THE WHITE HOUSE TRANSITION PROJECT
1997-2021

Kinder Institute on Constitutional Democracy
University of Missouri

Smoothing the Peaceful Transfer of Democratic Power

Report 2021—22

THE OFFICE OF THE STAFF SECRETARY

Kathryn Dunn Tenpas, *Brookings Institution*
Karen Hult, *Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University*

WHO WE ARE & WHAT WE DO

The White House Transition Project. Begun in 1998, the White House Transition Project provides information about individual offices for staff coming into the White House to help streamline the process of transition from one administration to the next. A nonpartisan, nonprofit group, the WHTP brings together political science scholars who study the presidency and White House operations to write analytical pieces on relevant topics about presidential transitions, presidential appointments, and crisis management. Since its creation, it has participated in the 2001, 2005, 2009, 2013, 2017, and now the 2021. WHTP coordinates with government agencies and other non-profit groups, e.g., the US National Archives or the Partnership for Public Service. It also consults with foreign governments and organizations interested in improving governmental transitions, worldwide. See the project at http://whitehousetransitionproject.org
The White House Transition Project produces a number of materials, including:

- **WHITE HOUSE OFFICE ESSAYS:** Based on interviews with key personnel who have borne these unique responsibilities, including former White House Chiefs of Staff; Staff Secretaries; Counsels; Press Secretaries, etc. , WHTP produces briefing books for each of the critical White House offices. These briefs compile the best practices suggested by those who have carried out the duties of these office. With the permission of the interviewees, interviews are available on the National Archives website page dedicated to this project:
- ***WHITE HOUSE ORGANIZATION CHARTS.** The charts cover administrations from Ronald Reagan to Barack Obama and help new White House staff understand what to expect when they arrive and how their offices changed over time or stayed the same.
- ***TRANSITION ESSAYS.** These reports cover a number of topics suggested by White House staff, including analyses of the patterns of presidential appointments and the Senate confirmation process, White House and presidential working routine, and the patterns of presidential travel and crisis management. It also maintains ongoing reports on the patterns of interactions with reporters and the press in general as well as White House staffing.
- ***INTERNATIONAL COMPONENT**. The WHTP consults with international governments and groups interested in transitions in their governments. In 2017 in conjunction with the Baker Institute, the WHTP hosted a conference with emerging Latin American leaders and in 2018 cosponsored a government transitions conference with the National Democratic Institute held in November 2018 in Montreal, Canada .

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Office of the Staff Secretary, a unit recommended by the first Hoover Commission (1947–49), appeared in the White House Office in the fall of 1953. Since then, its job has changed significantly as many of its earlier tasks are now the responsibility of the Office of Administration. The contemporary role of the Staff Secretary is best described as the "last substantive control point before papers reach the Oval Office." Members of the Barack Obama administration described two key parts of the job: "never assume that the president got what he needed" (De interview) and "make sure that all the relevant people have had input so the president gets the full range of perspectives on an issue" (Brown interview). Given the pivotal position of the Office of Staff Secretary in presidential paper flow, it regularly handles complex policy issues and its work can be highly political.

Among the Staff Secretary's tasks:

- Decide which memos go to the president
- Decide whether a particular staff member's viewpoint is pertinent
- Determine who weighs in on key speeches
- Act as an "honest broker"
- Be sure that others respond to presidential directives or questions elicited by the materials the president sees
- Supervise the offices of the Executive Clerk, Records Management, and Correspondence

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MAIN TASKS OF THE STAFF SECRETARY

The primary job of the Staff Secretary is to control the paper flow to and from the president, to be the "'clearinghouse' through which literally every piece of paper pass[es]." (Huntsman interview, p. 2). James Cicconi, staff secretary for George H.W. Bush, underscored how critical this is:

> I knew that the core function of my job was being the President's in box and out box essentially, coordinating the decision-making process in the White House for the President, making sure that the issues were teed up for his decisions; he had the options and decisions placed in front of him and when he made them ensuring they were implemented; and that everybody that needed to be in the loop was, that he had the full range of advice from his advisors before he made a decision; people weren't cut out by other people and that once he made the decision there was a disciplined process of implementation. That's a job that is huge because you're really having to be involved with everything that passes through the President's hands for a decision. I knew that was the core of the job and it always has been the tradition of the job. It had been called secretary to the president at one time and it really was still that function. I knew that's how I would be measured as a success or failure in that job, how well I did that. (Cicconi interview)

CONTROL PAPER FLOWING TO THE PRESIDENT: SERVE AS THE "IN-BOX"

The volume of material coming to the president is astounding. Coping with it is initially "like trying to drink out of a fire hose" (Jones interview). Such an onslaught requires an administrative staff that typically has worked two shifts and an alert staff secretary sensitive to what presidents *must* see, what they *should* see to make informed decisions, and what they *prefer* to see.

The material flowing into the Staff Secretary's office covers a wide range: presidential decision memos, bills that Congress has passed and associated signing or veto recommendations, drafts of presidential speeches, standard forms requiring the president's signature, the daily briefing book to prepare the president for the next day's schedule, White House guest lists, samples of constituent correspondence, personal mail from friends and colleagues, and presidential "night reading," "weekend reading," and "trip reading." During the two Bush presidencies, the Staff Secretary was at the center of the speech clearance process, but that role did not continue during the Obama administration.

Perhaps most important, "the staff secretary and the staff secretary's office is responsible for making sure whatever it is that's being proposed and sent to the president is ready for primetime" (Brady interview, p. 9). The former Bush staff secretary elaborated:

> That means has it been legally reviewed? If it's a policy document, are the options laid out for the president? Do they truly reflect the variety of opinions in a clear fashion that senior officers want to make sure are brought to the president's attention? If it's a speech being sent in to the president, is it a speech that truly reflects administration policy, that's consistent with previous statements the president made? Has it been vetted? By that I mean if a speech comes in to the staff secretary's office from the speechwriting office then it was our responsibility to circulate it around to those who would have a substantive interest in the speech. So it would go to the counsel's office absolutely for legal review. It would also go to the chief of staff. Perhaps if there are some national security type issues, foreign policy issues addressed in it, it would go to Brent Scowcroft and his office to take a look at it. Significant administration policy statements would go to OMB, Richard Darman or Roger Porter who was the head of OPD, the Office of Policy Development. It would go to those various offices with very quick turnaround times. Sometimes speeches came in and the turnaround times were really short, so there was a lot of follow-up responsibility in getting people's comments. The comments would come back in and then the Office of the Staff Secretary had the sometimes difficult job of reconciling comments because you'd get comments that were 180 degrees apart or really did a number on the flow of a speech. (Brady interview, pp. 9–10)

From a somewhat different vantage point, Alonzo McDonald, deputy chief of staff under President Carter, described his view of particularly effective decision memos for the president:

> The stuff I thought should come in was stuff in which the issue was crisply defined, the recommendation was clear, the level of consensus related to that issue should be clear, and the key elements of evidence that swung it should be clear so that in a short executive summary of two or three pages one could say here's all the background we really like but here's the core issue. (McDonald interview)

White Houses differ as to whether national security and other highly sensitive materials are put through the "staff system." In the George H.W. Bush White House, for example, there were

> some NSC, National Security Council, matters, some highly confidential matters that would go to the president more directly, through the National Security Advisor to the President. . . . Those individuals may take things directly in to the president with others, cabinet secretaries perhaps, where highly confidential matters are involved. But, by and large, the staff secretary process was observed very well. Once materials get to the staff secretary's office the vetting might be reduced depending on the sensitivity of the material. (Brady interview, p. 9)

Most Staff Secretaries try to prioritize the papers coming into the president. One Nixon staff secretary recalls, for instance, that he classified

> most of the material that was to go before the President into different categories such as "for your information" or "action required," which suggested he needed to sign a document or take further action of whatever kind. Other materials were handled differently —I had set up a system of different colored folders that denoted different levels of urgency. For example, the red folders were for items requiring immediate action. They might contain the CIA daily file on the progress of the Vietnam War or special

> messages from Kissinger or Haldeman or others on priority matters. . . . Items would filter to me, and several times a day I would take them up to the President and collect what else he had, and we kept his office going in that way. I know it may sound as though it was unworkable but it was almost fool-proof and fail-safe. (Huntsman interview, p. 4)

James Cicconi also noted the importance of adjusting the flow of materials to a particular president's "work style."

> . . . you needed to understand the president, how he liked to work, how he liked to make decisions, the degree of detail he was comfortable with, what types of things he wanted to see and what types of things he was willing to delegate unseen, style of work and level of involvement, level of information. You can drown a person. . . . I mean I learned trial and error with President Bush that he was a clean-desk guy but that was a problem if you sent him a long memo that was a fairly in-depth analysis of a problem. There was a particular memo on Middle East strategy, strategy for the Middle East peace negotiations going forward. It was a think piece and it was very involved. It was an excellent memo. I learned with President Bush that if I sent him a memo like that during the week with all the press of events, people in and out, he'd read it, he would understand it but he would gain far more from it if I sent it to him at Camp David on the weekends. I learned that at Camp David he got up at six or seven in the morning and got his coffee and sat on the porch by himself and went through his paper. The birds are chirping and there's nobody around. There's nobody bothering him and he's able to take time with things. And I could tell because things like that memo would come back with extensive marginal notes and comments and maybe even a memo he wrote in response to it. He would spend more time contemplating the memo and its implications and things of that nature because he was in a situation, in a setting and at a time in the week when he could think on it. (Cicconi interview)

Another of Richard Nixon's staff secretaries, Jerry Jones, recalled that "Nixon hated to get anything over a page on a decision memo and the staff secretary couldn't send more than a few sentences" on the cover memo to the President (Jones interview).

Follow Up on Paper Flowing Out of the Oval Office: Serve as the "Out-Box"

Sometimes it is the papers that come *out* of the Oval Office that are as important. In most White Houses the Staff Secretary also has been responsible for channeling presidential decisions, questions, and comments (on, for example, the daily News Summary) to the appropriate parties. Nixon Staff Secretary Jon Huntsman remembered

> an impeccable system of tracking down the President's requests. That was, of course, part of my job. I was allowed forty-eight hours, literally, and oftentimes six or eight hours, to act on every question the President had listed on the big, yellow legal pads he used. He would simply use an initial for each note he made: Haldeman was an H; Kissinger was a K – he would do this in reference to all key people in the Cabinet and senior White House staff. And throughout the day, the President in his meetings would designate items on the yellow pad, and then I would take his yellow sheet(s) and implement all the notes he made. We had a remarkable follow-up system to make sure that the memos and anything the president wanted done, or needed done, received appropriate follow-up. If we hadn't received a response in a matter of hours to any of the President's questions or action-items, I'd send out a second alarm. (Huntsman interview, p. 3)

In contrast, the Clinton operation, observed one White House staff member, paid relatively little attention to implementation:

> That tended to be more honor system. In other words, if the president would send something back, he would send some document back and there'd be a question on it—Bruce Reed, what about blank—it would more be the case that we would depend on Bruce Reed sending an answer back than that we would be calling Bruce and saying what about that. I don't think that there was particularly a conceptual or a principal reason for that as much as it was just a time thing. And I think that it was a combination. There was a time thing and that you could pretty much depend on the notion that if one of the president's senior advisors was asked a question by the president he would think he better answer it.

> We constantly would get back—there were a lot of information memos, not a lot in percentage terms but there were a lot of information memos that we would get in a given period of time or a week that would be in response to things that the President had asked. . . . We thought about trying to do a real serious tracking system and we just ended up thinking that the cost-benefit analysis part of it didn't warrant it; there were undoubtedly some things that slipped through the cracks but not important enough to kind of do this whole time-intensive thing. Again, there was a period there where we kind of tried to do a little of that but we ended up not really following it through very actively.

Whichever path an administration follows, Jerry Jones, who served as staff secretary under both Richard Nixon and Gerald Ford, cautions that it is important not to overstate what such "implementation" responsibility involves.

> The staff secretary is simply a conveyor belt for the decision. The responsibility for decision implementation goes to somebody else. So if it's a domestic policy, the decision paper comes from the Domestic Council written by [Michael Raoul-] Duval if it were a transportation matter, or by Shepherd [?] if it was a legal matter or by Cavanaugh if it were a Health, Education and Welfare matter, Fairbanks if it was an environmental matter. If it were an NSC problem, it would come from one of their guys through Henry. If it were an economic matter, it would come from Shultz. The decision is made, the staff secretary conveys his decision back to the Domestic Council officer who sent the decision in, or the OMB officer, or the—they have the implementation responsibility. Usually they are having to coordinate two or three departments to implement a broad policy. So the implementers of the decisions are not the staff secretary or the chief of staff, they are the policy officers in the policy groups in the White House Office or the National Security Council office. (Jones interview)

COORDINATE AND MONITOR THE DECISION-MAKING PROCESS

At first glance, the Staff Secretary's job may seem mostly "administrative." However, it is quite substantive in both policy and political terms: the Staff Secretary must be "in the loop" on key issues and fluent with complex issues and positions.

> The staff secretary job is to be pretty policy wonkish, too. This policy is inconsistent with the one we had the president say last week. Let's send it back and make sure it's consistent. Or that speechwriter is always trying to get that policy in to a speech and we're not going to let him do it. (Card interview)

That means that the Staff Secretary must be, in the words of Eisenhower aide Wilton Persons, "the one office in the White House that knows the most about what is going on and where it is taking place" (in Walcott & Hult 2004, p. 246).

The Staff Secretary guides and oversees the policy decision-making process by making sure that all appropriate sources were consulted, thereby providing the full range of advice to the president. Jerry Jones stresses that the purpose of exposing policy options to wide scrutiny is to help ensure that the president sees the views of critics as well as proponents.

