The Truman White House

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III

THE WHITE HOUSE STAFF
LATER PERIOD

For the discussion of the White House staff during the later part of the Truman administration, three of the participants drew on material which they had previously prepared and adapted it for use at this conference.

Richard E. Neustadt had written a rather lengthy memorandum as early as February 1953, in which he described the positions that existed on the White House staff at the end of Mr. Truman’s presidency and characterized the persons who held these positions. Thus his observations have, in his own apt phrase, “the virtue of immediacy and also of innocence of what would happen under later presidents.” Dr. Neustadt, after serving in the Bureau of the Budget, served as special assistant in the White House from 1950 to 1953. He has taught at Cornell and Columbia universities and, since 1965, has been professor of government at Harvard University where, from 1965 to 1975, he also served as associate dean of the John Fitzgerald Kennedy School of Government. His book Presidential Power (1960) was widely acclaimed and continues to be considered one of the most influential studies of the presidency. In 1978, Professor Neustadt joined the board of directors of the Truman Library Institute.

Charles S. Murphy has worked in Washington since his graduation from law school in 1934. In 1947 he moved from the Office of the Legislative Counsel of the Senate to the White House where he served first as administrative assistant to the president and, from 1950, as special counsel to the president. He returned to government service during the Kennedy and Johnson administrations when he was undersecretary of agriculture (1961–65) and chairman of the Civil Aeronautics Board (1965–68). He is now in private practice in Washington, D.C., and is president of the Truman Library Institute. His statement for the conference, adapted from an address he delivered at the Truman Library in 1967, stresses Mr. Truman’s ability to simplify complex matters, echoes
Mr. Hopkins's observations about the president's orderly way of doing things and his high regard for the office he occupied, and calls attention to his success in the use of staff advisers.

Ken Hechler's contribution vividly illustrates the staff's interaction with one another and with other elements in the government (in this case primarily the Department of State) and also the president's manner of participation in the evolution of a (relatively minor) public statement. Mr. Hechler's memorandum is based on notes prepared in 1952, shortly after the events he describes. Ken Hechler was a special assistant in the White House office from 1949 to 1953. He served as a member of Congress from the Fourth District of West Virginia from 1958 till 1976.

In addition to Messrs. Hechler, Murphy, and Neustadt, the panel for this third discussion session included Adm. Robert L. Dennison, Beth Campbell Short, David H. Stowe, and Roger W. Tubby. Admiral Dennison, a career naval officer, served as naval aide to the president (1948–53) but also discharged a number of functions not normally expected from or associated with a military aide. His prepared statement illuminates both Mr. Truman's methods as president and his perceptions of his role. Admiral Dennison's distinguished naval career culminated with service as commander in chief of the U.S. Atlantic Fleet and a concurrent assignment as supreme Allied commander, Atlantic, for the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (1960–63).

Beth Campbell Short, an experienced newspaper woman, enjoyed both vicarious insight into the White House office while her husband, Joseph Short, was the president's press secretary and direct insight during her service in 1952 and 1953 as correspondence secretary to the president. She later served as press secretary to Sen. A. S. (Mike) Monroney, and since 1966, she has been special assistant to the assistant commissioner of the Social Security Administration.

David H. Stowe, after service in the Bureau of the Budget, was named special assistant to the assistant to the president (Dr. John Steelman) in 1947 and became administrative assistant to the president in 1949. After the end of the Truman administration he engaged in the practice of labor arbitration. Since 1970 he has been a member of the National Mediation Board.

Roger W. Tubby was closely associated with Joseph Short, serving as one of two assistant press secretaries and succeeding to Short's duties after the latter's death in 1952. Mr. Tubby was assistant secretary of state for public affairs in 1961 and 1962 and U.S. ambassador to the European Office of the United Nations and other international agencies in Geneva, Switzerland, from 1962 to 1968. In 1975, he became deputy commissioner of the New York State Department of Parks and Recreation.
During the last twelve to eighteen months of the Truman administration the personalities in the White House office and their relations with one another were relatively stable. This was the last phase of staff development under Harry Truman. This was the staff with which he faced his last session of the Congress and his last political campaign in office. This was the staff that operated after the Soviet atomic bomb, after the Korean outbreak, after “partial” mobilization, after renewed high prices, and after direct controls had lost their shock effect—their emergency flavor—and been assimilated as “normal,” familiar features of the governmental landscape.

At the start of 1952, there were twenty-two full-time and three part-time civilian officials in the White House engaged in presidential staff work. There were, in addition, three military aides, one of whom, the naval aide, was—for reasons of personal competence—frequently drawn into staff undertakings akin to those of the civilian officials.

This group of twenty-eight—including the part-time civilians—constituted the president’s personal staff. They were the individuals who had some voice in the conduct of public affairs at the presidential level. This group was, of course, only a fraction of the number of individuals on duty in the White House office.

To avoid any possibility of misunderstanding, here is a listing of the groups excluded from this consideration of the president’s personal staff:

1. The armed forces personnel handling communications, manning the aides’ offices and the medical office, serving as White House chauffeurs, etc.

2. The civilian personnel engaged in purely administrative, clerical, and stenographic duties within the White House office (except for their nominal supervisor, the executive clerk).

3. The Secret Service Detail and the White House Police.
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4. The liaison staffs handling government-wide contacts with the public service organizations of the advertising and motion picture industries.*

Apart from these excluded personnel, the presidential staff per se was somewhat smaller in 1952 than during the preceding two years, but that decline was due wholly to the full-scale transfer of Averell Harriman’s office from the White House to ODMS [Office of Defense Mobilization and Stabilization] after October 1951.

Aside from the period of Harriman’s White House tenure (July 1950–October 1951), the presidential staff in 1952 was somewhat larger than it had been at any time since the first confused months of the Truman administration. This growth of staff occurred almost entirely during President Truman’s second term. In the winter of 1947–48—a period of stabilized staff operations much like 1951–52—there were sixteen full-time civilian officials, as compared with twenty-two four years later. The make-up of this full time staff and the pattern of its growth, is shown in Table 1.

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<td><strong>WHITE HOUSE STAFF SIZE</strong></td>
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<td>POSITION</td>
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<td><strong>Total Full-time Civilians</strong></td>
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These figures may be compared, roughly, with a total of approximately seventeen (including Byrnes’s OWM) on Roosevelt’s full-time staff late in 1944 and a total of twenty-three staff appointments announced in the press during the first three weeks of the Eisenhower administration.

