First Impressions:
Presidents, Appointments, and the Transition

Stephen Hess
The Brookings Institution

September 18, 2000

First Impressions: Presidents, Appointments, and the Transition

A curious product of our presidential system is that while the electorate casts its vote for only two individuals, it in effect chooses hundreds of individuals to govern. The president-elect must quickly build an administration of private citizens that reflects his or her vision. This act of administration-building has been called "a uniquely American enterprise." In most democracies the pieces of the incoming government are already in place, as members of a shadow cabinet take their places alongside the new leader. It is the very "formlessness" in the United States, says the *New York Times*, that makes "a president-elect's task at once exciting and daunting."[1]

For those on the inside, noted Martin Anderson, who has been there twice, it is a time of "delicious chaos."[2] For those on the outside, bankable information is hard to come by. "Those who know aren't talking," said insider Edwin Meese during the 1980 transition, "and those who are talking don't know."[3] It is a complicated business, largely conducted behind closed doors.

For the national press corps, the journalists who shape our collective judgment of what kind of president we are about to get, covering the transition mainly boils down to a simple story about people. Who's in? Who's out? And who are the ins? Why were they chosen? Who do they represent? Are they competent? Controversial? And why did it take so long to assemble the president's White House team and Cabinet?

Thus the initial success and lingering impression of each presidency will be largely determined by the selection of about 30 people picked in haste during the brief period between election and inauguration. These include the secretaries of the 14 executive departments: State, Treasury, Defense, Justice, Interior, Agriculture, Commerce, Labor, Health and Human Services, Housing and Urban Development, Transportation, Energy, Education, and Veterans Affairs.

Congressional acts award Cabinet rank to the U.S. trade representative and the "drug czar." The president fills out the rest of his Cabinet as he sees fit. For instance, President Clinton's second-term team includes the administrator of the Environmental Protection Agency, director of the Office of Management and Budget, director of the Central Intelligence Agency, U.S. representative to the United Nations, administrator of the Small Business Administration, director of the Federal Emergency Management Agency, chair of the Council of Economic Advisers, and the White House chief of staff. Notable also are other top members of the White House staff, such as the national security adviser, the White House counsel, press secretary, and the primary economic and domestic policy aides. In assessing the ability of a president to get off to a fast and favorable start, these are the appointees who put a face on the administration.

1 "Building an Administration," *New York Times*, December 14, 1975.
2 Martin Anderson, *Revolution: The Reagan Legacy* (Stanford: Hoover Institution Press, 1990), p. 196.
3 Edwin Meese III, *With Reagan: The Inside Story* (Washington: Regnery Gateway, 1992), p. 63.

Paradoxically these high-profile appointments are the easiest a president will ever make. Most of the men and women chosen are personally known to him. Some are among his closest friends. Some have just finished running his campaign. All have reputations that are easy to check out. Moreover, the historical record (as opposed to the anecdotal record) shows that the president is given considerable latitude by the public, the press, and even the Senate. Yet personnel mistakes, sometimes serious errors, have plagued chief executives even before they actually take office.

This essay first summarizes the experiences in this regard of the five most recent first-term transitions: Richard Nixon (1968-69), Jimmy Carter (1976-77), Ronald Reagan (1980-81), George Bush (1988-89), and Bill Clinton (1992-93). The mistakes and accomplishments of previous presidents give incoming administrations a roadmap to complete successful transitions. Lessons can be drawn from prior events. These lessons should be heeded early in the transition if presidents want to avoid the accusation of drifting and maintain control over their own messages.

In analyzing the transition periods of the last five presidents, eight essential lessons can be drawn. They are:

★ BE PREPARED. Pre-election transition planning is essential.
★ ACT QUICKLY. Have your key White House staff in place by Thanksgiving and your Cabinet secretaries announced by Christmas.
★ PUT THE WHITE HOUSE FIRST. Choose your White House team before selecting your Cabinet.
★ THINK CLUSTERS. Choose appointees as a team.
★ SEND A MESSAGE. The appointments you make send a message about the administration's priorities.
★ CHOOSE YOUR DEMOGRAPHIC GOALS. Think about what you want your administration to look like.
★ FEED THE BEAST. Give the press corps something to cover.
★ SMILE AND GROVEL. Handle senators with care. They are the ones who must confirm your picks.

Richard Nixon
Elected November 5, 1968

Richard Nixon's transition exemplified the importance of choosing the White House staff before the Cabinet. Sequencing of appointments is a matter of considerable relevance in transitions.[4] The order in which presidents-elect choose their advisers has both symbolic and practical significance. The sequence that Nixon followed reflected the attention that he was giving to organizing his White House staff and the importance of finding ways to reach out to the opposition party.

Of the 25 presidential elections of the 20th century, only four have been close and Nixon was involved in half of those, losing to John Kennedy in 1960 and defeating Vice President Hubert Humphrey eight years later. Now facing the president-elect were the challenges of finding a way to conclude a divisive war in Vietnam and of building bridges to an opposition Congress. Indeed, Nixon was the first president in 120 years to enter office without his party controlling at least one chamber of the Congress.

Every first-term transition is conducted in two cities, Washington and the winning candidate's home city. Nixon's home was in New York. He moved there after losing the California gubernatorial election in 1962. And New York was the ideal city for transition purposes, close enough to the capital for the convenience of commuting politicians and big enough (unlike Plains, Georgia or Little Rock, Arkansas) to divert an underemployed press corps. Nixon set up headquarters in the elegant Hotel Pierre, a block south of his Fifth Avenue apartment.

The president-elect's first substantive appointment (after the gracious gesture of appointing his longtime personal secretary, Rose Mary Woods) was Bryce Harlow to be chief White House assistant for congressional affairs. The Harlow appointment indicated Nixon's willingness to reach out to Democrats. A *New York Times* headline declared, HARLOW IS LIKED BY BOTH PARTIES. The article concluded, "He brings to his job a quality few men have achieved even after years of effort—he has the confidence of both Democrats and Republicans in Congress."[5] This initial turn to Harlow also demonstrated Nixon's willingness to give the White House preeminence over the Cabinet, despite his previous belief that the White House staff should be subservient to the Cabinet.

Some of Nixon's earliest efforts were directed at finding "name" Democrats who might serve in his administration. He asked Humphrey to be the U.S. representative to the United Nations and was turned down. He asked Senator Henry Jackson of Washington to be secretary of Defense and was turned down. Finally he considered offering the U.N. post to Sargent Shriver, President Kennedy's brother-in-law, who was then ambassador to France. As Nixon tells the story in his memoirs:

4 See Appendix A: Sequence of Presidential Appointments.

5 Felix Belair Jr., "Harlow is Liked by Both Parties," *New York Times*, November 14, 1968.

> Shriver expressed great interest and sent me a message stating the conditions for his acceptance. Among other things he required a pledge that the federal poverty programs would not be cut. It was intolerable to have a prospective ambassadorial appointee making demands relating to domestic policy, so I told Bill Rogers [Nixon's choice for secretary of State] to inform Shriver that I had decided against him and to let him know why. Rogers reported that Shriver realized that he had overstepped himself and had tried to backpedal, claiming that he had not meant his message to set forth conditions but to make suggestions. I told Rogers to say that my decision remained unchanged.[6]

The day after the Harlow announcement, Nixon announced that H.R. (Bob) Haldeman would be in charge of "the general administrative area" at the White House, a job description that shortly evolved into chief of staff. The next day he announced that John Ehrlichman would be his White House counsel. Haldeman and Ehrlichman had been top aides during the campaign. Robert B. Semple Jr., reporting the Ehrlichman appointment in the *New York Times,* wrote, "It can now be said with some authority…that much of Mr. Nixon's campaign staff will simply be transferred to Washington, where they will take up residence as members of the White House staff."[7] There followed a blizzard of announcements of young campaign workers joining the new White House staff. It was a logical plan in that many campaign duties—press relations, scheduling, advance work, the personal care of the boss—need to be replicated in the White House.

Unlike the Cabinet departments, where the structure is largely determined by law, there is some room for rearranging the boxes on the White House organizational chart to serve the individual needs of each president. One problem Nixon faced was what to do with his good friend Herbert Klein, a California newspaper editor, who had served him loyally in four campaigns. Klein expected to be press secretary. Nixon thought he was too independent. He decided to downgrade the press job and give it to 29-year-old Ronald Ziegler, a Haldeman protégé. But where did this leave Klein? Klein decided "I could best bring the indecision on my role to a head either way by making my own power play on television." Appearing on CBS' *Face the Nation,* Klein said he would like to "have a role with him [Nixon] if it were structured right. Otherwise, I would have to go back into private enterprise." The "structure" then agreed upon was a new entity called the White House Office of Communications, directed by Klein, which would be given government-wide responsibility for coordinating media relations.[8] Any revised government scheme for press relations gives journalists much to chew on. After Klein appeared on *Meet the Press* on December 8, the *New York Times* reported, "For perhaps the dozenth time since his appointment was announced, Mr. Klein also defended himself against assertions that he had been chosen to insure that nothing damaging to Mr. Nixon was allowed to leak out."[9]

Nixon announced that he would not reveal Cabinet appointments until at least December 5. But he mollified the restless press with the appointment of Dr. Lee DuBridge, president of the California Institute of Technology, as his science adviser; the appointment of a well-respected economist, Dr. Paul McCracken of the University of Michigan, to chair the President's Council of Economic Advisers; and two surprising selections of distinguished Harvard professors to his White House staff. Dr. Henry Kissinger, foreign policy consultant to Nixon's archrival Nelson Rockefeller, would be the national security adviser. Dr. Daniel Patrick Moynihan, who had served in the Kennedy and Johnson administrations, would be the president's assistant for urban affairs and director of a new Urban Affairs Council, which Nixon envisioned as the domestic

6 Richard Nixon, *RN: The Memoirs of Richard Nixon* (New York: Grosset & Dunlap, 1978), p. 338. A very different version of why Shriver did not get the job appears in R.W. Apple Jr., "Nixon Picks Yost as U.N. Delegate in Surprise Move," *New York Times*, December 21, 1968.

7 Robert B. Semple Jr., "Nixon Appoints Ehrlichman Counsel," *New York Times*, November 15, 1968.

8 Herbert G. Klein, *Making It Perfectly Clear* (Garden City, New York: Doubleday, 1980), pp. 39-42. Also see John Anthony Maltese, *Spin Control: The White House Office of Communications and the Management of Presidential News* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1992), pp. 22-27.

9 R.W. Apple Jr., "Laird Choice of Nixon to Head Defense," *New York Times*, December 9, 1968.

equivalent of the National Security Council. "The academic community heaved a great sigh of relief," noted a *New York Times* story reported from Cambridge, Mass.[10]

News from transition headquarters announced high-level study groups, such as one charged with outlining priorities in education to be headed by Alan Pifer, president of the Carnegie Corporation, a major educational foundation. Such enterprises, which spring up during most transitions, cadge ideas on the cheap, spot talent for sub-Cabinet jobs, and reward people who do not wish to join the new administration. They also often generate misinformation and rumor that get into the political bloodstream.