> But the job of the staff secretary is to kill ideas. I know that sounds awful but the problem with the White House is people run in with great ideas and they don't understand the consequences of this brilliant genius idea. And you have to send the genius idea to its natural enemies and test it and see if the natural enemy can kill it. If the natural enemy can't kill it then it's worth going with. If it has a hole in it, you have to know it has a hole and the way you know that is you send it to its enemy. So if the Domestic Council has a great idea, you send it to OMB and they'll kill it if they can. If Treasury has a great idea, you send it to Commerce. So that's the way you do that. You have to do it in a hurry, you don't have a prolonged debate. But the idea is let's seek out the natural enemy and see if they can kill it. That way you know at least you've heard the arguments. It may have several natural enemies. The congressional guy may absolutely go bonkers over something cute that somebody wants to do that undercuts the leadership up on the Hill. You've got to know that. . . . You've got to know what the enemies of these brilliant ideas think. That's what a system does, it poses the constituencies against each other so that you know what the arguments are and you can then choose. . . . But what it's designed to

> do is kill bad ideas. It's not designed to kill good ideas that can survive. Then when there's a conflict you throw it to the President: here's a brilliant idea that somebody thinks is awful. You have to know it. (Jones interview)

Rather clearly, the "routing procedures" (in the W. J. Clinton White House, for example, a "circulation cover sheet" attached to a packet of materials) are critical to rounding up relevant actors and input. Decisions about who to include and exclude on particular memos are inevitably political, but they play a critical role in the policy process. Including all senior staff on every decision is not the most efficient means of obtaining feedback; rather, a grasp of the policy and political elements of the decision should assist in formulating the routing list. Jerry Jones recalled, for example:

> Almost always on any major decision there is conflict on the staff and the president has to know the conflict. The Staff Secretary under the staff system is in charge of that transmission belt. What the staff secretary would do is take a paper say from the Domestic Council that recommends a decision—usually there are four or five choices and perhaps subchoices to the choices. Then the staff secretary takes that paper and he gives it to OMB and he gives it to the NSC guy, he gives it to the economic group and anyone else he thinks ought to see it. . . . [Y]ou basically have a checklist. Here's an issue dealing with this. Who do we usually send this to? Well, we always send it to these people. And then you say, because it deals with X, we better get somebody else's opinion. So the staff secretary has almost total authority on who that should go to. He might get guidance. The president really wants to hear what Eliot Richardson has to say about this or he really wants to hear what someone else has to say or he'd like to hear what somebody outside the government has to say on this. So the staff secretary then staffs that paper and he gives a deadline, I've got to have what you have to say about this COB [close of business] day after tomorrow. And people tell you. The Staff Secretary then writes a cover memo to the decision paper saying, "Mr. President, this has been sent to the follow[ing] people and this is what they say," boom. "This is the choice they would recommend to you," boom. And you do it in as brief a piece of paper as you can. (Jones interview)

In some cases, information like polling is sensitive, and presidents and their chiefs of staff prefer to limit circulation. In the Ford White House:

> . . . the President would receive the labor statistics from the Department of Labor and different financial data information. That would come to the staff secretary's office . . . but we'd send it in in a red folder to the president directly and privately. It wasn't vetted in any way, shape or form. It was something which we were very careful of. Sometimes other documents would come in with restrictions on them, saying this should go the president with a copy to the Chief of Staff and the National Security Advisor only. If I had some questions on the restrictions with some issues... then I would get on the horn with whoever had sent it in and say, "don't you think so and so should also be aware of this? Don't you think the president would also like advice from so and so?" And we'd work it out. So those things were judgment calls. . . . what you really want to have in these various positions is people with judgment because you have to make these calls on a very expedited basis, frequently with inadequate information. (Brady interview, p. 14)

Of course, assessing who gets what and when will likely be something that the Staff Secretary learns on the job.

Often, the complexity and diversity of views lead staff secretaries (or their top deputies) to add summary memos to the material on a particular subject that goes to the president, which seek to crystallize the primary disagreements or issues to be decided. According to one former staff secretary,

> . . . you need to fairly quickly get a six- or seven-page memo, understand it, and be able to, at least as we handled the job, boil it down in to a six-by-nine—generally—piece of paper, short synopsis that says attached is a memo on such and such; here's the main issue; here's what you have to decide; here's where the different players in the administration stand.

A key challenge in preparing such memos lies in treating all sides of the debate fairly so as not to bias the president's decision-making. Many former occupants of the Office have used the term "honest broker" to describe their duties. For instance, James Cicconi noted:

> Your "normal" decision memo from the domestic side or the national security side generally came in in draft form. It was circulated to the appropriate people by my office for their review, advice, comments. Before it went to the president their comments came in to my office as the "honest broker" with a copy to the people that originated the memo. I was the check in making certain that whoever was the author of the memo or speech or what have you played straight on the comment process. If they didn't take a comment or accommodate a comment, I would ask them why or my staff would. If I wasn't satisfied with the answer then I could overrule because I had the final responsibility for the paper that went to the President being full and complete and reflecting all the views of his advisors as honestly as possible. . . . you're an independent check. It's not really a rote process. You really have to approach it as the honest broker, as the person that is the President's agent to be certain he gets the full range of advice . . . . (Cicconi interview)

VERIFY THE ACCURACY OF PRESIDENTIAL SPEECHES

In most White Houses until Obama's, the Staff Secretary's office was a key part of the speech-writing process. As George W. Bush staff Secretary Bret Kavanaugh observes:

> Speeches are the primary way the president communicates decisions and proposals to the Congress, the Nation, and the world. As such, they are critical. Speeches force policy decisions and force policy clarity. President Bush spent a lot of time thinking about and working on his speeches. He worked very closely with the speechwriters and the Staff Secretary on editing speech drafts. He was quite detail-oriented and demanding about the content and precise wording of his speeches. I would get called to the Oval Office or phone calls from the Residence at all hours from him with changes and questions about speech drafts that would require immediate follow-up. During my nearly three years as Staff Secretary, for all speech drafts that were with the president, I kept copies with me at all times (literally) in case he called. In addition to the changes throughout the day, the 8:30 p.m. weeknight calls to the Staff Secretary office and the 7:00 a.m. Saturday and Sunday morning calls were a common occurrence. During my tenure as Staff Secretary, we started a very small weekly Oval Office meeting that included only the president, the top three speechwriters, the Communications Director, the Chief of Staff, and me as Staff Secretary. This would help the speechwriters get early direction from the president about speeches for the upcoming weeks, rather than simply presenting him with a draft a few days ahead of time. It also allowed the president a systematic way to present feedback on things that worked and did not work. This innovation worked very well in preventing situations where the president would get a speech draft only to respond that it did not represent what he wanted to say in the speech. It also allowed me as Staff Secretary to better perform my function as referee between the speechwriters and the policy advisors. It is helpful to be able to say in response to a comment or complaint from a policy advisor that the speech should not focus on X that "The president said he wants the speech to focus on X." That would not end the conversation (nor should it at the preliminary stages of a speech draft), but it would inform it. On occasion, it also helped us realize ahead of time that there was a significant outstanding policy issue that still needed to be decided in advance of the speech. (Tenpas notes from interview with Kavanaugh)