Of course, figures of this sort have relatively limited significance.

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* This little group, transferred from OWI [Office of War Information] to OWMR at the war’s end, then attached to OGR [Office of Government Reports] in its short-lived revival, was retrieved by Dr. Steelman from the wreck of OGR in 1947. It existed thereafter as a nominal part of the White House, but without any internal relation to the president’s business or to other White House undertakings.
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Part-time personnel, officials of other agencies, or private citizens may be as much or more a functioning part of a president's "staff" as the full-time officials in the White House office.

Furthermore, the really significant thing is not the number of staff aides, but what they do and how they do it. For the Truman staff, circa 1952, that information is summarized below.

*The Assistant to the President (John Steelman)*

There are three keys to understanding this post and Steelman's operation in it.

First, the job was the lineal descendant of the OWMR *directorship.* This means that when OWMR was liquidated in December 1946, Steelman, its last director, came into the White House without any loss of status. It means also that inevitably he brought with him a residue of then current OWMR projects and interests, on which he retained "the lead" within the White House for a number of years—for example, housing and education.

Furthermore, the OWMR background meant that in Steelman's new job, as in his old one, he was nominally the president's principal agent in the task of coordinating, adjudicating, and needling—the main domestic operations of the government. The press release announcing Steelman's new appointment stated quite specifically that he would "continue" to assist the president in "coordinating" executive "operations."

Whatever may be thought of OWMR's effectiveness in this role, or indeed of John Steelman's after 1946, the point is that of all the White House staff, he most clearly and most nearly had the "operations" assignment—and the prerogative. Other staff members might be instructed to act on an ad hoc basis or might follow their particular balls of twine into a lot of operational by-ways, but Steelman, alone, had a general mandate.

The second point to bear in mind is that John Steelman's whole prior experience in government had been as an expert mediator, a conciliator, a bringer-together of opposing points of view, concerned less with policy than with agreement and specializing in techniques of settling disputes.

Inevitably, Steelman's approach to his "coordinating" responsibilities on "operations" was deeply influenced by this background. He has often said that coming to the job long after the cabinet was appointed and entrenched, he could not hope, and did not try, to manage cabinet officers or to oversee their affairs. Instead he deliberately sought to be a smootherouter, a helper with troublesome details, a conciliator, treading warily among the department heads and to-and-fro between them and the president. In the same way, he sought—apparently with the presi-
dent’s assent—to disassociate himself from any labor or political partisanship. Advocacy was not to be his business.

But the choice of roles was not merely a tactical move, in light of entrenched cabinet strength; it seems clearly to reflect, as well, the natural instinct of the skilled mediator.

Third, it should be understood that when Steelman became the assistant to the president, he had already held a White House post for more than a year, as special assistant to the president concerned with labor-relations problems and the settlement of major labor disputes. He had not relinquished this assignment while serving as OWMR director, and when he returned to the White House, his labor-relations duties were simply lumped in with the “coordinating” role carried over from OWMR. But the specific, pressing—and familiar—labor problems naturally took precedence over the vaguer stuff of coordinating “operations.”

There has long been a view in many quarters that Roosevelt’s White House, and Truman’s as well, meddled too much in labor relations. There may have been some justification for this charge in one particular case or another, but as a general proposition it is insupportable. The laws of the land—the Taft-Hartley Act and the Railway Labor Act between them—require presidential intervention at the crisis stage in practically all disputes of national importance. And these legal requirements merely formalize and sanction what is bound to happen anyway. Law or no law, the tradition of presidential involvement goes back to Grover Cleveland.

Nowadays, with big labor, big management, a highly integrated economy, and a Cold War besides, it is quite inevitable that when the stakes are high, all sides will look to the White House, go to the White House, plan their strategy accordingly, and refuse to stop short. Conceivably, the immediate pressure on the White House might be eased if the Labor Department were an “industrial relations” enterprise rather than the labor secretary’s being expected to be labor’s representative in the cabinet. Under present conditions neither management nor the unions will deal with the secretary of labor when their own bread-and-butter is seriously at stake. They want the president’s representative, or better yet, the president himself.

In the Truman White House, John Steelman’s office was usually the place they would go. Whatever his title, whatever the formal range of his responsibilities, this was the heart of Steelman’s work as assistant to the president.

But Steelman passed to others the detailed staff work on developing policies and courses of action to meet the situations created by the disputes he was mediating or by the eventual terms of settlement. Generally speaking, these tasks devolved more and more on Charles Murphy, the
Richard E. Neustadt

president's counsel, with help from David Stowe and other members of the staff.

In practice, this meant that nobody was actually exercising firm, continuing control of the total staff, and no one staff member was continuously riding herd on the various government agencies involved from time to time. Steelman's mandate from the president certainly left him in position to assert continuing leadership on the policy side, but that was neither his way nor his preoccupation. Murphy, on the other hand, could not hope to assert control over the mediatory operations that Steelman kept in his own hands. Murphy was always mindful of Steelman's titular rights, particularly when it came to bearing down on operating agencies outside the White House.

In practice, Steelman handled a tremendous range of "cats and dogs"—that is, questions, issues, problems (both trivial and great) concerning day-to-day operations and relationships, principally on the domestic side of the executive establishment.

Generally speaking, these things came to him in three ways. First, he was constantly receiving from the president a mass of proposals, pleas, and denunciations about particular federal activities, left off by cabinet officers, congressmen, and the great assortment of private visitors who streamed through the president's office (usually with papers in their hands).

Second, a variety of businessmen, trade union officials, interest-group representatives and members of Congress with some special point of view or ax to grind, frequently called or wrote Steelman urging that the president make so-and-so do this and that about some federal undertaking.

Third, for six years Steelman sat in on cabinet meetings, always there, almost always with his mouth shut. In consequence, he received a great deal of his business from the department heads who were used to seeing him when they got together with the president. "Ask the boss if it is all right for me to do this"; "I want him to know I have done that"; "Some other department is stepping on my toes, does the boss know or care?" All the questions, the beefs, the complications arising out of day-to-day concerns, which were too trivial—or too unjelled—to be taken up directly in hurried sessions with the president, were likely to land on Steelman's desk, whenever or wherever a cabinet officer wanted help or even just to say that he had "checked in."

