DISCUSSION

C. A. NEWLAND (chair): It might be helpful to review the White House staff as it looked toward the end of the Truman administration—its makeup, its recruitment, who the people were, what their functions were.

RICHARD E. NEUSTADT: As I recall, after Governor Harriman and his little staff moved into an Executive Office role and out of the White House per se, the number of full-time people who had something to do with policy was about twenty-two. Then there was Sidney Souers who was a consultant two or three days a week—I forget which—and several more people in such a status. Of the three military aides, Admiral Dennison was certainly in the policy business and not merely a specialized military functionary.

If I recall correctly, the press office had a press secretary and two, maybe three, assistants. Dr. Steelman had a couple of assistants, and one of the administrative assistants, David Stowe, worked with him.

Charlie Murphy had Dave Bell and Dave Lloyd, who had become administrative assistants, working with him, and I think he had two other assistants (of whom I was one). Then on all foreign policy messages and speeches Dean Acheson's personal assistant, Marshall Shulman, was ordinarily associated, so you could call that another hat or something. That makes four or five people around Murphy.

Don Dawson's was a two-man office as I remember. I think one ought to include Bill Hopkins who, though a careerist, performed functions that are now performed by layers of special assistants. Jimmy Lay should certainly be counted as a member of the staff. (Although he was performing a secretarial function, his entire staff was counted as being in the Executive Office as I recall.) Philleo Nash was there from first to last; I can't remember whether you had assistants or not—certainly not many?
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PHILLEO NASH: I was a vacant assistant to a vacancy at that point.

NEUSTADT: By contemporary standards it was a very small staff, but by 1952 it was a larger staff than Mr. Roosevelt's had been, though only by a very moderate amount.

NEWLAND: Let us look at that staff. Were there some factors about this staff that may not be in the records?

KEN HECHLER: It was a very informal staff even though everybody knew precisely what their lines of authority generally were. It was a happy staff and the morale was tremendously high. The reason for this was the personal interest that the president took in each individual, in his family and his personal life, as well as the opportunity, for example, to go down to Key West, Florida, for a work-play period every year. This has not yet been mentioned. It gave the morale of the White House staff a very important lift every year; the president and staff would go down at about Thanksgiving time and stay until nearly Christmas. The staff had an opportunity there to work closely together, as well as to play volleyball, fish, swim, and talk in relaxed circumstances with the president and his family. But in addition to that, on the job there were many factors that enabled us to work together more closely.

The White House mess, I think, was a contributing factor because in addition to the morning staff meeting, at noontime most of us would eat together and trade ideas back and forth as to what we were doing and what problems we were confronting.

One of the earliest things that happened to me when I joined the White House staff late in 1949, was that the president invited us all over to Blair House. He said he was “baching it” that night, that the “Boss” was in Missouri. We had a little staff dinner together and I was just on cloud nine: Here you are, and here is the president of the United States, playing the piano, in the shadow of the portraits of Monroe and Jefferson and Jackson, making you feel that you are part of a momentous time in history. Of all the jobs I have ever had, I have never seen higher morale nor more hard working people nor a group that got more fun out of its work.

DAVID H. STOWE: One of the things that impressed me was the change after the '48 election. The many things we said about the value of the staff really came into full focus during the second four years. The learning period had been accomplished; now Mr. Truman moved out into his program and his administration, and that infused a lot of vigor into the staff, through the staff meetings. We were watching things unfold as he would talk to us.
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I do not want to pass up the opportunity to say that, as important as the staff meeting was, there was one individual who probably played, next to President Truman, the greatest role in coordinating the operation of the staff, and that was Bill Hopkins. Because Bill knew where everything was, he, in his own quiet way, was able to coordinate even those things that did not quite get coordinated in the staff meeting.

There was another interesting change in that a substantial number of new faces now appeared. There were six people who came over from the Bureau of the Budget: Dave Bell, Harold Enarson, Russ Andrews, Dick Neustadt, Milton Kayle, and Ken Hechler. So, added to a number of us who were career types, this marked the formation of a staff with government experience, people who knew the operation of the government and were able to coordinate.

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There was a period of time, certainly during the war under F.D.R., when the Bureau of the Budget became almost the center of the government's domestic operations. After President Truman came in, and particularly when James Webb became director of the budget, the Budget Bureau and the Treasury Department came to work closely together. The cooperation between Jim Webb and Secretary Snyder and their staffs in the entire budget operation became, perhaps of necessity, quite different than it had been during the Roosevelt period. Without knowing, I have the feeling that this was one of the coordinating movements that President Truman, in his own inimitable way, was able to accomplish to get the maximum value out of the Treasury and out of the Bureau of the Budget—two operations which inherently have to work in the same area with the same mind.

I see the second four years as a period of professionalism, generated by the leadership of the president and molded by his concept of cooperation and coordination.

NEWLAND: Dave, you mentioned that about a third of those twenty-two staff people came over from BOB. They came into a situation where there were others, like Matt Connelly and so on. What was the relationship between the people who came from BOB and those who had had long personal service with the president—some even while he was in the Senate.

White House staff volleyball game (Margaret Truman setting up the ball), Key West, Florida, November 25, 1951.
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STOWE: I can only answer for myself. I think all of us know the great value of Matt Connelly. I always found that the staff members who were there before I arrived and those who came after I did never had a moment's difficulty—the group just seemed to blend. I can't give you any particular device which blended it, but maybe others could.

ROGER TUBBY: I was not going to comment on that just yet, but I do want to point to the feeling of respect and affection and loyalty that we all had. I came to the White House from the State Department, and my associate, Irv Perlmeter, came from the Treasury—when Joe Short was press secretary. There were so many little personal things that meant so much, personal awareness of our individual lives, our family lives, that endeared President Truman to us. And I think he was as interested in those of us on the immediate staff as he was in the guards at the front gate or the other people on the White House staff. He was, I think, really just a great human being.