In such administrations, the Staff Secretary must check to be sure that presidential speech drafts are accurate, consistent with prior statements, and have been circulated and approved ("cleared") by those with substantive interests in the speeches. Rhett Dawson, Assistant to the President for Operations during the Reagan administration, elaborated:

> So, if the President was going to make a speech, you wanted to fact check it. You wanted to make sure it didn't take you in a new course on policy without thinking about that and identifying it. You wanted to make sure it was accurate before the President uttered it because the person who hands the president the speech actually has to know it's right and then you have to vouch for it. (Dawson interview, p. 6)

In the George W. Bush White House, this process involved both a policy check and a fact check. Fact-checkers would "footnote" (i.e., provide outside verification for) every factual assertion in each proposed public address. Moreover, as Staff Secretary Kavanaugh recalls:

> For major addresses, our office would receive drafts a couple weeks or more out, but for less significant speeches, it might be a couple days in advance. On the fact-checking and policy-checking front, that sometimes meant tight turnaround. While the policy-check process depends upon the topic of the speech, some policy verifiers can include the Homeland Security Adviser, National Security Adviser, the Domestic Policy Adviser the Economic Adviser, and the Legislative Affairs Director, and their key staff members. If it is a foreign policy or national security speech, the following individuals would receive drafts: the Defense Secretary, the Secretary of State, the National Security Adviser, and the CIA. During the time I was Staff Secretary from July 2003 through May 2006, the Defense Secretary, the Secretary of State, and the National Security Adviser would personally review, comment on, and clear drafts of all important Presidential speeches on national security issues. (Tenpas notes from interview with Kavanaugh)

On occasion, the clearance process can uncover unresolved differences on policy matters that may require further discussion or presidential resolution.

> When significant policy issues were raised during the clearance process, we would try to resolve them among the policy staff. Often, however, I and/or the primary speechwriter would have to take questions back to the President for resolution about the wording of specific proposals or decisions, for example. If someone was opposed to the way something important was phrased, it was my job to make sure the President was aware of that and could make an informed decision. It was important that I maintain strict neutrality and impartiality in that role so that the president and his policy staff would have confidence that their concern would be presented to the president fairly. If the issue was sufficiently large, we sometimes would convene another meeting with the President and the key policy advisors on that speech to resolve it. Ultimately with speeches, as with all else in the Executive Branch, one person is responsible, and that is the President. So it was important to make sure he had the necessary information to make the best possible decisions about the content of the speeches. (Tenpas notes from interview with Kavanaugh)

In short, in these White Houses the Staff Secretary was responsible for ensuring the accuracy—both as a factual matter and as a policy matter—of presidential speeches by requiring fact-checkers to review and document every single factual assertion and by vetting the speech with key principals who work on the issues. Given the increasing frequency with which presidents deliver public remarks, as well as the extraordinary scrutiny to which their words are subjected, this task has become more time-consuming than ever before. Raul Yanes, staff secretary during President George W. Bush's second term, indicated that the speech clearance and verification process consumed roughly 40 percent of his time (Yanes interview).

During the Obama administration, the Office of the Staff Secretary had less contact with speechwriting and did not conduct a separate fact-checking or clearance process. Instead, speechwriters met independently with the president to discuss content and style. Future administrations will need to assess the president's preference and determine whether this task should be reincorporated into the Office of the Staff Secretary.

PREPARE "THE BOOK"

Six evenings per week, staff members in the Office of the Staff Secretary spend a significant portion of the day preparing "The Book." According to Brent McIntosh, deputy staff secretary during the George W. Bush administration, the "book" is

> a compilation of memos, briefing papers, drafts of proposed remarks, descriptions of travel, intelligence, reports from the Cabinet, correspondence with foreign heads of state, a detailed calendar for the day, a calendar for three weeks out and three months out. Much of the book is not staffed out, but we assemble

> the materials and assure that the "right" people have seen the informational memos. In addition we want things to be clear, efficiently laid out and have been through the "lawyer's lens." (McIntosh interview)

The practice continued under Obama. The briefing book is not typically prepared on Saturdays, but must be transported to the president when he is "on the road." In this case, the staff member traveling with the president will compile "The Book," demonstrating its ongoing and critical role in the daily workings of the White House.

OBTAIN PRESIDENTIAL SIGNATURES

The Staff Secretary also is responsible for both assuring that the president signs key documents in a timely fashion and that the autopen is used only by those authorized to do so. Such documents can include disaster declarations, "executive orders, pieces of legislation, [and] notes from the president" (De interview). Obama Staff Secretary Raj De elaborated:

> Getting things signed was part of the job. And managing that process, managing the autopen, which was really overseeing the Clerk's Office which owns the autopen . . . a lot goes into tracking when legislation is passing, making sure you get the memo from OMB advising the President whether he should sign, understanding what's happening with the signing statement or not. . . . So everything from whether he should sign or veto it from the high end, . . . tracking what the right people are suggesting on that front, to how many pens does he use, and then getting a time slot to get it signed. (De interview)

Overseeing the autopen means that the Staff Secretary communicates with the Clerk about when it is used. Under Obama, Lisa Brown recalls that she frequently authorized use of the autopen, and "it increased as routine matters started to come in more. Once you had handled a routine matter with the president, [kind of got the hang of it]," subsequent versions did not need to go to the president (Brown interview).

OVERSEE CORRESPONDENCE, THE EXECUTIVE CLERK, AND RECORDS MANAGEMENT

Recent administrations typically have placed these offices under the jurisdiction of the Staff Secretary. Of the three, the Executive Clerk's office and Records Management are run by longtime professionals with a superb working knowledge of managing presidential records and preserving them. Past administrations have benefited greatly by holding over staff members in these units.

Although the Correspondence Office also has relied on numerous aides who stay from one administration to the next, typically it has been supervised by a presidential appointee. The person selected to head the office must have a strong sense of the importance to the president and the administration of responding appropriately depending on both the author of an incoming message and the subject of the message. President George H.W. Bush's staff secretary, James Cicconi, spoke of his efforts to remind the Correspondence staff to handle mail with care. Attached to a memo was an illustrative note regarding a 1939 letter to President Franklin Roosevelt. The letter, as Cicconi recalled, "was messy, crudely typed, full of cross-outs and misspellings. Its author told the President of a theory he had, by means of which an explosive device of incredible magnitude could be created. . . . It was signed: Albert Einstein" (in Patterson 2000, pp. 384–85).