The heads of independent agencies, whose access to the president was frequently more restricted, made extensive use of Steelman's services in this role. Indeed, the weaker the agency, the more dependent on borrowings of presidential powers and prestige and the greater its use
of the Steelman channel. Housing and the RFC [Reconstruction Finance Corporation] were good examples.

Taking all these things together, there was a huge volume of business crossing Steelman’s desk or coming in over his telephone. A lot of it was trivial, some of it was very vital, and all of it was spewed up by the great federal machine in daily motion.

Steelman could be, and often was, an effective channel between departments and the president for settling spot problems. He was effective also in the technique of designed evasion, the man who could “study” a problem forever—or lose it completely, if need be. Be it said that much of this “negative” action was undertaken at the president’s direct request. Some personalized and personable wastebasket work is bound to be essential to any president.

Steelman handled a very large share of his total work-load personally. Though he had two full-time staff assistants, he never used them as general aides but rather as special-purpose helpers to whom he gave assignments from time to time. Harold Enarson helped out on the labor-relations side, particularly in processing disputes referred from the Federal Mediation and Conciliation Service and the National Mediation Board. Russell Andrews helped with the general stream of visitors and correspondence. The work load of these two men varied greatly, as did their relationship to Steelman’s central interests of the moment. They were sometimes in the stream, more often out of it. Neither was in any sense a “deputy.”

In addition, until the end of 1951, Steelman had the occasional assistance on a consulting basis of a former staff member, Robert Turner, and the full-time help of Turner’s girl Friday, Marjorie Belcher. Miss Belcher occupied herself with winding up Turner’s long involvement in certain commodity, materials, and stockpiling questions—an inheritance from OWMR days. Miss Belcher also processed Tariff Commission recommendations under the injury provisions of the Reciprocal Trade Act—documents which came to Steelman for reasons long since forgotten by all concerned.

Generally speaking, in his relations with his own staff, Steelman retained the mediator’s instinct. He was his own man and kept his own counsel.

*The Special Counsel to the President (Charles Murphy)*

In attempting explanations of White House organization, some Truman staff members were fond of saying that while Steelman looked out for “operations,” Murphy handled “plans” and “forward programs.”
This is a great oversimplification, much too tidy to be accurate, but there is just enough truth in it to make it a convenient point of departure.

Only a hint of Murphy’s role is given by a listing of the fixed, well-organized assignments he had acquired or had inherited from his predecessors, Sam Rosenman and Clark Clifford.

Murphy was responsible for the preparation of all the president’s speeches, his other major public statements, and all presidential messages to Congress.

Furthermore, Murphy was generally responsible for staff work on the development of the administration’s legislative proposals, on the selection of issues and emphases in the president’s own legislative program, on the final review of enrolled bills, and on the preparation of Executive Orders. It was to Murphy that the Budget Bureau’s legislative clearance operation looked for leadership. It was Murphy who prepared agendas for the president’s meetings with congressional leaders and who took their calls on particular headaches about particular bills.

As a natural extension of these jobs it was to Murphy that the president turned during the campaign year of 1952 for such things as the “White House draft” of the Democratic platform; and it was Murphy who captained the writing-and-research team on the Truman campaign train that year.

Thus, the special counsel held the acknowledged staff lead on preparation of all the formal documents which expressed, explained, or defended the president’s major policies and programs—foreign and domestic, executive and legislative, governmental and “political” alike. Now if this did not put Murphy “in charge” of policy and program planning, at least it got him deeply and strongly involved in the process. The strength of his position is highlighted by the following observations.

In the first place, messages, speeches, Executive Orders, and the like are not merely vehicles for expressing policy, they are devices for getting policy decided. They have deadlines attached. And there is nothing like a deadline on the statement of a policy for getting a decision on what that policy shall be.

Thus Murphy had not only the power that goes with choosing the words but also the power that goes with presenting the issues for decision. And as a corollary, he had the responsibility for determining what the issues were, clarifying them, counteracting the premature commitment, counterbalancing the one-sided presentation, flushing out the hidden controversies, and surveying the alternatives.

The preparation of these great “action” documents was rarely an editorial matter. Ordinarily it was a matter of helping the president
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decide what to say, as well as how to say it. And inevitably, it was also a matter of when—of timing.

Now the strength of Murphy’s position lay not only in the fact that these types of staff advice were his to give, but that he had equipped himself to produce results. He had “tooled up,” staffed up to carry the load. And while his own organization was not wholly adequate by any means, there was nothing else like it, nothing else to match it, anywhere around the president.

Murphy, as special counsel, operated not just as an individual but as head of a very close-knit team. During the last year, the full-time members of the team were David Lloyd and David Bell, both administrative assistants to the president, and Richard Neustadt, Murphy’s own assistant. These three worked as Murphy’s general-purpose associates, operating very intimately and very flexibly, working jointly or severally on anything and everything that came along.

Murphy had a second assistant, Donald Hansen, who concentrated on loyalty and security matters and certain other “legal” concerns (which will be discussed later). But Hansen was always available in a pinch for more general assignments. And Lloyd had an assistant, Ken Hechler, who served the whole Murphy group as a lightning-fast researcher, fact-finder, and compiler of background information, particularly in the field of “political” research.

Besides these men, several other members of the White House staff worked for Murphy on an informal, ad hoc basis. Most of the assistants to the other presidential appointees drifted in and out of Murphy’s circle, depending on the projects at hand and the needs of the moment. In appraising this staff as a source of strength to Murphy, mere numbers were, of course, a factor. But two other aspects need to be considered.

First, the group around Murphy were the “idea” boys, the bright young men of Truman’s White House, responsible, indefatigable, in earnest about the great causes both foreign and domestic that are identified with Truman’s name. Naturally, these men were a center of attraction for their counterparts in the agencies, on the Hill, in the Democratic National Committee, and in the Washington headquarters of interest groups espousing Fair Deal programs. There was thus a real network of close, informal relationships between Murphy’s group and bright, able, imaginative staff men all over Washington.

Second, Murphy’s associates were, by and large, not simply idea men, but reasonably experienced bureaucrats with considerable understanding of the bureaucratic power structure—that is, of the way things are done and how and by whom. Generally speaking, these men had
Richard E. Neustadt

"been around," they knew how to "operate," their acquaintance was wide, their finger-tips sensitized.