The press was full of speculation as November flipped into December. It was more apt to be wrong than to be right. Three days before Nixon unveiled his Cabinet, predictions in the *New York Times* added up to five correct and six incorrect. Douglas Dillon, who had served as secretary of the Treasury under President Kennedy, was to be Nixon's secretary of State, according to R.W. Apple Jr.[11] *Chicago Daily News* predictions, published with pictures and biographies, were wrong in every case.[12]

The TV extravaganza that Nixon produced on December 11 to introduce his Cabinet has never been duplicated. All 12 departmental secretaries announced at the same time! Live, prime-time, on all networks! The president-elect, on a raised platform, commented on the "extra dimension" qualifications of each selectee facing him in the front row. The cameras in turn focused on the chosen, smiling or immobile. The purpose of the presentation was to make a splash, to grab attention. But in hindsight the real value was that each nominee got less nitpicking attention; the story was greater than the sum of the parts. Or as columnist Tom Wicker put it, "A prime-time television spectacular tended to emphasize the collegiality of the whole thing; let's have a big hand for the new Government, he [Nixon] seemed almost to be saying."[13]

Nixon's Cabinet was composed of white male Republicans. As he had failed in his quest for a Democrat, so too had he failed to get an African-American or a Hispanic-American. He was turned down by Senator Edward Brooke of Massachusetts and Whitney Young of the Urban League. (He did, however, use the Cabinet presentation to announce that he was going to reappoint Mayor Walter Washington of Washington, D.C., the only major city then with a black chief executive.) There is no evidence that he sought a woman. No Jews were among the chosen. What is remarkable was how little outcry was caused by this absence of diversity. A front-page *New York Times* article on December 14 noted the regret of Bayard Rustin, the civil rights leader. But that was about it, although the article reported that Leonard Garment, a law partner of the president-elect, was heading "a small group" seeking minority candidates for sub-Cabinet jobs.[14] The accent on diversity would become so pronounced over time that 1968 now looks like ancient history. Moreover, diversity simply became a more dominant theme in putting together a Democratic administration, given that party's greater support from minority groups.

Of the chosen dozen, three were governors: Walter Hickel of Alaska (Interior), George Romney of Michigan (Housing and Urban Development), and John Volpe of Massachusetts (Transportation). Three were close friends of the president-elect: William Rogers (State), John Mitchell (Justice), and Robert Finch (Health, Education and Welfare). Nixon had never met two of his proposed Cabinet members: George Shultz (Labor) and Clifford Hardin (Agriculture).[15] Nixon's notes for the Cabinet announcement show that he did not know Shultz's first name or how to spell his last name.[16]

10 Robert Reinhold, "Scholars Praise 2 Nixon Choices," *New York Times*, December 4, 1968.
11 R.W. Apple Jr., "Nixon's Cabinet Due in Few Days," *New York Times*, December 8, 1968.
12 Jonathan Friendly, "Articles About Possible Cabinet Nominees Raise Questions on Journalistic Standards," *New York Times*, December 9, 1980.
13 Tom Wicker, "In The Nation: The More Things Change, etc.," *New York Times*, December 12, 1968.
14 R.W. Apple Jr., "Rustin Regrets Lack of a Negro in Nixon Cabinet," *New York Times*, December 14, 1968.
15 John Ehrlichman, *Witness to Power: The Nixon Years* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1982), p. 88.
16 William Safire, *Before the Fall: An Inside View of the Pre-Watergate White House* (Garden City, New York: Doubleday, 1975), p. 108.

The number of "turndowns" may have been above average; no one keeps such records or has complete knowledge of them. Nixon admits in his memoirs to having been rejected by Humphrey, Jackson, Brooke, and Young. Kissinger gives additional information on Nixon's choices. He writes in his memoirs, "Nixon told me that [Robert] Murphy had turned down the position [of secretary of State]."[17] Former Pennsylvania Governor William Scranton, another likely secretary of State or U.N. ambassador candidate, made it clear that he did not want full-time employment in the government. The point, of course, is that a president's ultimate choices cannot be judged against the ideal since circumstances over which he has no control often intervene.

The president-elect had an additional decision before filling the sub-Cabinet posts. Would he keep any of the government's key administrators? This activity is always watched closely by Washington insiders. The young John Kennedy had been particularly skillful in this regard, providing instant reassurance by quickly re-appointing J. Edgar Hoover as director of the FBI and Allen Dulles as director of the CIA. Nixon took a page from Kennedy's playbook by again retaining Hoover and re-appointing President Johnson's CIA director, Richard Helms. He also asked Ellsworth Bunker, U.S. ambassador to South Vietnam, to remain in his post "for a period of time."

Second echelon appointees generally do not get much press notice unless they come with celebrity status, as when Nixon added former University of Oklahoma football coach Charles Burnham "Bud" Wilkinson to his White House staff and named America's best-known yachtsman, Emil "Bus" Mosbacher Jr., to be the State Department's chief of protocol. There was one second echelon controversy, however, when Nixon picked David Packard to be deputy secretary of Defense. The problem was his wealth, not his ability. As co-founder of Hewlett-Packard, the electronic instruments company and a huge defense contractor, Packard was faced with what he called "an impossible conflict of interest problem." Previous Pentagon nominees, notably Charles E. Wilson of General Motors and Robert McNamara of Ford, had sold their stock in the companies they ran. But Packard could not sell his 29 percent interest in H-P without depressing the market price and penalizing the other shareholders. Packard proposed putting his stock in a trust with all income and increase in value going to educational and charitable institutions. "But is it logical to apply a looser conflict-of-interest standard to an appointee who happens to be wealthier?" asked the *New York Times.*[18] The Senate thought so at that time, approving Packard (and his proposal) 82 to 1. The lone dissenter was Senator Albert Gore Sr.

Following a practice started in 1953, Senate committees now hold informal hearings on the president-elect's Cabinet choices even before he takes office so that the appointees can be quickly considered once a new president is inaugurated and can formally make the nominations. And so on January 20, 1969, Richard Nixon was sworn in and sent his Cabinet nominations to the Senate, where they were approved during a 20-minute session. The next day the new Cabinet took the oath of office at the White House, with one exception—Walter Hickel, the president's nominee to be secretary of the Interior, who had not yet been approved by the Senate.

Whereas Packard had been challenged for a potential conflict of interest, and another Nixon nominee had been questioned about a record of drunk driving, the concern over Hickel's appointment was less about his personal behavior than his policy beliefs. This was a rare departure for the Senate when considering a job that serves at the discretion of the president. The standard rule of thumb had always been, as expressed by Senator Henry Jackson, chairman of the Interior Committee, that if a candidate "met the minimum standards, I think the president is entitled to his choice."[19] The accusation against Hickel was that he was a business-oriented governor who

17 Henry Kissinger, *White House Years* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1979), p. 26.
18 Editorial, "Conflict-of-Interest Standards," *New York Times*, January 19, 1969.
19 "Cabinet Approved Except for Hickel," *New York Times*, January 21, 1969.

was insensitive to conservation. Or as stated in a *Times* editorial, "As chief steward of the nation's resources his inclination seems to be to put private profit ahead of the public interest."[20] Conservation groups deluged the Senate with mail urging that Hickel not be confirmed. As one senator put it, "Hell hath no fury like a conservationist aroused."[21] But during five days of fierce committee hearings Hickel expressed a devotion to conservation that had not been previously evident, and the Senate voted 73-16 in his favor. On January 23 the president conducted a full-dress swearing-in ceremony at the White House for his secretary of the Interior, symbolically completing the work of his transition.

Right after the election, Herblock, the *Washington Post's* liberal cartoonist, who was famous for depicting Nixon with dark jowls, drew a barbershop with the sign, "THIS SHOP GIVES EVERY NEW PRESIDENT OF THE UNITED STATES A FREE SHAVE."[22] In general, it was that sort of transition.

20 Editorial, "Conservation Front: Cloudy," *New York Times*, December 20, 1968.
21 E.W. Kenworthy, "Nixon Is Reported Considering Conservationist for Key Post," *New York Times*, January 12, 1969.
22 See Stephen Hess and Sandy Northrop, *Drawn & Quartered: The History of American Political Cartoons* (Montgomery, Ala.: Elliott & Clark, 1996), p. 121.

Jimmy Carter
Elected November 2, 1976

He was the first president since Woodrow Wilson without Washington political experience. Jimmy Carter had been a one-term governor of Georgia, whose candidacy for the Democratic presidential nomination, according to 1975 bookmakers, was rated at only 8-to-1 in a field of 14. The genius of his long-shot victory was that in a nation doubly shocked by the back-to-back events of Vietnam and Watergate, he offered absolution to the American people. All of this isn't your fault, was his message, it's the fault of politicians. "I want the government to be as good as you are."[23]

Carter's personal history had personnel consequences: It meant that he did not have wide knowledge of the sorts of people who usually populate presidents' Cabinets.

Unlike President Nixon, Carter chose to select his Cabinet before his White House staff. Importantly, the Carter transition shows the significance of thinking of the Cabinet in terms of clusters. Furthermore, questions about using the transition selection process to fulfill demographic goals were first raised by Carter.

Better pre-election planning might have helped close Carter's knowledge gap about potential appointees. During the summer Carter created a small transition office in Atlanta, headed by Jack Watson, that compiled "a working list" of about 75 prospective candidates for high-level positions. After the election, however, campaign manager Hamilton Jordan had other notions of who should control personnel selection. The "bloodless duel" between Jordan and Watson ended with Jordan in charge of the transition's "talent inventory program," as the people-picking process was formally known.[24]

When choosing the vice presidential candidate, Carter had drawn up a list of about 20 members of Congress, then boiled it down to seven. Since he didn't know any of them very well, he invited the finalists to come by for interviews. The exercise was highly publicized and demeaning for the losers, but Carter was pleased with his choice of Walter Mondale and determined he would now use the same procedure for picking the Cabinet.[25]

There were logistical problems in conducting the Cabinet search from Plains, Georgia. As recounted by Robert Shogan of the *Los Angeles Times*, "Carter's hometown was served by no airline, railroad, or bus company. It was without any motel, hotel, or even a restaurant, except for a sandwich shop which, as a sign posted behind the counter informs its patrons, lacks a rest room."[26] Eventually Carter moved some of these discussions to Atlanta, where he borrowed space in the governor's mansion.

Although Carter's first appointment was Press Secretary Jody Powell, who had held the same

23 See Stephen Hess, "The President: Is He the People's Choice?" *Information Please Almanac*, 1977 (New York: Simon and Shuster, 1976), p. 10.
24 James T. Wooten, "Carter Aide Chosen to Guide Transition," *New York Times*, November 11, 1976.
25 Transcript of Carter news conference, *New York Times*, November 16, 1976.
26 Robert Shogan, *Promises to Keep: Carter's First Hundred Days* (New York: Thomas Y. Crowell, 1977), p. 82.

position during his term as governor, he made it clear that he would appoint the Cabinet before the White House staff. Every president responds to what he feels are the mistakes of his predecessor, known as "the principle of contrariness."[27] Carter's contrary act was to tear down the so-called Berlin Wall that characterized Nixon's White House under Chief of Staff Bob Haldeman. The staff at the Carter White House would know its place, subservient to his Cabinet, and would have no chief of staff.