BETH SHORT: May I speak up on that? One of the things I remember best was the time Joe was being sworn in as press secretary. The ceremony was to be early in the morning, at 8 o'clock, and we did not know about it until the night before. I had three small children (two boys and a girl) to get ready, their suits washed, and so forth. One of the boys had two front teeth out at the time—he was nine—and he said, "I won't go. I'm not going to go see the president of the United States with two front teeth out. The rest of you can go, but I won't go."

We did finally get him into the president's office. Suddenly, after we had all spoken to the president, I looked around and he was not there any more and neither was my nine-year-old son. There were people waiting to greet the president, and Chief Justice Vinson was there to do the honors. Just about that time President Truman and Steve walked out from behind those circular curtains in the Oval Office, and the swearing in began.

On the way home I asked Stephen, "What was going on when you and the president disappeared?" He said, "You know, Mother, now I don't mind having those two front teeth out. The president took me behind the curtain to show me that he had a tooth out, and the only difference is, he is going to have his capped today and I have to wait until mine grows in."

There were so many things to make each individual proud and happy to work for President Truman. He has never gotten enough credit for being the first president to appoint a woman to the top staff.

When I got the call from Matt Connelly asking me if I would take Bill Hassett's job as one of the three top secretaries—this one in charge
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of correspondence—I said, "Matt, please tell the president that I feel just as Joe does, that when the president of the United States asks you to do a job, you, of course, do it as a patriotic citizen, but if he is asking me to do this as some kind of an honor or a way to help the Short family finances, I am sorry I cannot do it."

Matt said, "Oh, you know better than that, Beth, the president wouldn't..."

I said, "Well, you go tell the president that that's what I said."

He called me back after a while, and said, "The president said to ask you where do you think he was when you covered him for the Springfield, Missouri, newspaper back in 1930-something, when he was running for the Senate? How do you suppose it was that the only time he asked you to ride on the Independence was when he was going to the Thirty-fifth Division reunion at Springfield? He is a good politician, and he knows that you wrote for the Associated Press and covered Mrs. Roosevelt and the president at various times, and he wants you to know that he wants you to do this job and he wants you to start tomorrow or the next day."

I hardly had a chance to take a breath before Matt added, "The whole top staff is going out for Adlai Stevenson on a whistlestop, and you will be the only one left at the White House, and they are leaving in two days. If you don't come in right away, you'll be the only one left in Washington and you won't even know which door leads where."

NEWLAND: The press office has been referred to by those around the administration as a "homicidal center," a rough operation. It certainly has been that in recent years. Do you care to comment on that, Mr. Tubby?

TUBBY: The pressures were, and are, indeed very great. In fact, three press secretaries, Steve Early, Charlie Ross, and Joe Short, all died—literally—on the job, and Irv Perlmeter, my associate, had a heart attack. But having said this, I would have to note that Jim Hagerty went through eight years afterwards; but maybe the pace was somewhat different under President Truman's successor.

There is an adversary relationship that exists between the president and the press, or between his press secretaries and the press, which is inherent and natural and often quite healthy. With President Truman there was (and this has been referred to earlier by Averell Harriman and others of the cabinet) an openness and a candor in the morning staff meetings which gave all those present a feeling of what the others were up to and what the president was interested in having done. The press secretary's role then was not simply to be a transmission belt from the
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president to the press, merely passing on whatever it was that should be passed on to the press; the job was a two-way street.

President Truman was very anxious to know, not only through us in the press office but through others on the staff, through the cabinet, and through people on the Hill, what the people out in the country were interested in and what they wanted. For our part, we would brief him not only on what had been in the papers or on the radio—TV was very new in those days—but on what some of our friends in the press corps were saying about things.

One of the things that endeared the president to me especially was his candor. You had a feeling that he would, figuratively, pick up his cards, sort them, and share his hand with you and the others of the staff, consulting with you on how it might best be played. The result was that during our own briefings with the press corps, we were fairly confident of where the president stood, and we also knew that he would back us up, if necessary.

In preparing for the president's own press conferences, the press staff would try to guess what questions might be asked and then offer recommended answers and provide background material in each category for each question and answer.

This we usually did on Mondays, coming up with fifty or sixty possible questions. We then referred them to the various departments and asked for recommended responses.

When these came in, we would go over them, maybe check back, and put the material into a black looseleaf notebook for the president. He would take it with him the night before he was to meet the press and go over it. Then on the following morning we would get together, update that material, and check with the staff on whether we ought to recommend some changes.

This system, I think, worked very well; I did pass it on to Jim Hagerty and I think it was used by Eisenhower. I do not know whether it has been used since. But I think that in this way, we avoided the kind of things that came up in the U-2 case or with the Bay of Pigs—when the press staff, both in the White House and in the State Department, were not informed as to what was really going on.

NEWLAND: You noted that, after delivering the briefing material to the president, you met the next morning. Can you elaborate on that?

TUBBY: Yes, usually about half an hour before the press conference itself, the regular staff would meet with the president and go over the recommended responses, and various members would make their own comments.
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In those days, because the White House was being renovated, we held press conferences over in the old State-War-Navy Building next door, in the old Treaty Room. The president was respected and liked by most of the correspondents, but he was neither respected nor liked by most of their publishers. The Democratic party, of course, has always faced a rather hostile press, but the president went into his press conferences as if to battle. I think he relished the challenge. There were times when he would be pressed, and I remember one which was rather embarrassing for me. The president said that he had delivered an ultimatum to Stalin in connection with the Russian troops stationed in Azerbaijan in northwest Iran. I had not heard of the ultimatum having been delivered, and so I got up and whispered to the president, “Are you sure it was an ultimatum?”

He turned to me and then said to the press corps, “Why, Roger is questioning whether it was an ultimatum, but I sent an ultimatum, I sent a very strong message to Stalin.”