President Truman's speeches, messages, and the like were written not by writers, but by lawyers and economists and public administration specialists who had picked up skills along the way as generalists in government. This did not bring the highest literary quality to Truman's public papers, but it certainly meant a sensitive awareness of their potential as vehicles for making or influencing policy.

It meant, too, that Murphy's men had some ability to operate "underground" at the subcabinet level and below, all through the government—obtaining information, exchanging views, sometimes even coordinating a bit of policy, or influencing an administrative action, without the fuss or formality—or futility—that often must attend dealings with and among department heads. Of course, when the shoe was on the other foot, when dealings at the top were necessary to minimize entrenched attitudes and bickering and lethargy among the bureaucrats, Murphy's group was usually free to ignore the second-stringers and go directly to the department heads. Thus, in a relative sense, their experiences gave them the best of both worlds—both bureaucratic contacts and White House status.

These factors all added to the strength of Murphy's position in the policy arena. But there were also some basic limitations in his situation. First, while Murphy had his hands on several of the key "action" processes around which policy was made, there were some others more or less outside the range of his recognized assignments. One of these was the budget process, the determination of the sums to be requested for existing and projected activities. On the budget message, as such, and on new substantive legislation to be proposed thereby, Murphy's claim was certainly well staked out, though he had to share the terrain with the budget director. But on the dollars-and-cents allowances in the budget document itself—the stuff of which policy is so often made, or unmade—there was no mandate or machinery that brought the special counsel regularly into the general dialogue between the budget director and the president.

Similarly, on the issues raised by the course of the military campaign in Korea and by major political developments in the Cold War around the world, the special counsel had no recognized hunting license, no established part to play, unless the president needed to say something or to recommend legislation or to issue an Executive Order.

The absence of a mandate which regularly involved him in these processes did not mean that Murphy or his staff never got into budget decisions or foreign and military policy. From time to time, they got in
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very deeply. But Murphy's technique was always to move under the cover, however tenuous, of some recognized mandate that he did possess. He always sought a "handle," an excuse, to rationalize his appearance in someone else's bailiwick. And his associates, perforce, followed his cue.

It is hard to say how much Murphy's technique—the constant use of cover, the tendency to await some semblance of a "mandate"—was an inherent limitation in the counsel's job and how much was an outgrowth of Murphy's own temperament and training as focused on the job. To some degree the limitation was, of course, inherent. The post of presidential counsel generates no independent leverage. On the White House staff, all glory is reflected, and partial or total eclipse—sometimes momentary, occasionally sustained—can be a common occurrence.

Unquestionably, however, personality had something to do with Murphy's particular response to his particular opportunities. His mind and temperament were essentially judicial. His long service in the Senate counsel's office naturally conditioned him against "fighting the problem." Though Murphy grew greatly in the White House, still there never were the sharp, continuous clashes of personality and ambition that characterized his predecessor's relations with Steelman, Connelly, and certain cabinet officers. The "mandate" technique helped to minimize all that but at the price—perhaps necessary, perhaps not—of circumscribing the counsel's range of interests and the timing of his interventions.

There was another limitation built into Murphy's operation, and that was time. There was never enough time to do a real job—a complete job—on all the things implicit in his regular assignments. Deadlines on presidential documents limited Murphy's scope even as they strengthened his hand. Inevitably, it was the most concrete jobs, the presidential documents due by a certain date, that got top priority, that is, the larger share of staff energy and attention. The less immediate, less tangible projects always had to give way. Murphy and his associates were relatively alert to the productive but intangible stuff of spying out the landscape, thinking ahead, following up, "operating," on the great issues present and to come. These things they carried on as best they could, in snatches, piecemeal, squeezing their forays in between their work on the endless series of public papers of the president of the United States.

The Truman staff was well organized to develop legislative programs, but far less well equipped to lead, guide, or share in the campaigning that is essential to translate programs into law. On the administrative side, the Truman White House rarely failed to state a better policy than it could implement in actions by the governmental agencies.

The contrasts, of course, were not unique to the Truman regime. To some degree these will be found in any administration. The White House
staff, however organized, cannot make up for all the weaknesses of party discipline and leadership in Congress; nor can the staff preempt the role of agency direction, from cabinet officers through bureau chiefs and their subordinates.

Moreover, the staff can never be expected to allocate its time to best hypothetical advantage, regardless of the personal preoccupations of the president—those being, after all, the *raison d'être* of the staff itself. If in Truman's time "disproportionate" staff energy went into speeches and the like, then it is also true that these were among the things that the president, personally, *had* to do, and none but his own staff were handy to help him. In a real sense, the White House staff's main purpose was to concentrate on just those things no one else in the executive had been set up to do. And these unique assignments inevitably impeded the interesting business of looking over the shoulders of other agencies and staffs to see how they were performing.

But granting that no president and no White House staff can ever do a perfect job of follow-through on legislative or administrative action, it also should be said that within the particular context and limitations of the Truman presidency and the Truman staff, neither Murphy nor his associates conceived that they were accomplishing as much as might have been possible, had they been able to cope with their time problems. They never overcame those difficulties, but they knew better than to blame them all on history or the dynamics of American government.

The time problem that faced Murphy and his aides in coping with their regular assignments was tremendously complicated by the spate of crucial ad hoc jobs that came their way. Over the years, it became more and more usual for Murphy to end up as the cleaner-upper of nasty operational crises.

In 1951, for example, it was Murphy who finally worked out a settlement of the RFC controversy between the Fulbright-Douglas subcommittee and the president; Murphy who initially picked up the pieces of the Treasury–Federal Reserve controversy—though these agencies finally came to terms entirely on their own. It was Murphy who did the chief work and worrying on how to put the Wage Stabilization Board together again; Murphy who tried time after time, with proposal after proposal, to obtain definitive action to meet and overcome the issue of corruption and the situations behind it.

The common characteristic of all these problems, and the many others Murphy took on, boils down to this: hard questions and choices of policy were involved in a critical operating situation which had reached such proportions publicly that the substantive issues could be neither evaded nor decided on a purely ad hoc basis. When a matter reached
that stage, it usually got into the special counsel's hands, whether by
assignment from the president or by tacit consensus among Murphy's col­
leagues or sometimes by nothing save the workings of his own conscience.