Outsider Carter had pledged to bring "fresh faces" to Washington. At one point Hamilton Jordan even declaimed that "if, after the inauguration, you find a Cy Vance as secretary of State and Zbigniew Brzezinski as head of National Security, then I would say we failed. And I'd quit."[28] But now that Carter had become the ultimate insider he was finding that past Washington experience might be a valued asset for future Washington service. The concern for balancing old and new was symbolized by Carter's first Cabinet appointments. On December 3, a month after the election, he announced that Cyrus Vance, a prominent establishment figure whose past government positions included deputy secretary of Defense, would head the State Department and that Bert Lance, a self-styled "country banker" from Georgia without federal experience, would be director of the Office of Management and Budget. Carter praised each man as "a good manager," a quality he held high in making his initial selections.[29]

Carter promptly outlined broad guidelines to prevent conflicts of interest, including appointees' full disclosure of net worth, a pledge not to lobby before their agencies for at least a year after leaving government, and divestiture of holdings that were likely to be affected by their official acts.[30] Lance announced plans to sell his bank stock. The Nixon experiences had made "conflict of interest" yesterday's transition issue.

Key appointments were visualized in terms of clusters. Vance was part of the national security cluster; Lance was part of the economic cluster. The Vance cluster was largely completed with the selection of Harold Brown for secretary of Defense and Brzezinski for the NSC slot. The economic cluster was completed with the appointments of Michael Blumenthal for Treasury secretary and Charles Schultze for chairman of the Council of Economic Advisers. Five of the six nominees were experienced Washington hands. All were white males.

By December 15 Carter had not yet appointed a black or a woman. Wrote Paul Delaney, "The overwhelming support blacks gave to Mr. Carter—in his primary campaign as well as in the general election—marks the first time a president has been so indebted to a minority community, and blacks fully expect appropriate payoffs, perhaps too much so."[31] On the 16th, Carter announced that Congressman Andrew Young ("one of the best personal friends that I have in the world") was his choice to be U.S. representative to the U.N. Far from being a "payoff," the president-elect was in Young's debt for taking the job.[32] A *Times* editorial noted, "The symbolism of a black American speaking for this country to all the nations of the world will not be lost either inside our boundaries or across the globe."[33]

Carter's response to criticism about the lack of diversity in his appointments was that prominent blacks were turning him down. He mentioned Mayor Coleman Young of Detroit, Mayor Thomas Bradley of Los Angeles, and Vernon Jordan of the National Urban League. But, said a *Times* report, "Sources who had talked with the two Mayors said in interviews this week that they had not decided to take themselves out of consideration until it became apparent that the Housing and Urban Development job was the only one open to

27 Stephen Hess, "Making It Happen," in Barry P. Bosworth and others, *Critical Choices* (Washington: Brookings, 1989), p. 98.
28 Quoted in Cyrus Vance, *Hard Choices* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1983), p. 30.
29 Transcript of Carter news conference, *New York Times*, December 4, 1976.
30 "Text of Carter Statement on Conflicts of Interest," *New York Times*, January 5, 1977.
31 Paul Delaney, "Blacks Expect Gains for Help to Carter," *New York Times*, November 7, 1976.
32 Transcript of Carter news conference, *New York Times*, December 17, 1976.
33 Editorial, "Ambassador to U.N.," *New York Times*, December 17, 1976.

them."[34] As Carter filled the "inner Cabinet" with white males, advocates for women and minorities complained that their constituents were being relegated to the "outer Cabinet."

The very public manner in which Carter floated names of potential appointees generated fierce lobbying. Would the president-elect choose John Dunlop to be his secretary of Labor? George Meany and Lane Kirkland of the AFL-CIO came out swinging on his behalf. The Congressional Black Caucus and women's groups were bitterly opposed.[35] Would the president-elect name Harold Brown or James Schlesinger to be his secretary of Defense? The intrigue was captured by Pentagon correspondent John Finney, who wrote, "As soon as Mr. Schlesinger began figuring in speculation…, some Congressional liberals mounted a campaign against his appointment….[T]hey started a counter-campaign by floating the name of Paul C. Warnke….Mr. Warnke is a liberal on defense matters, Mr. Schlesinger a conservative. The liberals probably never believed that Mr. Warnke would be appointed, but their tactic was to make Dr. Harold Brown…seem like a moderate and an acceptable compromise."[36]

Cabinet selections were completed on December 23. Carter had promised the process would be finished by Christmas. A member of the *Times'* editorial board had forecast on December 7, "Since several previous Presidents have had one woman appointee in the Cabinet, Mr. Carter will have to appoint at least two if he is to make any impact…One of them may be black…."[37] Carter chose Juanita Kreps (Commerce) and Patricia Harris (Housing and Urban Development); Mrs. Harris was black.[38] The secretary of Interior was a Western governor, Cecil Andrus of Idaho. A Minnesota congressman, Bob Bergland, was named secretary of Agriculture. There was one Catholic, Joseph Califano (Health, Education and Welfare) and one Jew, Michael Blumenthal (Treasury), both of whom had held high positions in previous Democratic administrations. There was even a Republican, James Schlesinger, the former secretary of Defense, who would be on the White House staff until Congress could create a new department of Energy. It was a traditional Cabinet within the Democratic party's frame of reference. Ironically, Carter had chosen fewer newcomers to Washington than either Nixon or Kennedy.

There still would be two controversies before the Senate gave its blessing to the incoming administration, one predictable, one not.

The controversy over the appointment of Griffin Bell to be attorney general could have been anticipated. A Georgian and a former federal appellate court judge, Bell was the only real friend among Carter's department heads. Despite candidates' talk about choosing the best qualified without regard for political consideration, most presidents-elect quickly realize that they need to have absolute confidence in the legal officer who will make decisions of immense political consequence. Kennedy chose his brother. Nixon chose his law partner. Reagan would choose his personal attorney. Carter must have known this in that he did not subject the AG nomination to the same kind of let-it-all-hang-out procedure that characterized the selections at Defense and Labor. The Senate would test Bell's commitment to civil rights. The case against him was that he belonged to private clubs that excluded blacks, that he had supported the unsuccessful nomination of G. Harrold Carswell to the Supreme Court, that he had not sufficiently promoted school desegregation when he was counsel to Governor Ernest Vandiver from 1959 to 1961, and that he had ruled against seating Julian Bond in the state

34 David E. Rosenbaum, "Carter Says Many Have Declined Posts; Mentions 3 Blacks," *New York Times,* December 17, 1976. Previously two white business leaders, A.W. Clausen of the Bank of America and Irving Shapiro of du Pont, withdrew from consideration for the Treasury post. Jane Cahill Pfeiffer of I.B.M. declined to be secretary of Commerce.

35 Tom Wicker, "The Dunlop Signal," *New York Times*, December 14, 1976.

36 John W. Finney, "Finding a Job for Schlesinger," *New York Times*, December 14, 1976. Also see David E. Rosenbaum, "Public Controversy Helps Carter In Selecting Cabinet, Aide Says," *New York Times*, December 18, 1976.

37 William V. Shannon, "Guessing Game," *New York Times*, December 7, 1976.

38 The federal departments dropped from 12 to 11 when the Post Office became an independent entity. Subsequently, the Energy Department was created in 1977; the Education Department in 1979, at which time the Department of Health, Education, and Welfare became the Department of Health and Human Services; and the Veterans Administration became a department in 1989.

legislature in 1966. The Judiciary Committee held six days of hearings, during which, not coincidentally, Bell announced his intention to appoint a black judge to be the solicitor general. The Senate vote in Bell's favor was 75 to 21.

No controversy was predicted, however, over the nomination of Theodore Sorensen to be director of the Central Intelligence Agency. Unlike outsider Bell, Sorensen was deeply enmeshed in the Washington scene since his days as President Kennedy's famous ghostwriter. Two days after the *Times* called his confirmation "virtually certain," the paper's front page headlined SORENSEN APPROVAL BY SENATE AS HEAD OF C.I.A. IS IN DOUBT. The sudden squall was set off by the Intelligence Committee having been alerted to Sorensen having taken classified material with him when he left the White House staff in 1964 to write a book. The initial allegation, as is often the case in contentious nominations, produced a pile-on: Republicans, elements of the Democratic Party not friendly to the Kennedys, and intelligence community professionals objected to Sorensen—saying he had been a conscientious objector in World War II, he lacked experience in the field, and his law firm represented certain foreign governments. At his confirmation hearing on January 17, Sorensen announced he had asked Carter to withdraw the nomination. It was a defeat for the president-elect. If he had more carefully cultivated the committee before making the appointment, perhaps the outcome would have been different. But Sorensen's prompt decision minimized the damage. In early February the President nominated Admiral Stansfield Turner, an Annapolis classmate, and he was unanimously confirmed.

The other Cabinet nominations survived in the usual manner. Washington State congressman Brock Adams, Carter's choice for secretary of Transportation, appeared before the Commerce Committee and, when questioned by Senator Moynihan of New York, promised to discuss with Northeastern governors the possibility of using a large portion of their highway money for mass transportation, promised to review federal support for the Westway highway project in Lower Manhattan, and said he understood the senator's point that a greater share of mass transit funds should be allocated to cities like New York.[39] "It's an educational process" for the appointees, noted a Senate committee staff director. "They often come up here feeling that the President and Cabinet run the country, and that the Congress stands by waiting for orders."[40]

A week before the inauguration the last piece of the mosaic, the White House staff, was put in place. Hamilton Jordan, even without the chief of staff title, would be the *primus inter pares*, first among equals. Of the 11 persons with greatest responsibility, seven were from Georgia. In addition to the previously announced—Lance (OMB) and Powell (press)—Jordan would be joined by Robert Lipshutz (counsel), Jack Watson (Cabinet secretary), Frank Moore (congressional relations), and Stuart Eizenstat (domestic affairs). Only Eizenstat had Washington experience. Two women, one of whom was black, and a Hispanic-American were given exalted titles, but they were not in the inner circle. Press Secretary Powell, announcing the new appointments, used the "wheel" image, with the president as the hub, to describe what the White House would look like organizationally. The words he reiterated were "informal," "open-door," "free access." Cabinet Secretary Watson stressed that the White House staff was not going to exercise any "command role."[41] If it was not obvious what the Carter administration was to be, there was no doubt that what it did not want to be was the Nixon administration.

39 David E. Rosenbaum, "Senators Cordial to Adams at Confirmation Hearing," *New York Times*, January 8, 1977.
40 Steven V. Roberts, "Cabinet Hearings Cast a Long Shadow," *New York Times*, January 6, 1981.
41 James T. Wooten, "Free Access by Staff to Carter is Planned," and Charles Mohr, "No Command Role Expected," *New York Times*, January 15, 1977.

Ronald Reagan
Elected November 4, 1980

Ronald Reagan's entrance into the Executive Office displayed the merits of being prepared. The Reagan campaign began the process early, and while it was not a transition entirely clear of bumps, it marked one of the strongest beginnings for an administration.

The results of the election doubly advantaged Reagan's transition. He had won an overwhelming victory. Unlike Nixon and Carter, there was no need to talk of bipartisanship in making appointments. Ultimately he chose one Democrat to serve in the Cabinet, Georgetown University professor Jeane Kirkpatrick, to be U.S. representative to the United Nations, but her party affiliation was not an issue. Moreover, the election created a Republican majority in the Senate, for the first time in 26 years. The president-elect had the votes to confirm his nominees, some of whom, such as James Watt to be secretary of the Interior, might have been turned down if the Democrats had remained in control.

Another notable difference from 1968 and 1976 was that there was a large reservoir of experienced Washington hands available to join the new administration. Reagan's party was back in power after only four years. Observing the incoming transition team, an admiring Carter White House aide commented, "They're very competent. They're no strangers to Washington. They know their way around and they know what they want. They're more relaxed than we were four years ago."[42] While this was especially helpful at the secondary level, the talent pool also produced the secretaries of State and Defense, Alexander Haig and Casper Weinberger.