Of course, there was Merriman Smith of the UP with his “Thank you, Mr. President,” and the mad dash was on for the phones.

Going down on the elevator I said, “Boss, are you sure it was an ultimatum? That is a pretty strong word—I mean, you do something or else.”

“Why,” he said, “well, you check it out, and if I am not right you set the record right.”

So when I got back I checked very carefully with State and Defense and he had sent a strong message, but not what was normally thought of as an ultimatum. I then put out a statement to indicate the nature of what he had sent.

There were always good relations between the president and Charlie Ross and Joe Short and the rest of us who worked on press. We found over and over again that what the president always wanted to know was whether something was the right thing to do. Even if on occasion we would say, “If you do this, Mr. President, you are bound to get a pretty strong adverse reaction,” his reply always was, “It is right, isn’t it?” And this was certainly the case with the firing of General MacArthur.

I remember going into the Oval Office with the ticker tape from the Associated Press when MacArthur had sent the message to Joe Martin in which he said, in effect, that he felt that Chiang’s troops should be unleashed and that we ought to go to the Yalu and beyond. When I took this in to the president, he was reading General Bradley’s book about the landings in Normandy. I gave it to him, he glanced at it, put it down, and turned back to the Bradley book. I said, “Mr. President, I think this man is not only insubordinate, but he is insolent. He ought to be fired.”
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I was very junior to be giving any opinion about such a matter, but he picked up the ticker and read it again and said, “By God, Roger, I think you are right.”

Of course, he would probably have fired MacArthur shortly anyway. But, just to conclude the story, when that action was taken, Joe Short called the press in at about 1:00 A.M. to give them the news. I got through doing some background briefing at about 3:00 in the morning, and then I decided that rather than go home to Rockville and then turn around and come right back, I would sack out on one of the couches right there in the office. The president was up at about 6 o’clock, as usual. I went into the gym to try to clear the cobwebs out of my brain; and as I was punching a heavy bag I heard a familiar chuckle behind me, and Mr. Truman said, “Belt him a couple for me, Roger.”

By the time of the staff meeting there were bushel baskets of telegrams, overwhelmingly against the president. I remember picking up a bunch of those telegrams and just holding them up, not saying what was in them, and the president said, “See that fireplace over there, Roger? Go put them in there and set a match to them. The American people will come to understand that what I did had to be done. Now, what’s next on the agenda?”

He had made his decision, and he would not fret and fuss over it. He felt he was right, and that was it.

NEWLAND: While we are on this topic of press relations, are there other aspects of it that others would like to bring up?

NASH: It seems to me that somebody ought to lay low that allegation that President Truman spoke from the hip and that he spoke without adequate preparation. Because he spoke emphatically and aggressively and briefly, there were assertions that he was not thinking on his feet. In the areas that I dealt with this was never true at any time. But he certainly could slip one off when he wanted to.

TUBBY: He read the [background] materials very carefully. If he was dissatisfied with a response recommended by one of the departments, he would insist that the secretary or somebody else topside in the department give him a better response.

HECHLER: I am sure we are going to get into the speech-making process a little later, but it should be noted that the press secretary was always in on the final freezing session of a speech, when the president would read it over, and occasionally the press secretary would also make comments as to both phraseology and substance.
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WILLIAM J. HOPKINS: I might mention also that in the material the president signed (such as legislation, Executive Orders, proclamations, messages to Congress), it was always the practice to make sure that the press office knew about it. That protected the president and gave the press office and the president control of these documents until it was time to have them announced or moved forward.

SHORT: I remember when Joe decided that he needed two assistants instead of one, right after the president had appointed him. Joe was the first press secretary who had ever moved across the hall from the press room, where he had covered the White House off and on for twenty years either for the AP or the Baltimore Sun. Joe felt that he simply could not know everything that went on. He wanted someone who was an expert on domestic affairs and someone who was an expert on foreign affairs, so that when the reporters who covered the White House heard an announcement from the president about Indonesia or the United Steel Workers, they would have someone in the press office to whom they could come for background information. That really was his purpose in hiring Roger Tubby, because of his experience at the State Department, and Irv Perimeter, because he had been in the Treasury and with the AP and was very well informed.

NEWLAND: We may want to return to some aspects of the press and press relations, but let us now turn to the rather closely related item of speeches—the background research for them, their role in the decision-making process, etc.

HECHLER: The primary leadership in the speechwriting area, of course, was with the special counsel, Clark Clifford and later Charlie Murphy. The major assistants in that area were Dave Bell, Dave Lloyd, Dick Neustadt, and...

NEUSTADT: George Elsey, for a short period.

HECHLER: Yes, particularly in the earlier period before he joined Governor Harriman in the Mutual Security Agency. I can just talk about this from a worm's-eye view; others here can comment further. The thing that impressed me most about the speech-writing operation was the fact that the president himself was so thirsty for facts. In an age when we talk about substance and style, his emphasis came down heavily on substance, both in the initial instructions given in the staff meetings and in the tremendous amount of background research on facts and figures—the area where I had responsibility.

I was just making a list of some of the studies which I put together,
many of which formed the bases for possible speech themes. I recall, for example, early in 1950 when the Republicans were attacking the Fair Deal as socialism, the president thought it would be a good idea to make a collection of “scare words” or “calamity howlers” that had been spread by various critics of every piece of legislation back to the Sherman Antitrust Act of 1890 and the Interstate Commerce Act of 1887. This resulted in a rather large compilation that took me six weeks to put together; it formed the basis of some of the quotations that were used to ridicule that particular opposition argument.

Don Dawson has mentioned bipartisan appointments. Once when the president was making an address on bipartisanship, he asked that I put together a history of bipartisan foreign policy with particular reference to what his part had been in it. This resulted in a rather fat document which was eventually taken over by Senator [John] Sparkman and published as a Senate document. But the factual, substantive base came from this study the president had asked for. This also helped form the factual basis for some speeches.