In all these ways and for all these reasons, the special counsel's role
in Truman's White House was mainly as a general-purpose policy adviser,
a "counsel" in the broadest sense.

The Appointments Secretary (Matthew Connelly)

To understand Connelly's role in the Truman White House it is
necessary to consider both the character of his job and the nature of his
long association with the president. Together, those things produced for
Connelly a formidable position within the staff.

The appointments secretary had his desk just outside the usual
visitors' entrance to the president's office, astride the channels of commu­
nications. He was the direct personal contact with people who wanted to
see and talk to the president. Within limits, he had very considerable
discretion in deciding who got to see the president and who did not.
While cabinet officers, members of Congress, the White House staff,
heads of major private organizations, and the like had a right to entrée
which was virtually automatic, as a practical matter, Connelly had a good
deal of latitude in deciding when and in what sequence they should go in.

And this power to influence the timing of appointments for the
"great" meant more than mere discretion to deny the portals outright to
the hoi polloi.

The president's phone was in Connelly's hands in the same sense
and to about the same extent as was his door. Incoming calls from the
"great" went through directly, except when the president was engaged in
conference or with callers. Then Connelly decided whether to interrupt
or postpone. Calls from the "near-great" and the lesser-known usually
went to Connelly first, for his decision and disposal.

Not only did the appointments secretary handle visits and calls to
the president, he also made up the list of presidential engagements:
where the president would go and whom he would address, as well as
whom he would see. Here, too, as a practical matter, Connelly had con­
siderable discretion—not that he would have presumed to accept or re­
ject a serious invitation without checking, but because in all except the
most significant cases, it was he who checked with the president, and
thus he who was on hand to give Mr. Truman advice.

There were certain practical limitations, of course, in Connelly's
exercise of all these functions. There were ways to reach the president
other than through his office door or by phone. Old friends, staff mem­
bers, cabinet officers, and the like could find opportunities to negotiate
arrangements for themselves or others directly with the president. The president himself could, and often did, initiate phone calls and appointments. And there are four doors into the president's office; only the president controls them all. Then too, for the initiate, there was the after-hours call to the chief usher of the White House, the neutral civil servant who relayed messages and got instructions from the president on handling unscheduled phone calls or extending invitations to the residence itself. But granting these limitations, the nature of his official duties gave Connelly a role of great strategic importance, far beyond the mere mechanics of administrative detail.

In the first place, Connelly's physical location gave him an unmatched opportunity to know what was on the president's mind, to gauge his mood, to gain his ear at any time of day. During the course of an average day, the nature of Connelly's job and the location of his desk brought him into much more frequent contact with the president than was the case with any other government official.

In the second place, it was Connelly's business to dispose of the president's time—and there is no more precious commodity in the country. The man who has that to give—or appears to have it—will be sought after, courted, favored, and confided in by government officials, private interest representatives, and, last but not least, the whole party hierarchy—national, state, and local.

Taking these things together, any appointments secretary is bound to have an influence on the course of events. Jonathan Daniels has described the way F.D.R.'s military aide and secretary, General Watson, helped shape the decision to dump Henry Wallace by making sure a steady stream of Wallace's opponents got in to see the president all through the spring of 1944.

In Connelly's case, the opportunities afforded by the job itself were reinforced by his particular prior relations with the president. Alone of the civilian staff, Connelly was a holdover from Truman's Senate days when he had been chief investigator for the Truman Committee, sometime secretary to the senator, and personal jack-of-all-trades in the 1944 vice-presidential campaign. The appointments secretary must always have close, informal, intimate relations with the president; so must a senatorial handyman with his senator. But the nuances are different in these two situations; and the roles, responsibilities, and attributes of office are different. Yet here there was a carryover. Here, at least in some degree, they were combined.

On policy at the highest level—on the grand strategy of the administration, so to speak—Connelly's direct influence was negligible, and his indirect influence was sporadic and secondary. He occasionally advised
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on the time and content of messages and speeches, but in the later years, at least, he was rarely needed. Nor was he encouraged to take part in the stream of great issues flowing to the president for decisions from Budget, State, Defense. He had little to do with the elaboration of the Fair Deal or with the development of Cold War policy.

But at what might be called the tactical level—the level of day-to-day decisions in the normal grind of domestic government and party operations, including congressional contacts—Connelly's role was often crucial, indirect perhaps, sometimes hard to trace, yet not infrequently decisive.

In the last years he had one and sometimes two assistants helping him with contacts on and requests from Capitol Hill. They kept a low profile there and so did he, facilitating relations and pressing programs.

The Press Secretary (Joseph Short; Roger Tubby)

Characteristically, this office always faced in two directions; outwards towards the correspondents as news source, nursemaid, channel, lead, and buffer; inwards toward the president and other staff as counsel, guide, or fall guy for the press and public impact of every sort of presidential action. Frustrations were inevitable in each of these roles, and a great deal of tension and strain was involved in attempting both at once. Three factors were outstanding among the elements of strain.

First, the three national press associations, the major East Coast newspapers, and two of the radio-TV networks had full-time correspondents on the White House beat, inhabiting the White House press room and accompanying the president wherever he went, in Washington or out. This meant that there was always a nucleus of ten to twenty correspondents on hand all the time, with nothing to do but cover the president.

Relatively few of these full-time correspondents were in the first rank of responsible Washington reporters. Some of them were definitely second-string. The permanent group was thus a pretty heterogeneous lot—not equally competent, not all reliable by any means—but ever-present, always on the press secretary's hands, alternately starving for and overwhelmed by White House news. They were quarrelsome, querulous, bored with themselves, often dissatisfied, and always there.

They were as much a part of the president's entourage as the Secret Service. Yet their employers had not put them there to protect the president. And out of their ambivalent relationship to the staff and to the president came perpetual harassment for the press secretary, who was at once the nursemaid, friend, and protector of this press corps as well as guardian of the presidential gates against their "depredations."
President Truman en route to a press conference with his press secretaries, Roger W. Tubby (l) and Irving Perlmeter (r), November 20, 1952.
Second, the pattern of White House press coverage—and of press corps relations with the staff—was greatly affected by the tempo of wire-service reporting. The wire-service reporter is not called upon for commentary or interpretation. He is expected to produce spot news, sharp and fast, for instantaneous transmission to all parts of the world in time to make the very next edition—and, if possible, to headline it. Speed, compression, sensation: these spell good reporting in the wire-service lexicon.