Another talent pool was drawn from Reagan's two terms as governor of California. Every president's state contributes a body of supporters eager to move with him to the capital. But in measuring governing skills, all of the 50 states should not automatically be thought of as Washington writ small. A state's size and complexity makes a difference, and lessons learned in a California are more transferable to the federal government than lessons learned in an Arkansas.

During eight years as his state's chief executive, Reagan had developed a personal style of leadership. His objectives were few and clear, he inspired great loyalty in those around him, and he delegated immense authority. Subordinates polished lists of potential appointees while this president-elect, wearing a bright orange ski parka and gloves, went to his meat locker for veal and beef slabs. Emerging, he waved at the reporters and photographers, and asked, "You mean a farmer doing his work is of this much interest?"[43] He did not even announce the Cabinet choices; he left this chore to his press secretary. It was not a problem for Reagan to remain in Los Angeles during most of the transition.

42 Hedrick Smith, "Transition Shaping Up As a Very Fast Pit Stop," *New York Times*, November 16, 1980.
43 Judith Miller, "Reagan's Day: A Fitting, A $16.50 Clip and Work," *New York Times*, December 18, 1980.

The president-elect turned over direction of the transition to Edwin Meese, who had been his chief of staff in Sacramento. It was Meese who shuttled back and forth between Washington and Los Angeles. Pendleton James, a corporate headhunter with experience in the Nixon White House, headed the transition division charged with personnel recruitment. By September he had assembled a staff and was preparing a short list of candidates for each top job, using a set of five criteria: "First, commitment to the Reagan philosophy and program; second, the highest integrity and personal qualifications; third, experience and skills that fit the task; fourth, no personal agenda that would conflict with being a member of the Reagan team; and, fifth, the toughness needed to withstand the pressures and inducements of the Washington establishment, and to accomplish the changes sought by the President."[44] The potential nominees were filtered through a "kitchen cabinet" of Reagan's California friends, led by his personal lawyer, William French Smith.[45]

Final decisions were made in Reagan's home on a hillside overlooking the Pacific. Lou Cannon, the most careful outside observer of the process, argues that Reagan was deeply involved in making the appointments that mattered most to him. These appointees included Haig (State), Weinberger (Defense), William Casey (CIA), Smith (Justice), Richard Schweiker (Health and Human Services), Raymond Donovan (Labor), Drew Lewis (Transportation), David Stockman (OMB), and Kirkpatrick (U.N.). Casey, Donovan, and Lewis had important roles in the campaign and Senator Schweiker had been a Reagan loyalist since 1976. "Reagan was uninterested in many of the other Cabinet positions," Cannon writes, "and he was content in some cases to follow the lead of others who were more interested." Cannon cites Vice President-elect George Bush as the key player in picking Malcolm Baldrige (Commerce), Senator Robert Dole in picking John Block (Agriculture), and Reagan's friend Alfred Bloomingdale in recommending Samuel Pierce (Housing and Urban Development). Senator Paul Laxalt of Nevada would recommend the secretary of the Interior, James Watt. Reagan cared least about the jobs at Energy and Education, two departments he promised to abolish.[46] The ultimate results were shaped less by Reagan's old California friends (despite the media's attention to these wealthy entrepreneurs) than by the political realities of regionalism and clout.

All Cabinets, from the presidents' perspective, are a collection of friends and strangers. But the strangers' quotient in Reagan's Cabinet even exceeded Carter's. Haig begins his memoirs, "When, on December 11, 1980, President-elect Ronald Reagan asked me to be his Secretary of State, I had spent no more than three hours alone with him," and an hour of that time was in a helicopter in 1973.[47] Donald Regan asks in his memoirs, "Why would President-elect Reagan appoint a man he had met only twice [at fund-raisers] to a post as important as Treasury?"[48] And possibly as many as five other Cabinet officers could have written, as did Secretary of Education Terrel Bell, "I had never met him."[49]

Conflict-of-interest and financial disclosure requirements, the curse of Republican transitions, were exacerbated by new laws passed during the Carter administration. As described by William Safire:

> The Ethics in Government Act of 1978…requires prospective appointees to fill out the "Executive Personnel Financial Disclosure Report," a form printed in cool green, the color of cash. Worse, moments after a person is told by the President-elect that he is to be a Cabinet member, the new member of the team hears from "The Conflict-of-Interest Counsel." This friendly ferret drops

44 Meese, p. 63.
45 Steven R. Weisman, "Reagan's 'Kitchen Cabinet' Strengthening Its Influence," *New York Times*, November 30, 1980.
46 Lou Cannon, *President Reagan: The Role of a Lifetime* (New York: Touchstone Book/Simon & Schuster, 1991), pp. 84-87.
47 Alexander M. Haig, Jr., *Caveat* (New York: Macmillan, 1984), p. 1.
48 Donald T. Regan, *For the Record* (San Diego: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1988), p. 139.
49 Terrel H. Bell, *The Thirteenth Man: A Reagan Cabinet Memoir* (New York: The Free Press, 1988), p. 2.

by with a packet of forms including permission for the F.B.I. to launch a full field investigation and releases requesting former employers, schools and credit bureaus to disgorge everything about the nominee.[50]

As a result, at least three of Reagan's choices chose not to join his Cabinet: Walter Wriston of Citicorp would otherwise have been appointed secretary of the Treasury; rancher Clifford Hansen, a former senator from Wyoming, declined to be secretary of the Interior; and Houston oilman Michael Halbouty turned down the Energy post. Others declined for the usual reasons. Theodore Cooper, asked to be secretary of Education, had just taken a new job as executive vice president of the Upjohn Corporation. Anne Armstrong, one of the few women in Reagan's political inner circle, said, "I told him I had been in government and politics for 10 years and that I needed to go back to Texas and spend more time with my family."[51]

The orderly and leisurely appearance of the transition veiled a great deal of jockeying for position. George Shultz, a high-ranked candidate for secretary of State, was shot down by his former boss Richard Nixon, who strongly endorsed Haig.[52] Campaign manager Casey wanted to be secretary of State but had to settle for the CIA directorship. Stockman, a young Michigan congressman, lobbied for the OMB job with the aid of columnist Robert Novak.[53] Reagan passed over Meese for chief of staff, but eased the hurt by giving him Cabinet status as a chief policy advisor. The right-wing of the conservative movement bitterly complained that Reagan's appointees were too moderate, "Nixon-Ford retreads."

Although the final Cabinet announcement—Bell to head the unwanted department of Education—was made on January 7, the transition team considered the heavy lifting over by December 22, in time for Christmas. On that date Reagan added the lone black (Pierce, HUD) and the lone woman (Kirkpatrick, U.N.). The other unwanted department, Energy, was given to Senator Strom Thurmond's candidate, James Edwards, a successful oral surgeon and former governor of South Carolina. Only four of the nominees—Kirkpatrick, Bell, Watt, and Stockman—listed their net worth as less than $500,000.[54]

Several nominees had contentious Senate hearings even though they were approved with ease:

★ By choosing Haig, Nixon's last chief of staff, Reagan presented the Senate Democrats and the press with a tempting target. The *Times*' page one headline on January 14: HAIG AND DEMOCRATS IN REPEATED CLASHES ON WATERGATE VIEWS. Demands to produce Nixon tapes and papers went unheeded, with executive privilege supported by the Carter White House. The Foreign Relations Committee voted 15-to-2 and the Senate 93-to-6 to support the nomination.

★ Attorney General-designate William French Smith, when challenged for being a member of all-male clubs, responded, "I do not think that we have reached the point where belonging to the Boy Scouts or Girl Scouts, going to a woman's college or a men's college, or even playing on a female or male Davis Cup team should be viewed as evidence of discriminatory attitudes." Judiciary Committee approval was unanimous; one dissenting vote was cast in the Senate, by William Proxmire of Wisconsin.

★ James Edwards admitted that he was not up to speed on many energy matters. According to Edwards, the Three Mile Island nuclear accident "showed the system worked; nobody was harmed, nobody was killed." The Energy Committee's favorable vote was 17-to-0; there were three nay votes in the Senate.

★ Reagan's choice for Interior secretary, James Watt of the Denver-based Mountain States Legal Foundation, evoked strong opposition from

50 William Safire, "Reagan's Mr. Clean," *New York Times*, December 8, 1980.
51 AP, "Mrs. Armstrong Decides To Bar a Post in Cabinet," *New York Times*, November 27, 1980.
52 Cannon, pp. 78-79.
53 David A. Stockman, *The Triumph of Politics* (New York: Harper & Row, 1986), p. 70.
54 AP, "Financial Reports Show That 10 Members of Cabinet Are Worth $1 Million or More," *New York Times*, January 26, 1981.

conservationists who argued that he had a long record of favoring exploitation of the land at the cost of the environment. This did not impress the Energy Committee, where the vote was 16-to-0, with Paul Tsongas of Massachusetts abstaining; Watt carried the Senate 83-to-12.

★ Most serious was the case against Raymond Donovan to be secretary of Labor. He was an executive in a New Jersey construction company who an underworld informer accused of delivering money to a union courier in an effort to buy labor peace from the teamsters. Donovan vehemently denied the allegations. After delaying the hearings to conduct an investigation, the FBI concluded it could not corroborate the charges. On January 29 nine Republicans and two Democrats on the Labor and Human Resources Committee voted in his favor and five Democrats, including ranking minority member Edward M. Kennedy of Massachusetts, voted "present." On February 3, the Senate approved the nomination 80-to-17.

Comparing Reagan's Cabinet to Reagan's White House staff, Steven Weisman, who covered Reagan for the *New York Times*, observed that the White House aides "have one common attribute that most of Mr. Reagan's Cabinet members don't have: a long-standing commitment to Mr. Reagan's political fortunes, which is the one commodity that Presidents usually end up valuing the most when they weigh conflicting advice."[55]

Weisman was certainly describing Meese and Michael Deaver, who would be in charge of the president's message and image respectively. But Meese was right when he predicted early that "the senior White House staff is not going to be nine guys from California."[56] For besides loyalty, which is found on all White House staffs, what distinguished Reagan's aides was that they had more experience in the executive branch than any previous incoming White House staff. Whereas the Kennedy and Johnson assistants came from Capitol Hill, a very special part of Washington, the Reagan people came from secondary positions in the federal departments and the White House. Most important was James Baker, the chief of staff. Baker and Meese were the president-elect's first appointments, announced jointly on November 14. Baker had come to Washington to be under secretary of Commerce in the Ford administration. Others in the Reagan White House who had also served Washington apprenticeships during the Nixon or Ford presidencies included Fred Fielding (counsel), Martin Anderson (domestic policy), Richard Allen (national security), David Gergen (communications), Edwin Harper (budget), Pendleton James (personnel), Lyn Nofziger (political affairs), and Richard Darman (staff secretary). Elizabeth Dole, who became assistant to the president for public liaison, had worked in the consumer affairs office in the White House under Presidents Johnson and Nixon and was a member of the Federal Trade Commission for six years. Max Friedersdorf, who was appointed as assistant to the president for legislative affairs, had been on the staff of an Indiana congressman, a lobbyist for Nixon and Ford, and chairman of the Federal Election Commission. The new press secretary, James Brady, had handled press relations for the Office of Management and Budget in the Ford administration, worked as chief spokesman for a secretary of Defense, and had been press secretary to a senator. Even the next tier down had people coming back to government after the Carter interlude.