Then, after Sen. Joseph McCarthy started ranting, the president asked one day to have someone compile a history of witch-hunting and hysteria. This again was a rather extensive study, starting with the Alien and Sedition Acts and going down through the anti-Masonic movement, the Ku Klux Klan, and post–World War I hysteria. The president used this as the basis of many informal speeches that were done off-the-cuff.

All of us know what a tremendous respect for history President Truman had. Just before General MacArthur was relieved, I got a hurry-up call at about 6 o’clock in the evening: By very early the next morning I was to produce a document on the relations between General McClellan and President Lincoln. I did not have any idea what it was for, but as I began to develop this—and kept the Library of Congress open all night while I was looking—I began to see the tremendous similarity between one Mc and the other Mac and the manner in which they looked at their presidents and commanders in chief. This just served to illustrate the instinct for the jugular and the consciousness of history which President Truman had. His knowledge of history enabled him to put his finger on the essence instead of just viewing history as a stream of dates and events.

‘Unlike the messages to Congress and the major speeches, the whistle-stop speeches on the road were much shorter, much less detailed, and were developed in the form of outlines rather than complete texts. This enabled the president to use them as a springboard when he got on the rear platform, something he did with tremendous facility and great good humor. For instance, there was the time when he said that things had
gotten so rough in the farm country that the grasshoppers were eating the handles off the pitchforks. Now that was not anything the staff could ever have supplied; it was a vintage Trumanism.

Neustadt: On major speeches and messages, a draft—either originating in the White House or coming from a department as a draft—would, after a certain amount of exchange and polishing, become the subject of work around the table. At first only Charlie Murphy’s associates would be involved, along with other people in or near the White House who had something special to contribute. Marshall Shulman, for example, Dean Acheson’s special assistant, joined whenever we were treating foreign affairs. But if the situation was important, as the roundtable procedure continued it would begin to involve senior officials and the president.

I can remember a number of major messages to Congress in the later period with the president coming in and out of our sessions, looking over a penultimate draft, with Averell Harriman there, or with Averell coming in and out and Ted Tannenwald spelling him. I remember situations in which Dean Acheson, who had a very good sense of timing, would come in, take off his coat, sit down, and join the roundtable till the end. This progressive roundtable system served at least two purposes. It focused on policy details in which principals were able informally to exchange views and make recommendations and in which everybody got a chance to gauge the president’s feelings, mood, and attitudes toward the subject at hand. For the junior staff it was the substitute for staff meetings, and this was one of the reasons I wanted to bring it up. There could have been only a very few people on the White House staff who either did not see the president daily, in morning staff meetings, or did not see him two or three times a week in one of these roundtable sessions. This is important because it is so unlike the pattern of subsequent administrations.

Collective drafting, with its policy dimensions and its interchange characteristics, was enormously time consuming, but it could be done—for both major legislative matters and major speeches and addresses—by a staff as small as Charlie Murphy’s because there was a long tradition of using the Executive Office agencies as backup staff: the Bureau of the Budget, especially its Legislative Reference Division and some key examiners; the Council of Economic Advisers, particularly during Leon Keyserling’s period after the first chairman’s inhibitions about use of the staff had disappeared; and Averell Harriman’s group during the time he was special assistant and when he changed formal hats. It was possible for those of us who nominally were in the White House to get help and support of all sorts from people in those agencies. And it was also pos-
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sible for them to get immediate access to reliable information about the president’s views, so the exchange was mutually profitable. A good deal of the secret of the small size of the Truman staff relates to the efficacy with which the Bureau of the Budget, the Council of Economic Advisers, and so forth were able to backstop White House staffers.

This arrangement was reintroduced during Kennedy’s administration, partly by the fortunate accident that Elmer Staats was deputy director of the budget and David Bell was budget director and partly because Ted Sorenson, the new special counsel, was thoroughly brain-washed before the twentieth of January on the importance of these relations. The system was not really effectually carried out during any of the more recent administrations, and this accounts in good part for the great increase in the numbers of people formally called the White House staff.

CHARLES S. MURPHY: I would like to say just one more word about speechwriting, and it is perhaps something of a personal comment. I never had any particular talent for writing speeches, and whenever possible I got the work done by other people; only as a last resort would I do some of it myself.

I do wish to mention two speeches for which the only assistance the president got came from me. One was when Princess Elizabeth came over and presented an overmantel to the White House, and the president had to have something to say in response. And the other one was—you know the Memorial Bridge that goes across the Potomac River to the Lincoln Memorial—there are great big gold-colored horses at the end of the bridge, gifts of the Italian government; and this was another opportunity I had to assist the president.

THEODORE TANNENWALD: I think the record ought to show at this point that Charlie Murphy’s willingness to write was, in fact, the key to how the committee system for writing speeches worked, because in the final analysis that’s what happened on many occasions.

NEWLAND: Let’s move to another series of problems that may illustrate how the staff functioned: intelligence activities. I would like to call on Admiral Dennison to get us started on that. How were intelligence briefings handled regularly—while at the White House, perhaps when on the Missouri, or on the train, etc. How did the material get organized, and how did you get it to the president?

ROBERT L. DENNISON: Shortly after I had reported for duty at the White House, Admiral Leahy left. But before he did, the president sent for the two of us and asked Admiral Leahy to make arrangements so
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that all the information he had been getting from various sources—the Joint Chiefs of Staff, the State Department, the Atomic Energy Commission, and the other sources—would continue to come and would come then to me. The president also told me to take over the intelligence briefings that Admiral Leahy had previously conducted.

I want to make it clear that in no way did I become an adviser to the president. I could not possibly replace Admiral Leahy in that capacity. Of course, the president would occasionally ask my advice, but I was careful not to volunteer it. My function was to give him the information, having used some judgment and discretion in screening out unessential or irrelevant matter, and to avoid indicating in any way what I thought about the matter unless he asked me.