While a sizeable full-time staff works in the correspondence office, the unit also relies heavily on volunteers and interns. The volume of mail can be quite large. Phil Brady indicated that during the Bush administration, incoming mail ranged from 35,000 to 40,000 letters per

week (Brady interview, p. 8). And, in response to controversial legislative proposals, this number can skyrocket. After the introduction of the Clinton healthcare initiative, the White House was receiving about 48,000 pieces of mail (including faxes) per day (Patterson 2000, p. 384). Under George W. Bush, the White House received an average of 1,692,308 letters a year (Patterson 2008, p. 285). This flow not only varies with reactions to presidential speeches, visible events, and controversial actions but also has continued to increase from administration to administration. The expanded use of e-mail only adds to this volume. In the first six and one-half years of the Clinton administration, for example, the White House received 3,876,105 e-mails (Patterson 2000, p. 383); the George W. Bush White House received about 850,000 e-mails each *month*, compared to 323,009 per month under President Bill Clinton (Patterson 2008, p. 285). Located in the Correspondence Office as well is a presidential "comments line" that receives in excess of 300,000 calls each year. The office also houses an agency liaison unit (with four staffers in the George W. Bush White House) that handles "hardship cases" culled from letters, e-mails, and the comments line. By the Obama administration, director of correspondence Mike Kelleher reported that his office was receiving 100,000 emails, 10,000 paper letters, 3,000 phone calls, and 1,000 faxes *each day* (in Howell 2013, p. 2).

KEY CONTACTS

Unlike many of the offices in the White House, the Staff Secretary's office faces inward. Most contacts are with those inside the confines of the White House (and OEOB).

THE PRESIDENT

Since the primary task is to control the paper flow into and out of the Oval Office, the Staff Secretary's principal "client" is the president. As noted above, the key to successful performance appears to be the ability to match the president's work habits with the Staff Secretary's, so that the latter won't bother the president with the trivial, overwhelm him with massive memos or prevent him from receiving all points of view in a policy debate. This judgment is critical—knowing what to pass on, when, and how. According to one former staff secretary, the job requires someone who can make thoughtful decisions quickly—they need to have a demonstrated track record of wise decision-making under intense pressure.

PRESIDENT'S PERSONAL OFFICE

Known during the Clinton administration as "Oval Office Operations," the president's personal staff also will be an almost constant contact point for those in the Staff Secretary's office. Indeed, the presidential aide has been called the "last quality checkpoint" for the briefing materials sent to the president (Patterson 2008, p. 261).

CHIEF OF STAFF

Aside from the president and the Oval Office staff, the Chief of Staff will likely be the Staff Secretary's most frequent patron. Interestingly, the proximity of the Chief of Staff to the Staff Secretary has varied over time. For instance, in the Reagan White House Richard Darman was located in a separate Staff Secretary unit within Chief of Staff James Baker's office and David Chew was lodged in a newly created White House Operations office after Donald Regan

departed. So, while the Chief of Staff has a close working relationship with the Staff Secretary, the placement of this individual is likely to depend on the preferences of the president and Chief of Staff.

The working relationships between Chiefs of Staff and Staff Secretaries can differ with the issue and the Chief of Staff's approach to management. For example, on some matters, the Staff Secretary may choose to pass on information to the president after consulting with the Chief of Staff. In other cases, the Chief of Staff may only need to be informed of particular memos.

Meanwhile, the approach to management (or the "style") of the Chief of Staff can make a difference in the nature of the working relationship with the staff secretary. Clinton Chief of Staff Leon Panetta described himself as

> a control freak in the sense of wanting to make sure as Chief of Staff that I had my finger on everything that was taking place. So I wanted to funnel all of the issues and decision making that ultimately had to go to the president through the chief of staff's operation. (Panetta interview, p. 4)

One former staff secretary recalled some of the similarities and differences among some of the Chiefs of Staff for whom he worked:

> So all of those basic operations you did whether it was [Chief 1] or [Chief 2] or[Chief 3]. At some level that didn't matter and you were kind of flooded with correspondence and proclamations and executive orders and all that kind of stuff. You were doing all that kind of stuff anyway. . . . under [Chief 2] . . . there were more situations that I recall—I know I went to more meetings in [his] office when it was [his] office where senior advisors were pulled in to discuss their views on a given decisional issue and where the objective was to try to narrow differences or find some consensus or whatever. So I think there was clearly more of that under [Chief 2] than under [Chief 1] and probably somewhat more under [Chief 2] than under [Chief 3]. It's not a dramatic difference in your job; there just was a little bit more of that kind of involvement.

Yet the cooperation and support of the Chief of Staff is likely quite valuable.

> . . . the most valuable commodity in the world is presidential time, the president of the United States' time. So that's one thing that a staff secretary in particular and a Chief of Staff with the Staff Secretary in a supporting role wants to insure that you protect that time and you only bring to the president's attention those things . . . that are . . . not just appropriate but timely. So if you have offices in the White House putting together think pieces on a bunch of subjects that aren't relevant in the near term and you know the president right now is overwhelmed with lots of other stuff like a Gulf War then you're not going to be forwarding as Staff Secretary those things to the president as unhappy as it might make whichever office produced this lovely think piece. So you're working with the Chief of Staff; you're having to serve as a wall in some instances, the last stop in some instances. (Brady interview, p. 21)

IMPORTANT OTHERS

Other important contacts include the Cabinet Secretary, White House Counsel, OMB Director, the National Security Assistant, the Press Secretary, and the heads of units for domestic policy, economic policy, homeland security, political affairs, and speechwriting. The Staff Secretary's office may need to ask them for input on an issue, prod them to complete a memo in a timely manner, or tap their knowledge for the president's daily briefing book.

INTERNAL ORGANIZATION AND OPERATIONS

The units that are included in the Office of the Staff Secretary have varied somewhat, both within and between administrations. Under President George H.W. Bush, for example,

scheduling was lodged there. The unit that has shifted in and out of the Staff Secretary's office most frequently is also by far the largest component: Correspondence. In the first term of the Reagan administration and part of the second, for instance, Correspondence was placed in the Office of Administration (where it had been for much of the Carter presidency); by the spring of 1987, the Office of Operations in the White House lodged the staff secretary, the "White House secretariat," and the presidential correspondence unit. During the George H.W. Bush, Clinton, and George W. Bush years, Correspondence returned to the Staff Secretary's office.

The most common configuration of the Office of the Staff Secretary in recent administrations has consisted of four components: the Staff Secretary, Executive Clerk, Records Management, and Correspondence. In 1998, for example, a total of 97 staff members worked in these areas: four in the Office of the Staff Secretary, five with the Executive Clerk, 24 in Records Management, and 64 in Correspondence; under George W. Bush, the total number grew slightly to 105: seven in the Staff Secretary's office, 10 with the Executive Clerk (Patterson 2008, p. 272), 23 in Records Management (Patterson 2008, p. 281), and 65 in the Correspondence unit (Patterson 2008, p. 286). The Obama administration was quite similar. The 2016 report to Congress on the White House staff listed six in the Staff Secretary's office, six in the Executive Clerk's unit, and 12 in Records Management; the report included 13 in the Correspondence unit, but the office also relied on numerous interns and volunteers and numbered well over 60.