In the White House—if not in some of the departments—this was a presidency prepared to "hit the ground running."

55 Steven R. Weisman, "Reagan's Inside Team Will Hold Much of Real Power," *New York Times*, January 4, 1981.
56 Adam Clymer, "Manager of Only Show in Town," *New York Times*, November 7, 1980.

George Bush
Elected November 8, 1988

It had not happened since Herbert Hoover succeeded Calvin Coolidge in 1929, an election resulting in the transfer of presidential power between administrations of the same party. A "friendly takeover" creates another dynamic, different advantages and different liabilities. Cross-currents exist that are not there in the us-versus-them transitions between parties, where all the players know which team they are on. There is no shortage of experienced hands to help the new president, but who gets the pink slips?

Thus, the friendly transition from President Ronald Reagan to President George Bush was both an unusual political moment and a surprisingly rocky period. The Bush administration's experience illustrates the importance of taking the Senate very seriously, given its role in the advise and consent process.

On the morning after his victory, Bush announced the importance that international relations would have in his presidency. James Baker, his Houston friend of 30 years, would be secretary of State. The former Reagan chief of staff had become secretary of the Treasury in Reagan's second term before resigning to run Bush's campaign.[57] For Baker, who had also been the initial announcement of the Reagan transition, this must have been something like being picked first in both the NBA and the NFL drafts.

A few days later, Bush retained Secretary of the Treasury Nicholas Brady, Attorney General Richard Thornburgh, and Secretary of Education Lauro Cavazos. The three had joined the Reagan Cabinet earlier in the year following Bush's endorsement. Brady was a New Jersey industrialist and briefly a U.S. senator; Thornburgh was the former governor of Pennsylvania; Cavazos was the president of Texas Tech.

Others closely identified with Bush's career would serve on his White House staff: C. Boyden Gray (counsel), Chase Untermeyer (personnel), David Bates (Cabinet secretary), James Cicconi (staff secretary), Andrew Card (deputy chief of staff), and Marlin Fitzwater, who had been Bush's press secretary before becoming Reagan's press secretary. But Bush reached beyond his inner circle to make his most important appointment: John Sununu, the New Hampshire governor with a reputation for abrasiveness, was to be chief of staff.

George Bush, the man with the golden resume—congressman, ambassador to the U.N. and to China, national party chairman, CIA director, two-term vice president—would not assemble a government of strangers. Bush's career had been long on friends and short on ideology. He even went back to his prep school days to pick the director of the United States Information Agency. Said one old friend, "Loyalty is his ideology."[58]

57 See James A. Baker III, *The Politics of Diplomacy* (New York: Putnam's, 1995), pp. 17-19.
58 Maureen Dowd, "Bush's Fierce Loyalty Raises Debate On Whether It Hinders His Judgement," *New York Times*, March 10, 1989.

Beyond the traditional competition of any transition, friendly or otherwise, there was in 1988-89 an underlying bitterness among the so-called Reaganauts in Washington, who felt that they were more than losing jobs, they were being purged.[59] Right after the inauguration the *New York Times* published a list of Bush appointees: of 53 White House staffers, for instance, 27 came from the Reagan government. In the cold light of history the Reagan loyalists were wrong: The Bush transition had struck a balance between the need to find places for campaign supporters and the retention of experienced executives. But the reality of impressions was that everyone knew somebody who had been fired.

Bush's government also reflected the revolving door of political Washington, as former officials returned to serve again. Brent Scowcroft, President Ford's national security adviser, returned to the same position after working as vice chairman of Kissinger Associates; Roger Porter, a Harvard professor, returned to the White House to direct domestic policy; and Richard Darman, a veteran of three Republican administrations, came back from Wall Street to head the Office of Management and Budget.[60]

The Cabinet choices, besides Baker and the three holdovers, consisted of former Senator John Tower, Defense; U.S. Representative Jack Kemp of New York, HUD; U.S. Representative Manuel Lujan of New Mexico, Interior; former chief of naval operations James Watkins, Energy; U.S. Trade Representative Clayton Yeutter, Agriculture; former Secretary of Education William Bennett, drug policy. Former Illinois congressman Edward Derwinski was to be the first secretary of the new department of Veterans Affairs. Two women who had served in previous Republican Cabinets were back: Elizabeth Dole to be secretary of Labor and Carla Hills to be trade representative. Only three of the 16 to whom Cabinet status was given were new to Washington. Dr. Louis Sullivan, a hematologist at Morehouse Medical College, where Barbara Bush was a trustee, was to be secretary of Health and Human Services. Samuel Skinner, secretary-designate of Transportation, was a prominent lawyer from Illinois, where he was Bush's campaign director, and Houston oil executive Robert Mosbacher, another Bush friend and chief campaign fund-raiser, was rewarded with the Commerce portfolio. The diversity total was two Hispanic-Americans, one African-American, and two women, a considerable advance over previous Republican Cabinets.

One member of the inner circle who helped Bush on personnel matters described the process. "The purpose of the first meetings was not to make or come to conclusions on individuals, but rather to talk more generally about the sort of individuals needed."[61] Bush ultimately decided that what he most needed in the Energy Department was an expert on nuclear matters, a program mired in controversy, and chose a retired admiral trained by Hyman Rickover.[62] On the other hand, former Transportation Secretary Dole had the sort of governing skills that could usefully fit into any outer Cabinet slot. If the watchword of Carter's selection process had been "good manager," the watchword of Bush's was "team player."

Bush had strong feelings about what he wanted at the CIA and U.N., two jobs he once held. The intelligence post had never changed hands during a transition until President Carter fired CIA Director Bush in 1977. Now Bush endorsed the concept of continuity and retained CIA Director William Webster. The CIA position had been elevated to Cabinet status when Reagan gave the job to his campaign manager, William Casey. But Bush believed the director of central intelligence "should not be in the policy business," and removed his appointee from the Cabinet. For the U.N. ambassadorship Bush picked a distinguished diplomat, Thomas Pickering, who also was not given Cabinet rank. "There is no point

59 See Herbert S. Parmet, *George Bush: The Life of a Lone Star Yankee* (New York: Scribner, 1997), pp. 360-361.
60 "Bush's Team: The First Choices," *New York Times*, January 23, 1989.
61 Gerald Boyd, "Circle of Senior Aides Helps Bush Fill Top Posts," *New York Times*, December 8, 1988.
62 Transcript of Bush news conference, *New York Times*, December 20, 1988.

in the United Nations Ambassador sitting around, as I did for a while, talking about ag policy."[63]

When all the pieces were in place, where were the "new faces" that Bush had promised? His response was "I didn't mean I was going to reach out and find everybody with no experience in government."[64] Yet after the initial burst of energy, the appointment pace slowed to a crawl. Some explanations are reasonable. There is a cumulative buildup of red tape over the history of transitions as each new type of controversy produces new procedures to protect the executive branch appointers and the legislative branch confirmers (and presumably the citizenry). Thus with each transition it takes more time to staff the government than the previous transition. Moreover, the more serious the effort to seek diversity, the longer the process takes. Still, the conundrum of the Bush transition was why a team so knowledgeable in the culture of the capital and the workings of government had such severe startup problems.

The matter of Louis Sullivan was an embarrassment. The matter of John Tower was a disaster.

For Dr. Sullivan, the hematologist, getting confirmed as secretary of HHS proved to be, in the words of Steven Roberts, "a painful lesson in the perils and pitfalls awaiting an innocent traveler in the Washington wilderness."[65] Although the wounds were self-inflicted, the Bush staff had not prepared him for his journey. One senior White House assistant called their performance "amateur hour." The issue was abortion and Sullivan was forced to twice reverse course to get in line with his president's position. In one case he found himself in the crossfire between two Republican senators, abortion foe Gordon Humphrey of New Hampshire and abortion supporter Bob Packwood of Oregon, to whom he had said privately that he favored *Roe v. Wade*. A "very upset and confused" Humphrey told reporters, "Let's put it plainly. Dr. Sullivan is the only black nominee to the Cabinet. It would be embarrassing to the President, embarrassing to the Republican Party, if that nomination encountered any trouble."[66] Belatedly the White House put Sullivan through a cram course for troubled nominees. In Washington parlance this is called the "murder board," a simulation of a confirmation hearing with former Senate aides and lobbyists playing legislators. The actors fire questions at the nominee and then pick apart his answers. After a week of getting murdered regularly, Sullivan told a friend, "I find that I need to learn the language, the culture and the etiquette of Washington so I'm not misunderstood."[67] Finally on February 23, after Sullivan apologized to Packwood for "having misspoken," the Finance Committee unanimously approved the nomination. The Senate confirmed the nomination on March 1, 98 to 1, with Jesse Helms the only senator to vote against Sullivan.

John Tower, however, was no innocent traveler in the Washington wilderness. He had retired from the Senate in 1985 after 24 years. As the virtual founder of the modern Republican Party in Texas, Tower had long supported Bush's political aspirations and had stuck with him through some difficult times. Tower's knowledge of the Pentagon was profound. He badly wanted to be secretary of Defense and there is no indication that Bush seriously considered any other candidate.

When the Armed Services Committee opened hearings on the nomination, the *Times*' Andrew Rosenthal noted, "Mr. Tower is unlikely to face opposition from the committee, of which he was chairman from 1981 to 1985. But aides said senators wanted to avoid any suggestion that they did not question a former colleague carefully enough."[68] The Senate is a clubby place. Rejecting a president's Cabinet nomination is rare; it's happened only eight times in 200 years, the last in 1959. It seemed highly unlikely that John Tower would be the ninth.

63 Transcript of Bush news conference, *New York Times*, December 7, 1988.
64 Quoted from *USA Today* in R.W. Apple Jr., "Bush's Beltway Team," *New York Times*, January 13, 1989.
65 Steven V. Roberts, "Sullivan's Rough Trip From Halls of Academe," *New York Times*, February 2, 1989.
66 Steven V. Roberts, "Bush Will Stand By Nominee to Health Post, Officials Say," *New York Times*, January 25, 1989.
67 Steven V. Roberts, "Cabinet Choice Fielding Hard Questions in Drills," *New York Times*, February 5, 1989.
68 Andrew Rosenthal, "Tower Begins Confirmation Hearings Today," *New York Times*, January 25, 1989.

When Bush announced Tower's selection on December 16, he said he was "totally satisfied" with the findings of an extensive FBI check into the candidate's personal and professional background.[69] But once the committee hearings began in January, Tower was subjected to an almost daily barrage of allegations about drinking and womanizing, with other charges leveled against his defense industry connections. "As might be expected," wrote William Safire, "each week with the nominee twisting in the wind invites some old political enemy or ex-wife or disgruntled former staffer to make a new charge, setting the F.B.I. off on another investigation, providing time for more new charges."[70]

On February 23 the committee split along party lines and voted down the nomination, 11-to-9. And on March 9 the Senate rejected Tower, 53-to-47, with three Democrats voting for him, and one Republican, Nancy Kassebaum of Kansas, voting against him, although she said she would have voted for him despite her misgivings if the president had needed her vote.[71] It was the first time that an incoming president had been denied a Cabinet member of his choice.