When General Bradley became chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, he came over to see the president and talk about the handling of information from the Joint Chiefs. The president had sent for me so that the three of us could discuss the matter. General Bradley and I were not acquainted—I had met him but I did not know him—and it may be unfair to say that perhaps he felt that since I was wearing a blue suit, I might be biased toward naval interests. He told the president that he would like to undertake the briefings. The president asked us both to go into the Cabinet Room and write out some kind of agreement; when we brought it back, the president said, “Well, this is fine.”

One morning not long after that, the president sent for me and said, “I just read in the newspaper about something that has happened in Korea. Why wasn’t I informed?”

I told him that I did not know anything about it either until I read it and then I reminded him of the agreement we had with General Bradley. The president said, “Oh, yes, but I am sure it won’t happen again.” But of course, it did. General Bradley found that he had so many responsibilities that he just did not have time to get over and adequately brief the president. Furthermore, it was difficult for anybody who was not just outside the door simply to pop in and see the president when there was urgent news. So the president concluded that this arrangement was not working too well and that we should go back to the previous briefing practice. That was fine with General Bradley and fine with me. There were, of course, others briefing the president. Sidney Souers and Jimmy Lay used to brief him; they were there with me many, many times, or I was there with them.

When I first knew him, the president wanted some way to coordinate the presentation of intelligence. Just after the war, I was political and military adviser to Forrestal, and he and Patterson and Byrnes called themselves a committee of three. I attended the meetings with Forrestal,
Howard Peterson was with Patterson, and Doc Mathews was with Byrnes, but we were not to take any notes. Before this system went into effect, where each principal had somebody sitting with him, I would get calls from the State Department or the War Department asking why the navy had not done something that I had never heard of nor had anybody else in the navy. Forrestal would have made some promise and then forgotten to tell anybody.

So we decided, Matthews, Peterson, and I, to agree after the meeting on what the three principals had said; and then we would go back and brief our respective departments on the sense of the meetings and boil it down into something understandable.

These meetings, of course, ceased after the National Security Council was set up.

NEWLAND: Governor Harriman, you earlier referred to your stint as a special assistant to President Truman for foreign affairs, and you observed that there were some who said you were a precursor of Henry Kissinger's. You disagreed. Why?

W. AVERELL HARRIMAN: I will be glad to elaborate. I think you will agree, Admiral Dennison, that the National Security Council really was not very important under Truman. It had been established, with Admiral Souers as secretary, but it never had the deliberative role that it later played when Robert Cutler was in charge under Eisenhower nor did it play a major role in policy decisions.

One of the problems was the conflict between Secretary of State Acheson and Secretary of Defense Johnson. Johnson was attacking Acheson because of his position in the Alger Hiss case, and the president asked me to do what I could to support Dean. I soon found that it was quite impossible to get any cooperation as long as Louis Johnson was in the Defense Department. After the Inchon landing he was asked to resign, and General Marshall took his place. It was almost necessary to have a man of General Marshall's standing to enlist the support of the people during the Korean War.

I tried my best to bring the cabinet together prior to their reaching decisions. I had a very small staff, headed by Theodore Tannenwald. We had very capable men. I had a representative on each one of the departmental committees that had anything to do with national security, war production, or international problems. I tried to get to know what the president wanted to have happen, and I used these men, who were well briefed, to try to get the staff-level interdepartmental committees to make these recommendations. I think we were quite successful in many cases in getting the interdepartmental committees to make the
recommendations the president wanted. That was a useful function, and it meant that the president did not have to intercede between cabinet members. It never occurred to me to do what Kissinger did—to get between the president and the members of the cabinet. I tried to make it possible for meetings between the president and the secretary, whoever he might be, to be as fruitful as possible, and to put the president in a position to deal with the problems that came before them. I think in that effort we were reasonably successful.

George Elsey was in my group, Lincoln Gordon, General Roberts for defense matters, Charlie Collingwood for public relations, and Sam Berger in intelligence and labor matters. Each was an extraordinarily effective individual, and in an interdepartmental meeting, each one knew more about his subject than almost anyone present.

TANNENWALD: I would like to make two points that are important in terms of understanding how this working arrangement operated. The first point is a philosophical one: it worked well precisely because Governor Harriman recognized that Dean Acheson as secretary of state had a relationship with the president (and the secretary of defense in the same way). The governor did not try to interpose himself between the cabinet members and the president. This philosophy was imparted to the governor's staff, so that when we went to these interdepartmental meetings, we pushed the departments to do what they were supposed to do and did not take over for them.

The second was a highly personalized element that I do not think can be overlooked. This system worked, particularly after Secretary Johnson left the scene, because Mr. Harriman was—and had been for many years—very close to Acheson, who was the secretary of state, and also enjoyed very good relations with General Marshall. Beyond that, Mr. Harriman had almost the same kind of close relations with the deputy secretary of defense, Mr. Lovett, that he had with Mr. Acheson. It is the personal link that counts: No matter how you set up these structures, they work only in terms of the human beings who occupy the key positions. During this period, the three men—Lovett, Acheson, and Harriman—were very close to each other, knew how each other's mind worked, and had great respect for each other.

As a footnote, one of the most significant things is that during the period that he was White House special assistant, either Governor Harriman or a representative of his always attended the daily staff meeting held by the secretary of state.

HARRIMAN: I would like to add a word to Admiral Dennison's comments on Admiral Leahy. Admiral Leahy was the chief of staff.
of the president of the United States in his capacity as the commander in chief of the armed forces. General Marshall recommended that to President Roosevelt—I know because he told me so. General Marshall was impressed by the fact that Churchill had General "Pug" Ismay as his personal chief of staff and he could see the value of that arrangement. But he said to me, "I am an army man; therefore, I have got to recommend a naval officer. Who do you think would be the best?" Together, we went over the list and the obvious person was Leahy. But it should be made quite clear that Leahy was the chief of staff to the president as commander in chief, and that continued during the Truman period.