But for the president and his press secretary these qualities spell trouble and not for them alone. The bear-baiting atmosphere of so many press conferences, which were inevitably geared to wire-service tempo, was hard not only on the president but on his press staff; it was equally rough for many members of the press corps itself. Indeed, the worry and frustration of successive press secretaries was matched by the frustration of the abler, more discerning and discreet reporters.

For the White House staff’s defense against the ravages of wire-service tempo, both in press conferences and out, was a protective stiffening, a recoil, an arms'-length attitude toward all (or almost all) the correspondents in the permanent press corps. Naturally, everybody suffered—as much from this reaction as from the difficulties which prompted it.

Many first-rate reporters for great dailies or weeklies—men and women able to reflect and to interpret at more length and leisure than the wire-service staffs—were increasingly cut off from the flow of informal confidential interchange, the background briefings that were essential if they were to do the best possible job not only for their papers but for the president. This they resented and resisted in their turn.

Yet for none was the strain so great as for the press secretary, caught in the midst of this swirl of frustrations, hampered by them constantly, never able to get clear, but only more entangled at each new turn.

The third source of strain for the presidential press officer had an internal not an external origin. The distribution of duties, the channels of authority around the White House for matters of substance—and even of phrasing—left the press secretary in a late-comer’s advisory role on almost every phase of the newsmaking process, except for purely technical details. Other people wrote the speeches; others decided whom to recommend for federal offices; others arranged the presidential calendar, deciding whom he would see and where and when.

There was nothing in the rules of the game to prevent a press secretary with a strong enough personality from making his advisorship count—but, unlike his colleagues on the staff, he could not concentrate on any one identifiable area. More pertinently, the nursing of the press
Richard E. Neustadt

filled far too many hours for him to spare much time serving as his colleagues' arbiter, even assuming they would have let him get away with it.

In moments of crisis, where activities had to be improvised around the table, Joseph Short—the strongest personality of all Truman's press aides—often intervened, often decisively. But many presidential actions were brewed more calmly, and the way prepared, the decision taken, the phrase made, by those who specialized in such things. Meanwhile the press secretary, busy with the endless detail of his office, turned to a quick review of the course proposed or the speech prepared only at the end of the process.

Each of Truman's press secretaries struck a different balance in working out his personal role amidst these contradictory pulls and pressures. Temperament and experience had considerable effect on the result in every case. Joe Short, for example, himself a much respected former White House correspondent, was a taut, tense, "ulcer-type." His became a top-level voice on general policy within the inner circle; he was sharp-minded, persistent, and passionately loyal. But the qualities that helped him to be effective there contributed to the disaffection of his former colleagues in the press corps. They saw him as impatient, overly protective, and lacking in appreciation of their special need for background information to guide their interpretations. Short closed off, as nearly as might be, all avenues to the staff save through the press office. But having done so, he then tended—as reporters were fond of complaining—to act less like a press-relations expert than like a confidential policy adviser (which, of course, he did become), more concerned with minimizing the momentary harm the press could do than with maximizing the "breaks" that it might give in response to the right timing and conditioning.

But be it said for Short, it can at least be argued that, during the last two years of Truman's term, there was no other realistic choice.

Correspondence Secretary (William Hassett; Beth Short)

President Truman once wrote, "The Correspondence Secretary takes care of Special Day and Special Week Proclamations, wedding anniversaries, etc. He heads off eager beavers who know how to save the world. He sends messages of greeting to all sorts of meetings and organizations. He must be a genius at work handling, intellectually honest and absolutely loyal. . . ." Mr. Truman might have added that this secretary prepared and supervised the use of form acknowledgments to routine letters from the public, composed special acknowledgments to public inquiries or commentaries of any special interest, and otherwise kept an eye on the handling of mail from private persons.

Unlike the president's assistant, the counsel, or the other secretaries,
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the correspondence secretary was rarely perceptibly involved in either policy or operations. Indeed, even routine "greetings" to organizations of major political importance—the CIO, say, or the American Legion—were normally subcontracted as a matter of course and actually written, for the most part, by one or another of Murphy's aides.

Unquestionably, these correspondence duties were vital to the presidential operation. They had to be done and done well. But it was largely by accidents of history and personalities that throughout the Truman administration, these duties rated one of the five top White House staff posts. Substantively, the correspondence job as carried on in Truman's time was of a considerably less critical nature than the work performed by Steelman, Murphy, and the other two secretaries.

The Administrative Assistants to the President

Of the five assistantships that were filled during most of Truman's last year in office, two were in the nature of merit promotions for members of Murphy's staff, David Bell and David Lloyd, who continued their work with little essential change. Both served as general purpose writers. In addition, they made excursions into and followed after a variety of policy issues, depending somewhat on their backgrounds and predilections.

For example, once Bell, a Harvard-trained economist who had come out of the Budget Bureau, had gotten into a number of natural resource problems relating especially to western development and electric power, he retained the "lead" in that area for several years. For four years running he was the White House staff man most concerned with general budget policy, especially on overriding problems of defense, and with the actual drafting of the budget message. Along with Turner, he served both Murphy and Steelman as personal eyes and ears on a variety of economic policy issues.

Lloyd, a lawyer, had been in government since the New Deal days with a break for service as the legislative counsel of Americans for Democratic Action. Like Bell, he was tagged with the lead on a number of ad hoc assignments which, once given, remained his for years. Low income housing was one of them. Certain foreign policy issues, like immigration and aid to refugees, were others. In addition, Lloyd became the staff man chiefly concerned on a continuing basis with the great constitutional controversies over presidential powers, especially in the field of foreign policy, that gained prominence in Truman's second term.

A third assistantship was also in the nature of a merit promotion for Steelman's first assistant, David Stowe. Stowe always remained to some extent in Steelman's orbit without much of an established mission of his
own; sometimes he aided Steelman, sometimes Murphy. He was rarely in business wholly for himself, but acted as a troubleshooter, fixer, even hatchet-man sometimes, on a shifting set of spot assignments.