Staff Secretary

In the past, the Staff Secretary has hired one or (in the Clinton administration) two deputies and two to three administrative assistants. Even though President Nixon's staff secretary, Jon Huntsman, possessed all the current Staff Secretary duties as well as management and administration, no recent Staff Secretary has assumed such broad and varied responsibilities. Huntsman remembers telling Chief of Staff H. R. Haldeman when Huntsman resigned: "One man should never do this. It's been a nightmare" (Huntsman interview, p. 4).

In general, it would be misleading to suggest that there is a sense of routine within the office. Although the influx of paper is constant, each day the issues are different. In addition, the staff secretary or deputy staff secretary travels with the president on domestic and international trips. Demonstrating the difficulty of attempting to create a sense of routine, one staff member recounted an attempt in which the two deputy staff secretaries tried to divide incoming mail according to foreign and domestic issues. Almost immediately, the overlap and "crisis" nature of much of the material precluded such a division of labor. The Office's responsibilities vary as well depending on whether the staff secretary is traveling with the president, preparing a briefing book for an overseas trip, or gearing up for a major speech. Some memos will need to be summarized in a cover memo, others will require routing for input among interested parties, and still others will have to be returned for additional work by the author.

In short, the Office of the Staff Secretary must be prepared for whatever hits the desk. Virtually the sole certainty is that that no two days will ever be the same. Indeed, almost the only routine feature of the operation appears to be the need for a seven-day workweek and long days with two shifts of employees to receive and log in new papers. Principals must be nearby in case an important document arrives requiring the president's signature. Such an event can occur at almost any time, and someone must be present to deliver the document to the president for a signature.

Daily Schedule

The Staff Secretary's day often is a long and fragmented one, punctuated by meetings, phone calls, and questions from the president and chief of staff. In addition, either the staff secretary or deputy must travel with the president (exceptions include trips to Camp David and short day trips on which there are no public addresses). Andrew Card has called the Staff Secretary position one of the "workaholic jobs. That's too much work for one person to do but you can't delegate it" (Card interview).

The day usually begins relatively early and can end quite late. George H.W. Bush's staff secretary, Phillip Brady, remembered:

> Most [days] typically [began at] 6:00. You had to leave by 6:30 to be there by 7:00. . . . After the senior staff meeting, assignments came out of that, responsibilities came out of that. There'd be a full schedule of meetings you personally would have. It might be a scheduling meeting that Andy Card would be chairing as deputy chief of staff on upcoming events the following day. There might be a meeting on a speech the President is going to be giving in a few days where there's some disagreement between offices as to how that speech should be cast or what we recommend to the President as to how that speech should be cast. If there were disputes and issues, there'd be a meeting scheduled for that. You'd have a ton of things in your office that had come in for presidential action; those things then needed to be staffed out and reviewed. So my own in box was quite large. There were other long-term projects you were involved in. . . . Frequently you'd go to lunch in the White House Mess, which was actually useful from a business point of view because you were able to catch one another there and get approvals or work out disagreements. It was very much a business session most times. . . . The schedule was such—this isn't unique to the staff secretary; it's true for everyone in the White House in any administration—that you generally looked up and it was seven o'clock at night. (Brady interview, pp. 24–25)

Brady also told a story that vividly illustrates how demanding the job of Staff Secretary can be:

> I had younger children at the time I was in the White House. One night I put my oldest son to bed. It was on a Sunday night. I put him to bed and he said without any sense of sarcasm, "See you next week, Dad." I was home all that next week; it was just that I'd leave before he got up and I got home after he went to bed. So the only time I could possibly see him was on the weekend when we weren't traveling. (Brady interview, p. 24)

Recent staff members from the George W. Bush administration expressed similar sentiments about the demanding nature of the position, describing it as one for a "complete work horse." According to Brett Kavanaugh:

> The "fire drill" time was between 6:15 and 8 a.m. when changes for that day emerged and we had to incorporate these changes in the President's schedule and speeches for that day. The President arrived like clockwork to the Oval around 6:50 a.m. Before his first formal meetings began at 8:00 a.m., the President would sign routine letters and photos, work on speeches, and call people in to discuss breaking issues and events of the day. This often would mean some changes in the speech drafts and answering any lingering questions about the speeches for that day. After the morning fire-drill, we would begin to devote more attention to preparing for the next day, reviewing speeches etc. . . . . I would not leave until about 9:30 or 10:00 p.m. (Kavanaugh interview)

Tenure and Background

Despite the hectic schedule, the average tenure of staff secretaries during the George H. W. Bush, Clinton, and Obama administrations was about two years, while President George W. Bush's staff secretaries stayed nearly two and a half years. President Carter had the pleasure of a single staff secretary serving throughout his term. During the Clinton administration, there

were several cases in which the deputy staff secretary was promoted to staff secretary. In both Republican and Democratic administrations, former staff secretaries moved on to become Chief of Staff (e.g., John Podesta under Clinton) or filled other senior governmental positions in subsequent administrations (e.g., Richard Darman headed OMB in the first Bush administration, Harriet Miers became Deputy Chief of Staff in 2003 and then the White House Counsel in 2005). Given the breadth of knowledge gained by a staff secretary, it is not at all surprising that this broad perspective recommends them for more senior positions.

Staff secretaries tend to come primarily from law and business positions and are recruited primarily for what many perceive as their uncommonly good judgment. While some have known the president, most gained their position through ties with the chief of staff. Given the closeness with which staff secretaries and chiefs of staff work, this makes considerable sense. Prior campaign experience is not a requirement, though some staff secretaries have paid their dues on the campaign trail. Many times, lawyers will volunteer blocks of their time rather than resigning from their positions, for example, on Hill staffs or in law firms.

Executive Clerk

This unit serves as the receptacle of the original copies of presidential documents. All documents to be signed by the president and thereby represent public activity are collected and researched. Researchers in the office compare documents with a statute's requirements, respond and conduct research for congressional requests, and check the authorization for a presidential nomination or appointment.

The Executive Clerk (or a representative from the unit) is actually best known as the individual who personally delivers presidential messages to the Hill and is permitted on the House and Senate floors to deliver veto messages.

> The executive clerk's office is also the official White House voice to the Legislative Branch. You see on TV someone coming in to the well of the House saying, "Mr. Speaker, a message from the President," and either bringing back a veto or bringing back a message of some kind from the President. That someone is from the executive clerk's office.
>
> . . . He is the one who does the announcing. He actually comes in to the well of the House. The House provides privileges to that individual office, the executive clerk's office, and that is the official communication link from the White House to the Congress. (Brady interview, p. 10)

Other tasks include keeping an eye on the veto clock (e.g., if the president receives a bill signed by the House and Senate and does nothing for ten days, it automatically becomes law), responding to Congressional requests for reports, overseeing presidential commissions, receiving declarations of emergency from governors, and monitoring the status of every bill and every presidential communication.