NEWLAND: Admiral Dennison, you noted that President Truman carefully distinguished between his role as commander in chief and his other roles. Could you comment further on that?

DENNISON: President Truman clearly saw himself in distinct and different roles: the president of all the people; the commander in chief of the armed forces; the leader of the Democratic party. The amazing thing to me was his ability in his actions and decisions to distinguish very sharply between these three roles. I never saw an occasion when he took an action or made a decision where I could not identify the role in which he saw himself. Even in minor things: I have a number of inscriptions—he signed himself "Your Commander in Chief" when he was speaking to me as a military person and his aide (or former aide), but without that title on other occasions and in other contexts.

TANNENWALD: I would like to recite a true story, which some of you have heard me tell and others have participated in; it ties in with the MacArthur episode, with the speech-writing system, and with the comment Admiral Dennison just made about the roles that the president played. During the preparation of what turned out to be the 1:00 A.M. press release on the firing of General MacArthur, I tried unsuccessfully to persuade Charlie Murphy and the others that the statement should contain a reference to the fact that the president was doing this on the unanimous consent of his principal military and civilian advisers. We met in the Cabinet Room at 10 o'clock that night to go through the statement with the president (under the system that has already been described); just as Mr. Truman was about to hand the statement to Joe Short to be released, he followed his practice of asking whether there were any other comments. The rule of the house was that, even if you were the lowest man on the totem pole, you still were entitled to speak up, and so I took advantage of the opportunity and made my point. I will never forget how he looked at me and said, "Son, not tonight.
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Tonight I am taking this decision on my own responsibility as president of the United States, and I want nobody to think I am sharing it with anybody else. This [consent of the advisers] will come out in forty-eight or seventy-two hours, but tonight it is my decision, and mine alone.” The episode taught me what I already knew, but it brought it home more clearly: This man knew what it meant to be president of the United States.

NEWLAND: To move to another topic which some have suggested might help us understand President Truman’s administration better, let us look at his consciousness of history and his consciousness of administration, particularly with respect to the transition to the Eisenhower administration.

HECHLER: Very briefly, on the morning after the 1952 Jefferson-Jackson Day dinner in Washington when President Truman announced that he was not going to run again, during a session in the Cabinet Room on some other matter, the president remarked on the terrible lack of preparation or briefings he had had when he took over from President Roosevelt in April 1945. Mr. Truman expressed his absolute determination that this would not happen again, regardless of who was elected president in 1952. So as early as March 1952, there was the determination that whoever was president, whether a Democrat or a Republican, there must be a smooth transition which was thoroughly planned. This, of course, grew out of President Truman’s deep consciousness of history.

TUBBY: In the field of press relations, Jim Hagerty came in and H.S.T. told us all to be very detailed in describing how we prepared for press conferences, how we handled the press briefings other than the president’s own. And this we did. I think in these briefings with the Eisenhower staff all of us contributed wholeheartedly, without any reservations at all, and I think this was a very good system.

JOHN W. SNYDER: One point ought to be brought up: even before the campaign had actually started, President Truman invited Eisenhower to come over to the White House for a general discussion, but the general, for his own reasons, declined.

ROGER W. JONES: Actually the concept of a smooth transition antedated the 1952 election by four years. Even though at least some of us in the Bureau of the Budget did not believe—and certainly the president did not believe—that there was going to be another president in January 1949, he gave us very explicit instructions to find out what it was that Dewey was talking about and what kind of positions the Republican party might take. This was a fairly casual kind of an operation, but he
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did start worrying about the transition as far back as 1948 and then formalized it in 1952.

ELMER B. STAATS: President Truman was fully aware of the conversations that were taking place between the Bureau of the Budget and Dewey’s people in 1948. He had sanctioned the procedure and urged that we cooperate. Then in 1952, the day after the election, Fred Lawton and I went to see President Truman and told him how important we thought it was to have someone work with us in developing the new budget. He called President-elect Eisenhower immediately, and eight days later Joe Dodge was on the scene. Our instructions from President Truman were to give Dodge every bit of information bearing on the budget and to treat him just as if he were part of the present administration.

JONES: And Dodge never took advantage of this. He took no action that could possibly be considered a violation of the confidence that had been placed in him.

STAATS: This procedure played a tremendous part also in the stability of the Bureau of the Budget personnel, I might add. Because of the confidence built up by the virtue of the trust President Truman placed in the incoming budget director, by the time Dodge was ready to take over he was prepared to keep all of the bureau’s staff without any change at all.

SNYDER: President Truman set up a committee of Secretary Lovett, Governor Harriman, Secretary Acheson, and myself and then invited President-elect Eisenhower to the White House again. This time he came, and we had a session around the cabinet table and exchanged views of what was likely to happen—what should be checked on—with his prospective appointees for those various offices (Defense, State, Treasury, and so forth). As we walked out, the president said to the four of us, “There is one thing definite, I want you to cooperate to the fullest with these people and see to it that they know the problems that are before each of your departments.”

SHORT: In my area, the transition operation was very limited. Because I had so recently learned the job myself, mostly from Bill Hopkins and from Bill Hassett (who was retired but had come down to fill me in), I was really prepared to help whoever was going to handle the Eisenhower correspondence. I was all set to explain how we handled the roughly fifteen thousand letters a week that came to the president. Mr. Truman did not permit the use of an “auto-pen”; he personally signed
the letters to personal friends and those papers which he was required by law to sign himself. Otherwise I wrote or approved all letters and signed “Beth C. Short, Secretary to the President.” I did try to give our correspondents the feeling that the letters from the White House expressed President Truman’s feelings. I studied his style and tried to write as he did, concisely and clearly. I thought all this was important and I was prepared to explain it.