For example, Stowe actually managed the WRSB [War Reconversion and Stabilization Board] during the period in which Steelman served as its acting chairman. In 1952, Stowe performed the same service during the months Steelman served as acting chief of ODM [Office of Defense Mobilization]. Because of his long Budget Bureau background handling manpower problems during World War II, Stowe got heavily involved in a variety of similar questions during the post-Korean mobilization. For a time he also did a good deal of work on international air-route cases and on a number of issues growing out of the reports of the presidential commissions on migratory labor and on resources policy. Finally, as a carryover from NSRB days, Stowe became the White House man on civil defense matters and on physical security arrangements for the president and his entourage.

In addition to these three administrative assistants, there were two others on entirely different kinds of assignments, each with fixed responsibilities and separate orbits all their own.

One of these, David Niles, handled problems, contacts, and relations with minority groups, performing for Truman in the same individualized and personalized way he had for F.D.R. While Niles formally left the White House staff late in 1951, his long-time assistant, Philleo Nash, carried on until the end, and Niles remained in pretty constant touch, on an informal "consulting" basis.

Another administrative assistant was Donald Dawson, the "personnel man" of the staff. Dawson held the title of liaison officer for personnel management and as such handled the stream of contacts with the Civil Service Commission and the Budget Bureau on a great variety of matters affecting the career service and the generality of federal employees. But he was also responsible, under Connelly's surveillance, for developing and processing candidates for appointive office, handling the staff work on patronage matters, high and low. In addition, he had a rather vaguely defined responsibility for overseeing internal White House personnel matters and space questions as well—the nearest thing to a regular contact point for the executive clerk, the senior White House careerist.

All of Dawson's major duties involved personnel, but that was about all they had in common. And this curious combination of essentially unrelated—though mechanically allied—functions plagued Dawson from first to last. He and his assistant, Martin Friedman, were forever becoming entangled in the very different requirements of their three distinct personnel assignments. It was sometimes claimed that they tried to
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handle patronage matters like professional civil servants and technical civil service matters like professional politicians. And this charge, while wide of the mark, does serve to illustrate the apples-and-oranges nature of their basket of assignments.

Consultant to the President (Sidney Souers)

Admiral Souers, a wartime naval intelligence officer, a Midwestern businessman, and a good friend of President Truman's, had been the first secretary of the National Security Council. He had given the council's staff its stamp as a nonpartisan, neutral, careerist "secretariat."

When James Lay succeeded to the secretaryship, Souers remained on hand several days a week as a consultant to the president. In this capacity he served as a sort of informal father-confessor and guardian for Lay, an elder-statesman kind of personal adviser to the president, and an informal link between them, confidant to both.

In other words, Souers served as a sort of super-secretary of the NSC, not a personal substitution for the secretariat's neutrality, but part of it himself. He did not function as the presidential alter ego on the NSC, or even as the NSC staff channel back to his White House colleagues. Instead, he was a quiet participant in the direct relationship between the president and Lay, close-mouthed with his White House colleagues, concerned neither to represent their interest to Lay, nor Lay's to them.

The gap between the White House staff, as a politically oriented, totally presidential entity, and the neutral secretariat of NSC was never bridged in Truman's time on any systematic basis. Murphy, Bell, and others of this group were successful, on a relatively few occasions, but never intensively or for long. This had very serious consequences for the evolution of the NSC and for its utility as part of the presidential staff machinery. But for one reason or another, the missing link was never forged in Truman's time and it remained for his successor to make the first attempt in the role then carved out for Robert Cutler.

The Military Aides

Only one of the military aides was drawn into policy matters during Truman's later years. Contrary to the popular supposition, this was not General [Harry] Vaughan, the army aide, but rather Admiral Dennison, the naval aide. Dennison's involvement was principally a matter of personal competence, an exceptional, noninstitutional affair.

The naval aide, it is true, had one special advantage over his colleagues. As heir to Admiral Leahy's wartime map room, it was to his office that the copies of top-secret cables from our representatives abroad came. Thus, the naval aide joined with Lay and Souers in the morning
intelligence briefings for the president and in many ad hoc conferences on matters of great urgency in the military and diplomatic fields.

But Dennison's special role involved much more than these sorties into the fringes of foreign policy. On certain other matters, especially in the field of maritime policy and shipping operations, Dennison gradually became the man with the White House lead. Starting as a consulting expert to the other staff, he ended up with the responsibility for staff work in his own right. On long-range shipping legislation, subsidy policy, and the like, the naval aide negotiated directly with the Budget Bureau, the maritime agencies, members of the cabinet, and even certain congressmen—just like any member of the president's civilian staff, bird-dogging a special assignment.

The Executive Clerk (William J. Hopkins)

Traditionally, this is the post of the senior, nonpolitical, civil service careerist in the White House office, the supervisor of office services and custodian of official documents requiring a presidential signature.

On the side of office services, the influence of the executive clerk was always circumscribed to the extent that the interests of presidential appointees became involved. On space matters and most internal personnel questions—including personal services in the White House budget—the clerk's functions were purely ministerial. Moreover, in the case of traditionally autonomous administrative units—the White House files, the switchboard, and the transportation office—Hopkins's "supervision" was a nebulous and delicate affair.

On the documents side, the executive clerk maintained control on the most informal, least obtrusive basis possible. Only once in Truman's time was a signature document lost irretrievably. This record was a miracle of art over science. Somehow the endless stream of papers flowed, and the orders, commissions, letters, and enrolled bills got to the president, were signed, and sent on their way. But the control system, such as it was, remained to the end nothing more than a vest-pocket affair, a matter of memory, handwritten notations, and general good will.

As for the documents not requiring signature—the reports, memoranda, "think" pieces flowing in from staff agencies and cabinet members—if they came by mail or messenger the clerk received them and got them to the president. But from then on it all depended. The president parcelled them out or buried them or mislaid them, as he chose. Hopkins watched and listened. Usually he had a good idea of what had happened, but he was not infallible; and there was never any inclusive written record covering disposal of the nonsignature documents transmitted.
through Hopkins's hands. And, of course, there were still other papers
he never saw at any stage and had no notion of, much less any record.

*Some General Observations on Working Relations
in the White House Office*

President Truman was an exceptionally kindly man, a most consid­
erate, even humble human being in all of his relations with subordinates. It is symptomatic that he was worshipped by his household staff and by
his Secret Service agents as no president in memory before him.