Not only are these tasks integral to a smoothly functioning White House. The clerk's office also is "a very, very important part of the administration because it is the institutional memory and is viewed by each president coming in as something that is critical; you can see what's happened in the past" (Brady interview, p. 8). Christopher Hicks elaborated:

> . . . the clerk's office is the only office that has any memory in the White House Office. They keep the records. The [Records and Management] office keeps the records of the president and the staff and all that stuff. It's kind of a central file system. But at the end of the administration under the Presidential Records Act all those papers go to the Archives. But the executive clerk's office is really the sole repository of history. You can call the executive clerk's office and get the status of bills, the status of nominees; you can say who was the Secretary of War during the Teddy Roosevelt Administration and they can tell you." (Hicks interview)

RECORDS MANAGEMENT

As mentioned above, the Presidential Records Act of 1978 requires that all official documents generated in the course of daily business be preserved. One former staff secretary described these documents as "the basis for every presidential library." In previous administrations, staff members from the National Archives Records Administration performed these preservation tasks. Through preservation, they seek to ensure a comprehensive history of the administration. Their management of records also serves as a resource for the president or policy units should they need documents. As with the Executive Clerk, experienced staffers are essential.

CORRESPONDENCE

This large office contains most of the employees (and numerous volunteers) under the purview of the Staff Secretary. The office is responsible for at least acknowledging all messages sent to the White House. Some messages (for example, letters from schoolchildren; e-mail, faxes, letters, and calls mobilized by identifiable groups) can be answered fully with "stock" responses, while others are forwarded to appropriate White House or executive branch agency officials for more substantive responses. This unit also receives, logs in, arranges for notes of thanks, judges the legality, and handles the distribution of every gift sent to the president. And, the correspondence office even has its own post office in the OEOB. In 2012, an article in the *Washingtonian* reported that letters delivered to the White House post office (in the Eisenhower Office Building) are "put through security tests, then packed in boxes and run through a metal detector" (Keane Scott, 2012).

Typically, correspondence aides track the content, source, and medium (electronic mail, voice mail, fax, U.S. mail) of the messages the office receives, reporting them to senior aides or the president on a regular (often weekly) basis. Many presidents, including most recently President Obama, also ask to see a regular sample of the mail and phone comments that come to the White House. Each day, the director of the Office of Presidential Correspondence chose 10 letters from among several hundred earlier marked "sample" by staffers, interns, and volunteers) to go the Staff Secretary's office for inclusion in the president's nightly briefing materials. Lisa Brown recalls, for example, that correspondence staffers

> looked for essentially representative letters on the issues of the day. They did not hesitate to include critical letters. . . . This was not about whitewashing and telling the President, you know, "Oh everybody thinks you're wonderful." There are a lot of different sort of things to think about as you're putting that together to give him a representative sampling. . . . And he would a number of times write back to people. Sometimes he would ask that a letter be shared with a member of his staff working on a particular issue, for example saying, "Send this letter to Gene Sperling." (Brown interview)

WHAT WORKS AND WHAT DOESN'T WORK: STAFF SECRETARIES' ADVICE

WHAT WORKS

Attendance at key policy meetings will enable the Staff Secretary to understand the intensity of the various opinions as well as the substantive issues involved.

Since the Staff Secretary needs to know something about everything, but does not have the time to be steeped in the details, these meetings can serve as tutorials. When invited, attend. Secondhand accounts of meetings often will give short shrift to heated exchanges or disagreement among staff members. As James Cicconi observed:

> . . . you really had to spend time in the various policy meetings occurring in the White House—whether it was cabinet meetings, cabinet council meetings, other policy discussions in the White House—not only because you had a voice or an influence in those decisions but also so you had a sense of the discussion, the tenor of the discussion and the views that were being expressed. On more than a few occasions I'd be in a pretty contentious debate in a cabinet council meeting or something like that. People would be arguing out an issue and it came time to write the decision memo to the President reflecting the differing views and for him to make a decision. You'd look at it and it would be like it was all sweetness and light and there really wasn't a difference. You'd call up whoever you might have heard in the meeting and say, "Why are your views not expressed in the memo the way you expressed them in the meeting?" "Well, I don't want to sound argumentative" or whatever. "The President needs to hear your point of view, if you still hold it." "Yes, I still hold it." "Then it needs to be accommodated in the memo. He needs to understand your feeling on this." It's his decision still. (Cicconi interview)

Beware of and try to counteract the tendency for staff members to mask their misgivings when asked to discuss an issue with the president.

Staff Secretary Cicconi remembered using several techniques for alerting the president to disagreement among his advisers:

> I put little notes on memos I would send in to him... They are usually fairly mundane. Occasionally there will be one where I'll say, "Mr. President, what this argument boils down to is Dick Darman thinks X, John Sununu thinks Y and Roger Porter thinks Z and the arguments are attached" or something like that. On other occasions I would say, "Mr. President, based on the discussion Jack Kemp has pretty strong views on this issue which aren't fully reflected in the attached memo; you may want to give him a call." Sometimes people in a private discussion where the president would prompt it will be more candid than they would in front of three or four other people, who they think may leak it to the *Washington Post*. So that's what an honest broker would do. (Cicconi interview)

Be a vigilant guardian of the president's time.

As Phillip Brady indicated, time is "the most valuable commodity in the world." Protecting presidential time involves being sure that whatever memos the president sees are "ready for primetime" (for example, they have been cleared by the Counsel's Office, OMB, NSC staff, and other relevant actors; they are necessary for the president to see at a particular point given all the other demands on his attention).

Early on, develop a keen sense of the president's working habits.

Does he like to read long memos or summaries? What about news articles? Is he interested in policy, political, or other details? Does he want all memos also routed through the chief of staff's office? What about personal letters? How should a Cabinet member's request for secrecy be handled? What types of materials should be handled with the president in person, and what are the best times of the day or week to do this?

The Staff Secretary often will need a second opinion and the president will not be available, try to create an "open-door policy" with the chief of staff for consultation.

Since the chief of staff is often the eyes and ears of the president, he/she needs to know about important incoming papers just as much as the president. For instance, George H.W. Bush Staff Secretary Cicconi recalled:

> I copied [Chief of Staff John] Sununu on everything. I had total entrée in to his office on no notice and used it. When something would come up that was hot or contentious or difficult, we'd talk. And I was making 100 significant decisions a day on pretty important things and not once in two years did John Sununu ever second-guess me or overrule me. I think he respected the responsibility I had. He supported it totally and supported me totally in that and did the same thing. (Cicconi interview)

Set up a 24-hour, seven-day staffing mechanism to record incoming and outgoing papers on computers.

These administrative assistants will not review documents for substantive purposes, but can log and track documents.

Upon careful review of existing staff in the Clerk's office, the Correspondence unit, and Records Management, aim to retain as many as you find suitable.