One day three people came into the office—Roger Steffan, who was the incoming administration’s transition specialist, Sherman Adams, and Arthur Vandenberg, Jr., who was the only one I knew. I spoke to him, he introduced me to the other two, and Sherman Adams said, “Mrs. Short, can you tell me where that door goes, right there by your desk?”

I was in Bill Hassett’s old office which was about the nicest one in the White House, next to the president’s. And I said, “I don’t know, Mr. Adams, I have never used it.”

He said, “Is it locked?”

And I said, “I don’t know, I have never tried it.”

“Do you mind if I try it?” He walked back and tried the door. It was open on my side, and then there was a little passage and another door which was locked. He said, “That’s all I need, Mrs. Short, thank you very much.” And that was all.

**NASH:** I gave a briefing and nobody came. I followed instructions to the letter. I had a briefing book and a status book, and I waited and waited and waited. Afterwards I found out that when they looked at the organization chart, Sherman Adams saw our operation and said, “What do they do?” Somebody told them, and he said, “Oh, political, we don’t need that. We are going to treat everybody alike.”

**SHORT:** I have a story that is secondhand; John Steelman told this to a friend of mine and maybe some of the rest of you have heard of it and can corroborate it. When they [the Eisenhower transition team] came to see Steelman, they asked him what his people did; he said, “Well, you know, they would study up on this subject and then go in and tell the president about it. The president tells us that he wants us to know about these matters, and I have somebody work on it, and they tell him.” According to my informant, Sherman Adams looked at John Steelman and said, “You don’t mean you let all those people go in to see the president on all those little things?”

Steelman said, “Yes, we do.”

Sherman Adams is supposed to have said, “But there aren’t more than four or five times a year when you need to bother the president.”
SNYDER: At the Treasury, we set up a suite of offices for George Humphrey, who was to come in as secretary. I called him up and asked him to come and see me and the offices we had set up. He immediately filled them with his prospective appointees; we worked with them for two months very assiduously, going over all the pressing matters—financial and economic problems, taxes, and all that sort of thing. We had really no trouble in the Treasury transition. We even went down and counted the gold to be sure that it was all down there.

HARRIMAN: The same was true in our transition in Mutual Security to Mr. Stassen.

TANNENWALD: We spent hours with Mr. Stassen.

HARRIMAN: He had all our people come in and see him, and the reward was that everybody got fired.

TANNENWALD: I stayed for three months.

HARRIMAN: If you were not fired, you were the only one.

CHARLES F. BRANNAN: I do not think this will add a great deal to history, but Secretary Benson decided that he did not want to come to the Department of Agriculture to be briefed. But the press kept pushing him, so finally he did come with a retinue of reporters and photographers behind him. He came into my office and, as I recall, asked three questions. The first one was what was my secretary's salary; the second was how much salary did Mr. [Wesley] McCune [Brannan's executive assistant] get; and the third one was did I think it was proper for him to take his kids to church in the official automobile? The press kept insisting that we have a picture taken together but he refused and left.

HOPKINS: This matter of the outgoing administration expecting the new people to come in and see them to find out how things are done—I think in each administration that has been expected, but it never happens. You sit there and wait for the phone to ring, and it never does. The incoming administration is coming off a winning election; they feel they know the answers and that they can do it better than the people who have been there. That is traditional, and it is not unique to President Truman's changeover.

Of course, when he came in under the unfortunate circumstances of President Roosevelt's death, it was a case of "the king is dead, long live the king." In a matter of twenty-four hours, all the desks were wiped clean and everything was boxed up in huge wooden cases that had been borrowed from the Treasury Department—the kind in which paper
money is received—and shipped off either to the Hyde Park Library or temporarily to the National Archives. Within forty-eight hours we were working with the new administration and the papers of the outgoing group were gone.

There is some question of whether the old concept of the outgoing president having possession of his papers is a great drawback to the incoming group. I have never felt that it was, because most of these documents originate in one of the departments and agencies, and the case file can be rebuilt. That was the situation when President Truman came in. There were some instances in which we had to go to the Roosevelt Library at Hyde Park or the National Archives to get papers, but very few. It was not any great problem.

In 1952 President Truman wanted to make sure that there was a proper changeover, but even at that he was very supportive of his staff. He named Dr. Steelman, as I recall, to be the liaison with the incoming group. Roger Steffan had been chosen as sort of a housekeeper for the new administration and arrived as a representative of Governor Adams several weeks before the changeover. He was moving around the office making inquiries and giving advice and even orders which, in a few instances, got back to President Truman.

One day the president happened to meet Mr. Steffan out at the doorkeeper’s desk and walked up to him and said, “I hear you have been pushing some of my people around. I don’t like it,” and walked off.

Things changed a little bit after that; it was a little smoother so far as we were concerned.

HECHLER: I think one of the points, aside from the papers, is that President Roosevelt never fully briefed Vice-president Truman on the problems of the presidency. And this is what President Truman determined should not happen to his successor, be he a Republican or a Democrat.

NEWLAND: Would anyone care to comment on the relationship between President Truman and President Hoover and on the importance of the Hoover Commission’s report?

SNYDER: Shortly after the war was declared over, President Truman sent an agent to take a careful look at the conditions in Europe, particularly the food conditions. That was Mr. [Will] Clayton. He made a most thorough and valuable survey and came back saying that something would have to be done and done quickly.

Several of us who had known Mr. Hoover recommended that Mr. Truman invite him in and talk to him about it. He did, and ex-President
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Hoover came in to see him. They established an almost immediate rapport, and President Truman invited him to go over and serve as food administrator, a job similar to what he did after World War I.

HOPKINS: That was the first time President Hoover had been back in the White House since he left on March 4, 1933.

Snyder: Mr. Hoover told me later that that added ten years to his life; it made him feel like he had a place of importance again.