The Bush people put too much stock in the Senate's habit of looking out for its own. (Only one former senator had ever been denied a Cabinet seat and that was in 1868.) Many of the allegations against Tower were easily disproved; nevertheless, he was a hard fellow to defend. "I can understand how over the years Tower might have left a lot of people unhappy with him," said Les Aspin, chairman of the House Armed Services Committee. "Everything was a struggle with him, everything was a fight."[72]

Furthermore, the administration's efforts to save the nomination were all thumbs. Sam Nunn, the chairman of the Senate Armed Services Committee, was infuriated when White House officials excluded Democrats from a Senate briefing about Tower's FBI report. The president's counsel asked Nunn to postpone the vote while other administration officials were pressuring for a quick vote. And the committee vote came when Bush and his top aides were in Japan for Emperor Hirohito's funeral, leaving the trolling for stray Democrats in less competent hands.[73] Nunn was a methodical, slow-to-reach-judgment Southerner, who had built his Senate career on expertise in matters military. When he decided that doubts about Tower's sobriety made him unfit to stand in the chain of command of the nuclear arsenal, there may not have been anything Bush's people could have done to get their nominee through the Democratic Senate.[74] Some in Washington questioned Bush's decision to go down fighting. But Stuart Eizenstat of the Carter White House concluded, "The Bush people have mishandled this nomination, but they were smart to have stood and fought, rather than to have played their cards and walked away as we did with the Sorensen nomination."[75]

Bush quickly patched up relations with Congress by appointing Dick Cheney, the popular Wyoming congressman who had been President Ford's chief of staff. Yet he paid a heavy price for the Tower humiliation. Other Cabinet nominees—Watkins, Bennett, and Derwinski—did not get confirmed until March. Gerald Boyd reported in the *Times* of "a growing perception in Washington that his Administration is adrift."[76] The president acknowledged, "Too much time has been wasted."[77]

69 Gerald M. Boyd, "Bush Names Tower to Pentagon Post, Ending Long Delay," *New York Times*, December 17, 1988.
70 William Safire, "Towering Inferno," *New York Times*, February 13, 1989.
71 Michael Oreskes, "Senate Rejects Tower," *New York Times*, March 10, 1989.
72 Susan F. Rasky, "Panel, Beginning an End to Ordeal, Sets Vote on Tower Nomination," *New York Times*, February 22, 1989.
73 Andrew Rosenthal, "On the Road to the Vote on Tower: A Series of White House Missteps," *New York Times,* February 26, 1989.
74 Tower blamed his downfall on the animus and ambition of Nunn. See John Tower, *Consequences: A Personal and Political Memoir* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1991), pp. 203 and 217.
75 Andrew Rosenthal, "On Capitol Hill, A Struggle For the Record," *New York Times*, March 5, 1989.
76 Gerald M. Boyd, "Bush Tries to Dispel 'Drift' Image, Says Administration Is 'on Track,'" *New York Times*, March 8, 1989.
77 R.W. Apple Jr., "An Attempt to Recover," *New York Times*, March 11, 1989.

Bill Clinton
Elected November 3, 1992

The transition into the Clinton administration, widely considered one of the most chaotic transitions in modern times, could be considered a case study of things not to do when entering into the presidency. The Clinton team was not in place early and did not inspire confidence in either the Senate or the media, and the whole process moved extremely slowly. In a more positive sense, it did send a strong message about Clinton's economic priorities. However, its self-imposed task to create a diverse Cabinet and White House staff impacted the pace of appointments. How does a president-elect, given 11 weeks, construct an administration that "looks like America"? That had been Bill Clinton's campaign promise and it was now his challenge.

Richard Nixon had made halfhearted attempts to find a Democrat and an African-American to include in his Cabinet, settled for a dozen white male Republicans, and announced them all at the same time on December 11. Jimmy Carter completed his selections on December 23, with two women and two blacks in the Cabinet. One of the women was black; the other black was the U.N. representative, a position that had not been in the Nixon Cabinet. Ronald Reagan's Cabinet was all male, all white, except for an African-American at HUD and a woman at the U.N. George Bush worked harder at seeking diversity, choosing two Hispanic-Americans, one African-American, and two women, but did not complete the Cabinet until the tenth week of the transition. And, of course, there were additional pieces that had to be fitted into the puzzle, ideological, geographical, political, personal, and substantive.

But never had a president-elect attempted so elaborate a construction as did Clinton in 1992-93. Cabinet building seems to cry out for gaming metaphors. It is juggling, musical chairs, tug-of-war, mix and match, a puzzle, jigsaw or crossword. All of these descriptions are useful in recalling the Clinton transition.

Clinton's selection process was contained in what has been described as "a very closed loop," consisting of his wife Hillary, Vice President-elect Al Gore, Warren Christopher, who had been deputy secretary of State in the Carter administration, and Arkansas friends Bruce Lindsay and Thomas (Mack) McLarty. "Most job seekers appeared to go through the same ritual in their treks to Little Rock," explained Richard Berke. "It starts with a phone call from Warren Christopher, the transition director, telling the person that he or she is under consideration for an appointment. The candidate is met at the airport by relatively low level aides, and then may be escorted to meet transition officials before going to the [Governor's] Mansion for interviews that usually last at least an hour."[78] A premium was placed on secrecy and protecting the candidates' privacy, not easy to do in a city the size of Little Rock and a cable culture whose stock-in-trade is political gossip. A widely read newsletter, *The Hotline*,

78 Richard L. Berke, "Job Interviews With Clinton: Mostly a Friendly Little Chat," *New York Times*, December 6, 1992. Also see Elizabeth Drew, *On the Edge: The Clinton Presidency* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1994), pp. 21-35.

ran a daily "Transition Box Score" handicapping the candidates.[79]

"It's the economy, stupid!" had been the campaign's theme. It was important that the economic team should be the first order of the transition's business. This Clinton did on December 10 with the appointments of Lloyd Bentsen, chairman of the Senate Finance Committee, as secretary of the Treasury; Roger Altman, an investment banker and friend of Clinton's since college days, as deputy Treasury secretary; Leon Panetta, chairman of the House Budget Committee, as director of the Office of Management and Budget; Alice Rivlin, former director of the Congressional Budget Office, as deputy director of OMB; and Robert Rubin, co-chairman of Goldman Sachs, as the head of the National Economic Council, a new White House unit that had been promised in the campaign.

"My first appointment, intentionally, is the Secretary of the Treasury," announced Clinton. "In filling this post, I wanted someone who had the unique capacity to command the respect of Wall Street."[80] Following Kennedy's example, calming the business community must be of paramount importance to a young Democratic president. Commented the *New York Times*, "All five are cut from the same fiscally conservative cloth."[81] No need to muddy the message by also announcing the appointments of such liberals as Robert Reich and Ira Magaziner.

Women's groups had made clear that their highest priority was a woman in one of the "big four" Cabinet posts—State, Defense, Treasury, and Justice. "A person with knowledge of the appointment process" let it be known that Clinton was seeking a woman for attorney general.[82]

Clinton's next batch of appointments consisted of four social activists, three of whom were women. In addition to his old friend from Oxford, Robert Reich, to be secretary of Labor, Clinton picked Donna Shalala, chancellor of the University of Wisconsin, to be secretary of Health and Human Services; Laura D'Andrea Tyson, a professor at Berkeley, to head the Council of Economic Advisers; and Carol Browner, a Gore protégé, to run the Environmental Protection Agency. Reported Gwen Ifill, "Mr. Clinton let slip some of this awareness of the symbolic intent of today's announcements when he asserted incorrectly that Ms. Browner would be the first woman to head the environmental agency and was quickly corrected by Mr. Gore." (Anne M. Gorsuch held the post from 1981-83.) Tyson, however, was in fact the first woman to chair the CEA.

No members of minority groups had yet been selected. But the *Times* revealed that Ronald Brown, chairman of the Democratic National Committee, after rejecting the U.N. ambassadorship, was going to be the first black secretary of Commerce.[83] Clinton then announced that Henry Cisneros, the former mayor of San Antonio, was his choice for secretary of Housing and Urban Development, and Jesse Brown, director of the Disabled Veterans of America, would be his secretary of Veterans Affairs. Another African-American, Congressman Mike Espy of Mississippi, was the leading candidate to be secretary of Agriculture.

As Clinton juggled the names and the jobs, he knew at least four white males who he wanted in the Cabinet: Warren Christopher to be secretary of State; Les Aspin, chairman of the House Foreign Affairs Committee, to be secretary of Defense; Richard Riley, a former governor of South Carolina, to be secretary of Education; and Bruce Babbitt, a former governor of Arizona, to be secretary of the Interior. Retiring Senator Timothy Wirth of Colorado felt he had a Cabinet claim at Energy and there were two top-rated claimants for Transportation, William Daley of the Chicago Daleys and former Michigan governor James Blanchard.

79 Gwen Ifill, "People in Line for Jobs: The 'Short List' Grows," *New York Times*, November 23, 1992.
80 "Excerpts From Clinton's Announcement of Appointments to Economic Posts," *New York Times*, December 11, 1992.
81 Editorial, "The Clinton Anti-Gridlock Team," *New York Times,* December 11, 1992.
82 Neil A. Lewis, "Clinton Expected to Name Woman Attorney General," *New York Times*, December 9, 1992.
83 Gwen Ifill, "Clinton Widens His Circle, Names 4 Social Activists," *New York Times*, December 12, 1992.

With only Energy, Transportation, and Justice unclaimed, the box score of the Cabinet was 10 men and one woman; seven whites, three African-Americans, and one Hispanic-American. No serious effort was made to find a Republican, which caused Thomas Friedman to write, "Republicans seem to be of two minds about Mr. Clinton's Cabinet. On the one hand they note that his promise to appoint a Republican to give his team a bipartisan air was ignored. On the other hand, Republicans almost seem relieved."[84]

Women's groups were now irate at their non-representation in Clinton's Cabinet. Eleanor Smeal, president of the Fund for the Feminist Majority, wrote him, "If the trend you have established continues, it is probable that you will appoint fewer women to the Cabinet than Presidents Carter, Reagan or Bush."[85] Hurt by the criticism, Clinton lashed out at the women, calling them "bean counters."[86] Patricia Ireland, president of the National Organization of Women, replied, "He has made a whole series of campaign promises, and he is going to be pushed and pulled in a lot of directions. Right now, he's just starting to squirm a little."[87]

Bean counters perhaps, but powerful bean counters, Clinton concluded. An anonymous "top adviser" to the president-elect told Adam Clymer, "He's casting aside people he knows very well and had planned to choose in favor of people he knows much less well who will help him reach his diversity goals."[88] Senator Wirth was out as Energy secretary and in was Hazel O'Leary, a black woman and little-known executive with a Minnesota utility. Clinton also played the U.N. game. The position was again raised to Cabinet status. When the national security team was announced on December 22, it consisted of six white men, one black man, and Madeleine Albright at the U.N. The penultimate slot, secretary of Transportation, went to neither Daley nor Blanchard but to Federico Pena, the former mayor of Denver, who had not been on any journalist's radar screen, thus giving Clinton's Cabinet a second Hispanic name.

And then there was one. "The transition team was scrambling to find the best female attorney general rather than the best attorney general period," according to George Stephanopoulos.[89] Clinton had been turned down by his first choice, Judge Patricia Wald of the U.S. Court of Appeals for the District of Columbia Circuit. Finally, on Christmas Eve, the mythic date by which presidents-elect aim to have completed their Cabinets, Clinton announced his attorney general would be Zoe Baird, general counsel of Aetna Life & Casualty Company, who was originally penciled in to be the White House counsel, a position that does not require Senate confirmation.