In the White House office, there was always informality and at least
surface friendliness, and generally everyone had a high morale, reflecting
the president's own attitudes and personality.

Truman was not only a considerate superior, he had an abhorrence
of caterwauling, knife-throwing, or in-fighting among his subordinates. His staff and cabinet learned, perforce, that for their own survival it was
essential to keep their quarrels beneath the surface, maintaining at least
the appearance of reasonably good relations with one another.

As far as the staff was concerned, it was inevitable under the cir­
cumstances that there be tension between the special counsel and the
assistant to the president, between the counsel and the appointments
secretary. In Clifford's time, this triangle of hostility was marked and
continuous, barely kept below the surface. Murphy, by temperament,
was less competitive and combative than Clifford. The tension remained,
but in a latent form. Yet there were moments during the last years when
the White House staff seemed close to dissolution into warring camps,
with Murphy—joined by Short, as press secretary—aligned against Con­
nelly, or sometimes Steelman. But war never broke out; disputes were
always kept under cover or patched up. Above all, conflicts among these
senior staff members remained on an individual-to-individual and issue­
by-issue basis. No fixed, continuing alliances were formed on either side. During the later years, the potential splits within the staff never hardened
and rarely came to sharp focus.

It is interesting to note that divisions of responsibility within the
White House were never as clearly felt or acted on as during the period
of sharp tension when Clifford was counsel. In 1947 and 1948, when
power within the staff was relatively polarized and jealously guarded,
staff operations probably were at their most effective. Tension drew lines
clear and sharp, creating a settled framework for daily operations, with
junior staff regularly and informally bridging the staked-out gaps be­
tween their seniors. Later, during Murphy's time, there were always
broad, shifting areas of fuzziness and uncertainty in the respective roles
and relationships assumed by Steelman, Murphy, Connelly, and the ad-
Richard E. Neustadt

ministrative assistants. Less tension bred more diffusion. The ball sometimes became very hard to find, carried on occasion by many—or not at all.

The Careerist Character of the Truman Staff

Almost all the members of the presidential staff had government work histories far antedating their White House service. Take the "big three" of the later period for example.

John Steelman had been commissioner of conciliation in the Labor Department for ten years before the brief venture in private life which ended with his being called to the White House in 1945. Charles Murphy had spent thirteen years in the office of the Senate Legislative Counsel before his appointment early in 1947 as an administrative assistant to the president. Matt Connelly had worked on Capitol Hill since the mid-thirties, where he held a succession of staff investigator posts for congressional committees, leading to his Truman Committee assignment and thence to the White House.

The backgrounds of these men have particular significance in helping to explain their respective points of view and work methods as presidential aides. But there is general significance, too, in the fact that all of them had come to the White House from the surrounding bureaucracy, from one end of Pennsylvania Avenue or the other.

And what was true of these three was emphatically so with the lesser staff. Tubby and Perlmeter, the two assistant press secretaries under Short, came from the press relations offices of State and Internal Revenue, respectively. Joseph Feeny, Connelly's assistant in the last year (there had been two the previous year), had spent the seven years before his 1950 White House appointment as a congressional liaison officer for the navy. Philleo Nash, Niles's assistant, was for several years an OWI race-relations expert before coming to the White House in 1945.

Thus, the members of Truman's staff came typically from elsewhere in the government. But that is not the whole story. For the largest single group of staff aides came not only from the government, but from a single agency, the Bureau of the Budget.

Run down the list: Stowe and Bell, both administrative assistants to the president; Neustadt, Murphy's assistant; Harold Enarson and Russell Andrews, Steelman's aides; Milton Kayle, in Stowe's office; and Ken Hechler, Lloyd's assistant—all seven of these men, a third of the total civilian staff, came out of the Bureau of the Budget, most of them without even a break in service.

This influx from the Bureau of the Budget was the natural result of James Webb's extraordinarily successful effort to make himself and his bureau a useful underpinning for the president and the White House in
those early, frantically uncertain years of the Truman staff's development. During Webb's years, the Budget Bureau's staff resources were made available to—and used by—the White House more freely and informally than ever before. And later, when the bureau as an organization retreated to a more normal, institutional role, there remained that heavy repository of transferred individuals, ex-budgeteers who had become full-fledged White House staffers.

**Staff Access to the President**

Six mornings a week it was Truman's custom to meet for half an hour with the senior members of his staff. During the last three or four years of the administration this group included all the presidentially appointed staff—the assistant, the counsel, the secretaries and administrative assistants to the president—along with the three military aides and the executive clerk.

These staff meetings were not primarily high strategy or policy sessions; they were not so much group discussions as a means whereby each participant could receive and report on assignments, in quick time, and hear something of what his colleagues were doing. The president ordinarily went around the circle, handing out papers or making inquiries and affording each staff member an opportunity to raise any matter he chose.

A great deal of routine business was transacted in this fashion. As far as the military aides were concerned, this was their chief opportunity to settle details about such matters as plans for the presidential plane, the yacht, the Little White House at Key West, and so forth. As far as the civilian staff was concerned, these meetings rarely afforded the time or atmosphere for full dress briefings, discussions, and decisions on major matters—and were rarely used for such—but they did provide a guaranteed daily means for transacting day-to-day business requiring the president's attention. And the staff meetings were useful, too, as a means of glueing together in a flexible, informal way the divergent daily interests and activities of the several individuals concerned.

Apart from these regular meetings, the senior civilians had as much access to the president, day or night, as his outside appointments and their sense of discretion allowed. His door was always open in emergencies, at any hour. While Connelly occasionally delayed his colleagues, he never presumed to deny them access for more than a few hours at a time. And though Connelly's own access was always assured, Murphy, Steelman, and Short managed to see the president almost as often as they might have wished and usually with relatively little delay.

In addition to the staff's access to him, the president had access to
his staff and made considerable use of it. Unlike F.D.R., Truman was physically able to move about the White House at will. Particularly in the mornings between about 8:30 and 9:30, the president often bobbed into an office to discuss something that had occurred to him overnight or to give a decision on a matter that had earlier been left for him to study. Murphy and Short, particularly, were the objects of these excursions, and they, in turn, were habitual visitors to the president’s office during these free moments early in the morning.