill so he brings a more direct and more personal involvement. It has a lot in my sense to do with their styles will be different and their priorities will be different.

MK: Does it affect the kinds of things that you would do? Like in a communications operation, for communications would it make a difference?

AL: Probably. But I'm not sure I can give you an example.

MK: I guess in Podesta's case as a deputy chief of staff he was very involved in communications whereas Erskine Bowles was not.

AL: Now Erskine did a little bit on communications in his earlier incarnation but less this time. I'm not sure I can tell. You're right; it should. I think in this case it would be because I worked with John and Erskine both there was less of a change.

MK: I was going to go into assignments within the Communications Office, what some of the divisions are.

AL: I think we talked about we have speechwriting; we have research; we have amplification. That I think we pretty much did.

MK: I think I'll hang it up.

AL: It was good to see you.

[End of Disc 1 of 1 and Interview]