Although the Clinton transition vetters had not seen it as a problem, their attorney general-designate had broken the law. She and her law professor husband had hired illegal aliens to care for their child and additionally had failed to pay Social Security taxes on their wages. "Radio talk-show hosts across the nation had a field day, and the public responded with outrage. Why does a person who earns $500,000 a year need to hire help on the cheap? And how could the nation's chief law enforcer be a scofflaw herself?"[90] The confirmation hearing was brutal.

Senator Thurmond: "You admit you did wrong?"

Baird: "Yes."

Thurmond: "You're sorry you did wrong?"

Baird: "Absolutely."

Thurmond: "You're repentant for doing wrong?"

Baird: "Yes, sir."[91]

84 Thomas L. Friedman, "Clinton's Cabinet Choices Put Him at Center, Balancing Competing Factions," *New York Times*, December 27, 1992.
85 Gwen Ifill, "Clinton Wants Wife at Cabinet Table," *New York Times*, December 19, 1992.
86 Gwen Ifill, "Clinton Chooses 2 and Deplores Idea of Cabinet Quotas," *New York Times*, December 22, 1992. But, wrote E.J. Dionne Jr., "presidential Cabinets have always been the product of a similar kind of bean-counting. What's changed is the nature of the beans we count." *Washington Post*, January 12, 1993.
87 Catherine Manegold, "Clinton Ire on Appointments Startles Women," *New York Times*, December 23, 1992.
88 Adam Clymer, "Push for Diversity May Cause Reversal on Interior Secretary," *New York Times*, December 23, 1992.
89 George Stephanopoulos, *All Too Human: A Political Education* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1999), p. 118.
90 Jeffrey H. Birnbaum, *Madhouse: The Private Turmoil of Working for the President* (New York: Times Books, 1996), p. 21.
91 Michael Kelly, "Clinton Cancels Baird Nomination for Justice Dept.," *New York Times*, January 22, 1993.

The nomination was withdrawn. But the next person Clinton proposed for attorney general, U.S. District Court Judge Kimba Wood, also had a "nanny problem." There was an explanation, but the White House correctly concluded that it was too complicated to untangle in 30-second sound bites and withdrew her name. It reminded R.W. Apple Jr. of Casey Stengel's assessment of the 1962 New York Mets: "Can't anybody here play this game?"[92] On the third try the President chose Janet Reno, state attorney for Dade County, Florida, and the nomination sped through the Senate. Reno was confirmed on March 11.

"I did micromanage the Cabinet appointments," Clinton admitted. "I spent more time on the Cabinet appointments than anybody in history had and I plead guilty to that."[93] One consequence was that Clinton failed to get around to naming his White House staff, with one exception, until six days before becoming president. The exception was the chief of staff, announced on December 12. Clinton made clear that he did not want a sharp-edged operator like John Sununu or an insider extraordinaire like James Baker. Instead he turned to Mack McLarty, his friend since kindergarten and now the head of a natural gas company. About to enter the shark-infested waters of Washington, perhaps Clinton felt that what he most needed at his right hand was a chum. McLarty told reporters he was not going to serve as a terribly aggressive gatekeeper.[94]

At the last news conference in Little Rock before leaving for the capital, Clinton announced the rest of his White House operation. There were very few surprises. Mostly it consisted of the young men and women who had been closely associated with his campaign and transition, people like Dee Dee Myers, Bruce Reed, Gene Sperling, and Marcia Hale. The *Times* reported, "Many staff members, relieved to have finally been given a job, cheered as their colleagues' names were announced."[95]

Clinton's transition effort to construct an administration that "looks like America" produced eight black, female or Hispanic nominations to Cabinet-level positions that had never before been held by members of their groups. Yet the fallout from the attorney general fiasco helped to create the impression that the new presidency would "hit the ground stumbling."[96]

92 R.W. Apple Jr., "Case of Double Jeopardy," *New York Times*, February 6, 1993.

93 Gwen Ifill, "The Baird Appointment: in Trouble From the Start, Then a Firestorm," *New York Times*, January 23, 1993.

94 Michael Kelly, "Clinton's Chief of Staff Ponders Undefined Post," *New York Times*, December 14, 1992.

95 Richard L. Berke, "Clinton Selects a Mostly Youthful Group of White House Aides," *New York Times*, January 15, 1993.

96 Russell Baker, "Must Be Democrats," *New York Times*, January 16, 1993. The "hit the ground stumbling" impression was further exacerbated when Clinton was forced to withdraw his nomination of Lani Guinier to be assistant attorney general in charge of the civil rights division after saying he could not defend many of the views expressed in her writings. See Neil A. Lewis, "Clinton Abandons His Nominee For Rights Post Amid Opposition," *New York Times*, June 4, 1993.

Lessons From Past Transitions

Transitions have both long-term and short-term consequences. The immediate objective is to prepare the president-elect to be as ready as possible to start running the government on January 20, the day his contract begins. First impressions are important. If his transition goes well, there will be a bonus, the so-called honeymoon, during which the new leader gets kinder and gentler attention from Congress, press, and general public. This section offers suggestions on how better transitions make better honeymoons.

But first let us note a long-term consequence. How well the president picks his people might be measured by how long they stay with him, rather than by how long it took to get them there in the first place. Presidents are not usually very good at firing people. If mistakes are made, they should be corrected. It can be messy. It is time-consuming. Since presidents make four-year commitments, presumably the expectation is that their Cabinet members should, too. Yet what is the record of the five presidents whose transitions we have just reviewed? After four years, what are their retention rates? The following numbers are the percent of the presidents' department secretaries who were still in place at the end of one term (after making appropriate adjustments):[97]

President	Retention Percent
Clinton	79%
Bush	79
Nixon	64
Carter	46
Reagan	46

One reason these figures are so fascinating is that in the mythology of transitions President Reagan is considered to have had the best and President Clinton to have had the worst. These conclusions, which I share, are based on more than personnel selection. Clinton badly stumbled on several issues, notably gays in the military, but his remarkable retention record deserves attention. And at the end of two terms he will leave office with four Cabinet members from his original team still in place: Janet Reno, Bruce Babbitt, Donna Shalala, and Richard Riley. Two-term president Dwight Eisenhower retained only Agriculture secretary Ezra Taft Bensen and Postmaster General Arthur Summerfield; two-term president Reagan retained only Samuel Pierce at HUD.

Officials are sometimes enticed by lucrative jobs outside government. Three of Reagan's losses fit in this category and perhaps this happens most often in Republican administrations. More significant, however, is that the presidents in the period under study fired five Cabinet officials and at least six others were forced out, including one secretary of State, one secretary of Defense, and

97 The figures exclude Cabinet secretaries who died in office or were given more important positions in government or in their presidents' campaigns.

two secretaries of the Treasury. Another secretary of State resigned in a policy dispute.

What makes the history of failed Cabinet officers so mystifying is that presidents have felt let down by their closest friends, such as Nixon's HEW Secretary Robert Finch, and by those with pluperfect credentials, such as Clinton's Defense Secretary Les Aspin. Total strangers have worked well, and then again they have not. Every type of background, business, law, academics, have produced successes and failures.

Presidents are almost always happier with their Cabinet changes: John Connally replacing David Kennedy as Nixon's Treasury secretary; Patricia Harris replacing Joseph Califano as Carter's HEW secretary; George Shultz replacing Alexander Haig as Reagan's secretary of State; Lamar Alexander replacing Lauro Cavazos as Bush's secretary of Education; Robert Rubin replacing Lloyd Bentsen as Clinton's Treasury secretary. The sad conclusion is that presidents (even presidents who have been vice presidents) don't know what they most need until they have been there awhile. This suggests the impossibility of telling them otherwise. They will make their own mistakes.

If, however, we could gather in one room the five presidents whose transitions we have just explored, ask them what they now think they did right and wrong, and what advice would be most helpful to the next president, this is what I think they would want to say about top-level personnel selection to President Albert Gore Jr. or President George W. Bush.[98]

Be Prepared

Once upon a time no candidate would be so presumptuous as to plan for his presidency before the people had elected him. Surely the voters would punish the candidate who took them for granted. Carter took this risk, set up a small group to prepare for his transition, and still got elected. But he discovered that his sensible innovation caused friction within his organization. Reagan finessed this problem by putting an intimate aide in charge of the pre-election planning. Yet when pre-election planning involves personnel decisions on who gets the spoils of victory, the possibilities of unauthorized leaks can make it a politically risky enterprise. Still, the value of presenting the victorious candidate with carefully vetted lists of those who should be considered for top jobs (much in the Reagan manner of 1980) is of inestimable value. "Start people through the FBI process the day after the election," advises Boyden Gray, "even if you don't know what jobs they're going to have."[99]

Act Quickly

Some well-meaning folks will surely tell you, "Look at the trouble your predecessors got into by rushing into decisions they later regretted. Take your time and get it right." This is good friendly advice and bad political advice. First of all, previous bad decisions were usually those that took the longest, those made as the transition clock was running down. The longer you delay, the greater the pressure you will be subjected to by job supplicants, interest group advocates, and the media. Every prompt decision means you will have to say no a lot fewer times. Quick decisions mean that the transition news will be momentum, not indecisiveness. The faster you make your appointments, the more time your appointees will have to get ready "to hit the ground running." A handy rule of thumb: Have your key White House staff in place by Thanksgiving and your Cabinet secretaries announced by Christmas.

Put the White House First

Carter and Clinton, the two presidents who chose their Cabinet secretaries before their White House assistants, eventually concluded they had made a mistake. By election day you probably do not know who you want to be your secretaries of Agriculture, Commerce, or Labor. But

98 These suggestions are deeply influenced by three scholars and friends who have led the way in studying presidential transitions: Richard E. Neustadt, Charles O. Jones, and James P. Pfiffner.

99 Alvin S. Felzenberg, editor, *The Keys to a Successful Presidency* (Heritage Foundation, forthcoming).

by election day you do know who you want as your top White House aides. So why delay the announcements? Especially if you are planning a surprise, a John Sununu or a James Baker, fast is best. White House aides are your processors. You need them in place to efficiently process the rest of your appointments: The chief of staff (to give direction), counsel (to sort out ethics questions), personnel director (for initial screenings), press secretary (for public announcements), congressional liaison (for Senate confirmations). Personal aides make your life run smoother. But how do you mix White House and departmental policy advisers?[100]

Think Clusters

Thinking in clusters is one way you can use your appointment powers to counter the centrifugal forces that pull the pieces of government into different orbits. For one shining moment at the administration's creation, you have the opportunity to relate the parts to each other. If you choose a secretary of State and a secretary of Defense and a national security adviser who are in sync, whose egos and ambitions are properly aligned, you will have a better shot at achieving your objectives. Yet examples of past dysfunctionality are stunning. Did Carter imagine a harmonious national security cluster with Brzezinski as his White House anchor? What could Reagan have been thinking when he joined together Haig, Weinberger, and Allen? How fortunate for Bush that John Tower was rejected by the Senate. His connection with Baker and Scowcroft would have been a disaster whereas Cheney, his replacement, was a perfect fit. The problems are more often caused by personality than by ideology. One wonders whether presidential transitions should hire a resident psychologist.