Their tasks are critical to the proper functioning of the White House, and institutional memory and expertise with records management are key. Among the things James Cicconi remembers counseling the incoming Clinton staffers about was to

> give the career people there a chance to prove their loyalty. There were a number of them that worked directly for me in there. I said, look, they're loyal to the presidency. They work for the White House and they are loyal to the presidency. They don't impact policy. They have jobs to do and they do them very well and they help you function. They will help you function on day one even if everybody around you is still learning how to do things. They know how to do things. If you come in and fire them all, you'll set yourself back months. Give them a chance to show that they're loyal, where their loyalty is. (Cicconi interview)

More recently, Obama Staff Secretary Lisa Brown praised these staffers as "a tremendous asset who are a font of knowledge on apolitical matters such as how you get a bill passed by Congress over to the president to be signed. They are dedicated public servants who you honestly don't have to worry very much about" (Brown interview).

Hiring those with a legal background and even prior White House experience will serve the president well.

The staff secretary and deputy staff secretary are charged with making paper move and spotting potential problems and unresolved issues. Both are important, but the latter task can have higher stakes. Those trained as lawyers who have already worked with clients and understand the need for painstaking attention to detail. They tend to be especially well suited for a job in the Staff Secretary's office. The intensely cautious approach coupled with an eye for detail makes lawyers ideal candidates for these positions. In the George W. Bush administration, those at the helm of the Staff Secretary's office had served in the White House Counsel's office as well and contended that the additional exposure to White House operations helped a great deal. During the Obama administration, three of the four Staff Secretaries were lawyers.

WHAT DOESN'T WORK

Downgrading the Staff Secretary from Assistant to the President to Deputy Assistant to the President.

Titles matter in the White House. Personal ties to the president and the chief of staff are critical. The best staff secretaries have been those with close ties to the president who are included in high level staff meetings. By granting the staff secretary the most senior title in the administration, he or she has the credibility and will be included in key meetings. This allows

the staff secretary to obtain a sense of presidential priorities and the nuances of arguments for or against a policy. As Obama Staff Secretary Lisa Brown noted, "And I think . . . the staff secretary performs the job best, if they are closely synced up with the senior team, in terms of, 'What are the policy issues that are going on? What are the discussions?' because it ensures that you have the right antenna" (Brown interview). Conversely, exclusion from key meetings creates opportunities for paper to find its way around the Staff Secretary and to the president, essentially undermining the role of this vital office. Only a limited number of individuals can be named "Assistants to the President," so choose wisely and allot one to the Staff Secretary.

Attempting to divide incoming material for the president according to subject matter rarely if ever works.

Many of the issues are overlapping and such a system will fall apart. According to one White House aide, efforts to divide work by substantive area tend not to work:

> We talked a little bit about dividing things sort of according to some substantive areas so that I had an interest in foreign policy and I would do more of that. I think it was that I was going to more on the foreign and economic side and the other deputy was going to do more on the social policy, sort of the rest of domestic policy. … It was more one deputy would cover one and one deputy would cover the other and he would sort of watch over all of it. It just didn't work out that way because the staff secretary's office, in the nature of it, it flows with the nature of what's happening so that if what's coming through—it is a quintessentially reactive office as opposed to proactive.

Shielding the president from contrary opinions will prevent him from making the best-informed decisions possible.

Don't try to hide disagreement or controversy among staff members. W. J. Clinton Staff Secretary Todd Stern noted:

> It was very important that we be viewed as honest brokers—that we didn't slant things one way or another, else we would not have retained the confidence of the people who had written those papers! (Patterson 2000, p. 340)

Limit the amount of time supervising activities of the Correspondence Office and other units.

This takes precious time and attention away from the primary task of controlling the paper flow to and from the president. From the Bush administration, James Cicconi indicated:

> I just said you know where I am if you have a problem; otherwise you're in charge and I'll back you up. So I didn't really get drowned in the management detail mainly because I think early on I set up a structure that worked without my daily involvement so that I could focus my time and energy on the things that really did matter. (Cicconi interview)

While the autopen may be appropriate for some letters, you need to know when to use it. A seemingly innocent mistake may become a diplomatic disaster.

In addition, be sure that your assistants are acutely aware that the autopen should be used only with your explicit approval. Staff Secretary Cicconi made this point very clearly:

> Well, it was [an important responsibility] and one of the first decisions I made was that nothing gets auto-penned unless there is a written authorization from me to auto-pen it…Since I'm going to be responsible, I want to be responsible, and I said I do not give verbal authorizations. It was one of those things which was a heavy responsibility and it is the only way to protect yourself. (in Patterson interview, p. 12)

APPENDIX: STAFF SECRETARIES, 1969–PRESENT

Administration	Staff Secretaries	Dates	Deputies	Dates
Obama	Joani Walsh*	2014–	Jesse Gurman	2015–2016
	Douglas Kramer*	3/12–2/13	Ted Chiodo	2012–2014
	Rajesh De*	2011–4/12		2012–2014
	Lisa Brown**	2009–2011	Peter Rundlet	2009–2010
G. W. Bush	Raul Yanes	6/3/06–1/09	Brent McIntosh	2/12/07–1/09
	Brett Kavanaugh	7/03–	William Burck	2005–07
	Harriet Miers	1/01–6/03	Stuart Bowen	1/01–
W. J. Clinton	Lisel Loy	2000–2001	———	
	Sean Maloney	1999–2000	Lisel Loy	1999–2000
			Justin Coleman	
	Phillip Caplan	spr '98–spr '99	Sean Maloney	1998–1990
			David Goodfriend	
	Todd Stern	fall '95–fall '97	Philip Caplan	fall '95–spr '98
			Sean Maloney	fall '97–spr '99
			Helen Howell	spr '96–'97
	John Podesta	spr '93–spr '95	R. Paul Richard	spr '94–spr '95
			Todd Stern	spr '93–spr '95
			Brant Lee	spr '93–fall '93
G.H.W. Bush	Philip Brady	1991–1/93	C. Dean McGrath	1992
	James Cicconi	1/89–12/90	John Gardner	1989–1992
Reagan	Rhett Dawson***	4/87–fall '88	Katherine Ladd	fall '88: Dir, WH Secretariat
	David Chew	1985–spr '87		'87: WH Secretariat
	Richard Darman	1981–1983		spr '87: Exec Asst
Carter	Richard Hutcheson	1/77–1/81	William Simon	1/77–1/81
Ford	James Connor	6/75–1/77	David Hoopes	8/74–1/77
	Jerry Jones	8/74–5/75	David Hoopes	
Nixon	Jerry Jones	4/74–8/74	David Hoopes	4/71–8/74
	Bruce Kehrli	1/72–5/74	David Hoopes	
	Jon Huntsman	2/71–2/72	David Hoopes	
	John Brown	1969–3/71		
	Ken Cole	1969		

*Deputy Assistant to the President
**Assistant to the President
***Assistant to the President for Operations

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