STAATS: We heard President Truman say many times what great respect he had for Hoover's work as war food administrator. He also felt that Hoover was a victim of circumstances in the Great Depression, and he had some feeling that a lot of things that happened were not Hoover's fault at all. The payoff of all of this was that during the time these various reorganization plans were before Congress, whenever we ran into trouble on the Republican side of the aisle, Mr. Hoover was there to organize the effort to get the votes. Without that kind of relationship much of what was accomplished would not have happened.

STOWE: There were two later occasions which brought this very forcefully to my mind. One was when many of us were trying to raise some money for the Truman Library—the president was really doing all the work, we just sort of went along. But we were having some problems in California, and at a session we had at the Waldorf in New York, somebody suggested that it might help if we could persuade President Hoover to become the honorary chairman in California.

A few minutes later the president got up, walked out, and was gone for some ten or fifteen minutes. When he came back he had a little grin on his face. Somebody asked him where he had been and he said, "Well, I have been downstairs to see President Hoover, and he is going to serve as chairman of my committee out in California."

The second time was during the 1960 Kennedy campaign when President Truman and I spent many evenings alone for some six or seven weeks as we traveled around the country in everything from a little four-seater plane to a big jet. I remember on at least two occasions that he recalled with great warmth his feelings for President Hoover, his indebtedness to him for the work he did after the war, and most importantly, the work he did on the Hoover Commission and the support he gave to the many Truman reorganization plans that were passed by the Congress.

Jones: Let me add one small vignette on the other side. One day in May after President Eisenhower was inaugurated, President Hoover did us the great honor of coming down to the White House mess and
sitting at the big table for lunch. There were six of us at the table, I will mention no names except my own, but two disparaging remarks were made about President Truman. President Hoover pushed back his chair and said, “That’s enough!” That ended that conversation right then and there.

HARRIMAN: We have not emphasized enough that President Truman was one of the best read men in American history, and particularly on the presidency, and that he had an enormous respect for the presidency. Part of the reason why he did this for Mr. Hoover was because Hoover had been president of the United States. Mr. Truman was repaid by being treated abominably by President Eisenhower, which I need not go into at this time.

MURPHY: I probably ought to say something about President Hoover. In 1948 President Hoover was still a natural target for people who took a narrow, partisan political view of things. The campaign was important to some of us, and as we worked on speeches for President Truman, we repeatedly put in things about President Hoover that were not altogether complimentary. They were not mean and vicious, but they were not complimentary. President Truman regularly took them out. Only once did I get one in that stuck.

In North Carolina, where I grew up during the depression, people whose automobiles broke down and would no longer run would put shafts on the front of them and hitch mules to them. People called them “Hoovercarts.” I started talking about “Hoovercarts” in the 1948 campaign, and everybody said they had never heard of them. President Truman was going to make a speech at the North Carolina State Fair that fall, and I put in a reference to “Hoovercarts”; he used it, and I must say, it just went over great.

NEWLAND: Could I come back to the issue we were on at the beginning of this discussion: What was the working pace in the White House during this period? You were talking about daily staff meetings at around 9 or 9:30, six days a week—what were the hours? I can remember another administration when the hours were early morning til late at night, seven days a week—what was it like under Mr. Truman?

DENNISON: I told the president once that he was the most difficult man I had ever worked for or ever could imagine working for. He asked “What do you mean?” I said, “I have been with you when I know you have had tremendous concerns and worries on your mind. But you never show it. We are not perfect, I know damn well I am not, but you never change your attitude, you are always cheerful and understanding, patient,
kind, and it is really difficult to work for you because I know I am not that good.”

He just said, “Don’t worry about it. If you do anything wrong, I will let you know.”

Neustadt: I am sure everybody worked hard, and the hours were long. For the staff that revolved around Charlie Murphy there was a certain periodicity about it: When we were involved with a message or speech, or getting ready for one, or cleaning up after one, it was just continuous—you barely got home to sleep. Then there would be a breather of, maybe, a day or two, which did not coincide with weekends. I do not know whether any others of the staff managed more regularity. It does not seem to me that we had very much, and you could tell the results in terms of the families—wives and small children suffered. But I do not think that is peculiar; it is the general situation around the White House.

Murphy: I agree with most of what Dick said, but I do not remember the breathers.

Neustadt: Charlie was the head of the unit, so he got no breathers. The rest of us—because of Charlie—sometimes had it easier.

Tannenwald: As one of those who had to divide his time, I got no breathers. If you had a regular job in one of the other agencies, you frequently were coopted to work on speeches or messages, but the other job still had to get done.

Murphy: We had a limousine and along about 11 or 12 o’clock at night, we would load everybody in the car and the driver would start taking us home. When we passed each fellow’s house, we would wake him up and let him out, and then we all got back in the morning.

But we did have a lot of fun. You could hear Dick Neustadt laughing across the hall, and then the rest of us laughed too.

Tubby: I think it was a lot of fun, even with an early riser for a boss. Sometimes, when I first started out there, he occasionally would call up at 6:00 or 6:15 A.M. and say, “Roger, what’s this story in the New York Times, what is this all about, where did this come from?” When I first started out I would be a bit groggy, but then my wife and I changed the location of the phone so that she would answer first and nudge me with her elbow and get me kind of alert.

Of course, on the press side, we would often get calls all through the night from correspondents whose papers were going to bed in Shanghai or Tokyo or other far-away places. But I think all of us agreed
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that he was such a marvelous guy to work for, and it was such a marvelous atmosphere to be in, that we did not mind it at all. But, like Dick, I think it was tough on the wives and children.

HOPKINS: President Truman was so orderly in his habits that it made everything much easier than in other administrations.

HECHLER: It was a beautiful, wonderful experience, working hard along with highly competent people. You really had a sense of history about it, too, at the end of every day, working for a great president of the United States.