Send a Message

Appointments, so microscopically examined and interpreted by the media, can be usefully employed by presidents-elect to send a message or make a statement. The ideological Reagan used his first appointment to choose the pragmatist Baker as his chief of staff. Outsider Carter chose insider Vance as his first Cabinet appointment. Clinton first picked an economic team, signaling that this was to be his top priority. The message can come from the sequence or the bundling. Nixon sent the most dramatic message when he announced his entire Cabinet at the same time, although the expanded size and expected diversity of today's Cabinets may take this out of the reach of 21st century presidents. Unfortunately most presidents-in-transition simply announce their intentions as they make up their minds and thus fail to take advantage of these early opportunities.

Choose Your Demographic Goals

Deep in the archive of the candidate's mind should be a rough sketch of what you want or need your administration to look like. This is personal property. To announce that you want the attorney general to be a woman is to paint yourself into a corner. So be prepared. Your pre-election planning should include the resumes of qualified individuals from the groups that are on your demographic wish list. And if the election is close, you may even need to reach across party lines. But also remember that this is a game that you can win by changing the dimensions of the playing field. The U.S. Government has 14 departments, with each department head an automatic member of your Cabinet. Yet there are some units of government called agencies or even offices that are more important than some of those that are the mighty departments. Is the secretary of Veterans Affairs really more important than the administrator of the Environmental Protection Agency? No, if you say so: that is, if you announce which positions are in your Cabinet *before* you make the appointments rather than after the fact when the same appointments are denigrated as pandering to special interests.

Feed the Beast

The beast is what Washington insiders call the media. Give reporters "a constant supply of dog-

100 Transition organizers should read Bradley H. Patterson Jr., *The White House Staff* (Brookings, 2000).

gie biscuits," claimed Lloyd Bentsen's press secretary, and they will "gleefully lick the hand that fed them." Run out of treats and they will "devour your arm."[101] The problem can be particularly severe for a transition press secretary, who will have little to report while the boss juggles the makeup of his Cabinet. Clinton was the extreme case. He did not announce any appointments until the sixth week of his transition. In the meantime reporters waited in Little Rock, staring at the walls of their rooms in the Capitol Hotel, and wrote stories about how long it was taking him to get organized. "Thanks to snippets of video and a few remarks on the run, it is known that President-elect Clinton likes a morning jog and weekend golf," reported Susan Bennett in the *Philadelphia Inquirer*. "What is not known after more than 30 days of the transition is anything of substance."[102]

The transition press corps is a curious hybrid of reporters who have been covering the winning candidate's campaign, some of whom now will be assigned to the White House beat, and White House regulars. The campaign reporters know the president-elect, but not the presidency; White House regulars know the presidency, but may not know the president-elect.

The reporters covering the Clinton transition arrived in Little Rock with a healthy curiosity and a good deal of good will, which was soon undermined by Clinton's incompetent press operation, according to scholar Charles O. Jones' interviews with reporters.[103] The moral for future transitions is more than that idle reporters are dangerous reporters. Having a press corps on hand and no hard news is an opportunity for the incoming administration to educate the journalists through daily briefings by visiting experts on all matters, economic, diplomatic, military, scientific, social, that a new president (and a new press corps) will confront in the next four years.

Smile and Grovel

Finally the nominations have been made and sent to the Senate, where the new president confronts a lot of brush fires and one truly horrendous confirmation fight. Senators seem to demand that there always will be one. Perhaps the president should designate one of his nominees as the sacrificial lamb so that the others could survive unscathed. But since this will not happen, what do the nominees have to look forward to?

They will need to be prepared to explain themselves. *What's this about your child's nanny, Ms. Baird?* They will learn what most worries the senators, especially senators on their oversight and appropriating committees. *We'll be watching, Mr. Watt.* They may be required to make promises. *As for pursuing arms reduction with the Soviet Union, we will hold you to your commitments, Mr. Haig.* And they will too often have to endure being confronted by growl and swagger. This is no easy task for people who also think they are important. To which the best advice of the political sherpas who are most experienced at leading nominees through the confirmation process is to accept the short-term pain, handle senators with care, smile and grovel. In the end, the Senate gives the president pretty much what he asks for, once they get the respect they think they deserve.

And so the team is in place: president, Cabinet, White House staff. At which point the last act of the transition is for someone to quote the favorite line of all political junkies: from the 1972 movie, a dazed Robert Redford, the winning candidate, suddenly realizes that now he must actually govern. "What do we do now?"

101 Kenneth T. Walsh, *Feeding the Beast: The White House Versus The Press* (New York: Random House, 1996), p. 9.
102 Stephen Hess, "President Clinton and the White House Press Corps—Year One," *Media Studies Journal*, Spring 1994, p. 2.
103 Charles O. Jones, *Passages to the Presidency* (Brookings, 1998), pp. 134-172.

Appendix A: Sequence of Presidential Appointments*

Nixon

1st week:	personal secretary, congressional liaison
2nd week:	chief of staff, press secretary, counsel
3rd week:	director of Office of Communications
4th week:	chairman of Council of Economic Advisers, national security adviser, science adviser
5th week:	none
6th week:	entire Cabinet, director of Bureau of the Budget
7th week:	representative to United Nations
8th week:	none
9th week:	none
10th week:	none
11th week:	director of Central Intelligence Agency

Carter

1st week:	none
2nd week:	press secretary
3rd week:	none
4th week:	none
5th week:	secretary of State, director of Office of Management and Budget
6th week:	secretaries of Treasury, Transportation
7th week:	secretaries of Interior, Commerce, Agriculture, Defense, Labor, Housing and Urban Development, attorney general, national security adviser, U.N. representative, chairman of Council of Economic Advisers
8th week:	secretary of Health, Education and Welfare, secretary of Energy, CIA director
9th week:	none
10th week:	none
11th week:	chief assistant and other top White House aides

Reagan

1st week:	none
2nd week:	chief of staff, counselor
3rd week:	none
4th week:	none

5th week:	none
6th week:	secretaries of Commerce, Treasury, Transportation, Health and Human Services, Defense, State, Labor, attorney general, director of Office of Management and Budget, CIA director
7th week:	congressional liaison, domestic policy adviser, secretaries of Interior, Energy, HUD, Agriculture, national security adviser, U.N. representative
8th week:	none
9th week:	press secretary
10th week:	secretary of Education
11th week:	none

Bush

1st week:	secretary of State, counsel
2nd week:	chief of staff, secretaries of Treasury, Education, attorney general, director of Office of Management and Budget
3rd week:	press secretary, national security adviser
4th week:	none
5th week:	secretary of Commerce, CIA director, U.N. representative, chairman of Council of Economic Advisers, trade representative
6th week:	secretaries of Agriculture, Defense, HUD
7th week:	secretaries of Transportation, Interior, HHS, Veterans Affairs, Labor, director of Environmental Protection Agency
8th week:	none
9th week:	secretary of Energy, drug policy director
10th week:	none

Clinton

1st week:	none
2nd week:	none
3rd week:	none
4th week:	none
5th week:	none
6th week:	chief of staff, director of National Economic Council, secretaries of Treasury, Labor, HHS, Commerce, director of Office of Management and Budget, chairman of Council of Economic Advisers, EPA director
7th week:	secretaries of HUD, Veterans Affairs, Education, Energy, Defense, State, CIA director, U.N. representative, national security adviser
8th week:	secretaries of Interior, Agriculture, Transportation, attorney general, trade representative
9th week:	none
10th week:	none
11th week:	White House staff including congressional liaison, press secretary, domestic policy adviser, counsel

*Sequence based on dates when the president announced the appointee's nomination.

Sources: Charles O. Jones, *Passages to the Presidency: From Campaigning to Governing* (Brookings, 1998), pp. 94-95, and additional information.

Appendix B: Sequence of Cabinet Secretary Appointments*

Nixon

12/11/68:	entire Cabinet

Carter

12/3/76:	Cyrus Vance (State)
12/14/76:	Brock Adams (Transportation); Michael Blumenthal (Treasury)
12/18/76:	Cecil Andrus (Interior)
12/20/76:	Griffin Bell (Justice); Robert Bergland (Agriculture); Juanita Kreps (Commerce)
12/21/76:	Harold Brown (Defense); Patricia Harris (HUD); Ray Marshall (Labor)
12/23/76:	Joseph Califano (HEW); James Schlesinger (Energy)

Reagan

12/11/80:	Malcolm Baldridge (Commerce); Drew Lewis (Transportation); Donald Regan (Treasury); Richard Schweiker (HHS); Caspar Weinberger (Defense); William Smith (Justice)
12/16/80:	Raymond Donovan (Labor); Alexander Haig (State)
12/22/80:	James Edwards (Energy); Samuel Pierce (HUD); James Watt (Interior)
12/23/80:	John Block (Agriculture)
1/7/81:	Terrel Bell (Education)

Bush

11/9/88:	James Baker (State)
11/15/88:	Nicholas Brady (Treasury)
11/21/88:	Lauro Cavazos (Education); Richard Thornburgh (Justice)
12/6/88:	Robert Mosbacher (Commerce)
12/14/88:	Clayton Yeutter (Agriculture)
12/16/88:	John Tower (Defense), rejected by Senate 3/9/89
12/22/88:	Manuel Lujan (Interior); Louis Sullivan (HHS); Samuel Skinner (Transportation)
12/24/88:	Elizabeth Dole (Labor)
1/12/89:	James Watkins (Energy)
3/10/89:	Dick Cheney (Defense)

Clinton

12/10/92:	Lloyd Bentsen (Treasury)
12/11/92:	Robert Reich (Labor); Donna Shalala (HHS)
12/12/92:	Ronald Brown (Commerce)
12/17/92:	Jesse Brown (Veterans Affairs); Henry Cisneros (HUD)
12/21/92:	Hazel O'Leary (Energy); Richard Riley (Education)
12/22/92:	Les Aspin (Defense); Warren Christopher (State)
12/24/92:	Mike Espy (Agriculture); Frederico Pena (Transportation); Zoe Baird (Justice), withdrawn 1/22/93
2/11/93:	Janet Reno (Justice)

*Dates listed are those when the president announced the appointee's nomination.

Sources: Charles O. Jones, *Passages to the Presidency: From Campaigning to Governing* (Brookings, 1998), p. 97, and additional information.

AUTHOR

Stephen Hess, a senior fellow at the Brookings Institution, has been intimately involved in presidential transitions since the 1960-61 Eisenhower-Kennedy transition, when he was on President Eisenhower's staff. Eight years later he returned to the White House as a deputy assistant to the president following the Johnson-Nixon transition. In 1976 he was a consultant to the president-elect in the Ford-Carter transition. He prepared a transition plan at the request of the Republican National Chairman for the Carter-Reagan transition of 1980-81. He was a member of transition planning commissions of the National Academy of Public Administration (1980) and the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace (1992). Mr. Hess wishes to thank interns Falan Yinug, David Perry, and Elizabeth Rees for preparing background material. He also wishes to acknowledge the contributions of the staff of The Presidential Appointee Initiative, a project of the Brookings Institution funded by The Pew Charitable Trusts. He would like to thank Sandra Stencel, Carole Plowfield, Suzanne Morse, Erin Murphy and Michael Hafken for providing editing and administrative support. Mr. Hess also wishes to thank Patricia Hord and Alyson Brooks at Patricia Hord.Graphik Design and production editor Missy Hall. The opinions expressed in this report are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect the views of the Brookings Institution or The Pew Charitable Trusts.