The Truman White House
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When the President's Committee on Administrative Management proclaimed in 1937 that "our president needs help," it recommended that all staff functions normally associated with top-level management be grouped in one organizational structure to be known as the Executive Office of the President. At first congressional opposition sharply curtailed this plan, but World War II made necessary a number of administrative arrangements which were placed under the broad umbrella of the Executive Office concept. During President Truman's administration, Congress created two major units to serve the president in a staff capacity, the Council of Economic Advisers and the National Security Council. In addition, of course, the Bureau of the Budget continued in its important role within the Executive Office, and as emergency agencies were created during the Korean War, they were placed in the Executive Office.

In the fourth session of the conference, the focus of attention was the Executive Office and its several units. The view from the Bureau of the Budget was represented by Elmer B. Staats and Roger W. Jones, both men with long and distinguished careers in public service.

Since 1966 Elmer Staats has served as the comptroller general of the United States. Prior to that, except for four years (1954–58) spent as executive officer of the Operations Coordinating Board of the National Security Council, he had been in the Bureau of the Budget since 1939, where his duties included service as chief of the War Agencies Section (1943–47), assistant director for legislative reference (1947–49), executive assistant director (1949–50) and deputy director (1950–54, 1958–66).

Roger W. Jones was Staats's deputy and, later, successor in the Legislative Reference Division of the Bureau of the Budget. He served as chairman of the U.S. Civil Service Commission (1959–61) and deputy undersecretary of state for administration (1961–62) before returning to BOB as special assistant to the director. From 1968 to 1971 he was assistant director of the Office of Management and Budget and continued as a
consultant to OMB until 1975. His prepared statement addresses itself primarily to the roles of the president and of the BOB in the legislative process.

Leon H. Keyserling, one of the three initial appointees to the Council of Economic Advisers and the council's chairman from 1949 to 1953, provides a panoramic view of the council's role and functioning during the Truman administration, including an assessment of President Truman's way of using the council. Since 1953, Mr. Keyserling has been a consulting economist and attorney. He is also the founder and president of the Conference on Economic Progress.

Walter S. Salant, after serving as an economist with several government agencies, joined the staff of the newly formed Council of Economic Advisers in 1946. He remained in this position until 1952, when he became a special consultant to the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO). From 1954 to 1976, he was a senior fellow of the Brookings Institution. Mr. Salant supplies two episodes which illustrate some of the problems of the White House organization under President Truman.

Theodore Tannenwald, in the framework of a broader discussion, also provides an episode illustrative of Mr. Truman's way of doing things. He also discusses the speech-writing procedure, the creation of the Mutual Security Administration, and the presidential transition in 1952–53. Mr. Tannenwald served as counsel to Averell Harriman, special assistant to the president, (1950–51) and as assistant director of the Mutual Security Administration (1951–53). He was appointed a judge of the United States Tax Court in 1965 and reappointed to a full fifteen-year term in 1974.

The functioning of the National Security Council in relation to the president as described by James E. Lay, Jr., who served first as assistant executive secretary of the NSC (1947–50) and then as its executive secretary (1950–61). Thereafter, Mr. Lay was deputy assistant to the director of the Central Intelligence Agency (1961–64) and executive secretary of the Central Intelligence Board (1962–71).
President Truman had very little formal administrative machinery other than the Budget Bureau at the time he came into office. He had the residue of the Office of War Mobilization which former Justice Byrnes previously headed; by this time it was headed by Judge Vinson, and subsequently was run by Dr. John Steelman, who previously had been concerned primarily with labor matters. So the president had two principal arms—one, the Budget Bureau, and the other, the Office of the War Mobilization and Reconversion. Very shortly after he became president, OWMR was terminated, partly to symbolize the emphasis upon a peace-time economy.

Obviously, the Bureau of the Budget was not the proper agency to carry on programs and policies of a highly political character. Dr. Steelman became the assistant to the president. The Budget Bureau was asked to draw up a statement of the functions of the new assistant to the president, and in visiting with Dr. Steelman about the draft which we had prepared, we had labeled it “special assistant to the president.” He made the point very strongly that he thought this concept inadequate. I asked him what he had in mind; he said he thought that there had to be developed something closer to a chief of staff or chief assistant. He changed the draft to “the assistant to the president” and subsequently obtained President Truman’s approval for that change. It turned out to be really quite a significant change. One of the reasons is that it formed the basis for Dr. Steelman’s view that this title gave him a charter as the chief of the White House staff (though it is clear that he never really functioned as such). Furthermore, it was important because this title was carried over after the Truman administration into the Eisenhower administration, and as the assistant, Sherman Adams clearly became the chief of staff.

At the end of the Truman administration the president had in the Executive Office the Bureau of the Budget, the Council of Economic
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Advisers, the National Security Council, and the National Security Resources Board. But there was another significant development which I think should be discussed with respect to the presidential staff, and that is the Korean War. Beginning in June 1950, the outbreak of the Korean War, one of the things that became clear very quickly was the fact that the president still did not have the machinery in his own office that could coordinate the mobilization effort we were making—particularly since we did not know with any certainty whether that effort would have to be accelerated. No one could be sure if controls would have to be developed in such a way as to enable us to move quickly on to much more elaborate and comprehensive controls. It became obvious that the National Security Resources Board, a multi-headed, cumbersome agency, was not adequate for this purpose. At the time, Stuart Symington (formerly secretary of the air force and later a senator from Missouri, who had been head of the Reconstruction Finance Corporation) was chairman of the Resources Planning Board. He argued strongly that the National Security Resources Board could perform this function. He took this issue to the president several times, including one very warm discussion in a cabinet meeting, but the president’s decision was to establish under his wartime powers a new agency headed by Charles Wilson, who had been the chief executive of General Electric. Wilson subsequently appointed Gen. Lucius Clay as his deputy, bringing him back from Germany for this purpose. The machinery developed under Wilson became the center of coordination and planning in the Executive Office for the Korean War period. This staff agency subsequently was merged into an Office of Civil and Defense Mobilization during the Eisenhower period, representing a combination of the residue of the NSRB and the Office of Defense Mobilization (which had been headed by Wilson); the civil defense function was added later in 1958.

Aside from the question of what formal machinery was established during the Korean period, the thing that impressed me most about the staff work under President Truman was the fact that it operated so informally. The leadership centered around the special counsel to the president, Clark Clifford, a fact which was most significant. I suppose the issue of whether the assistant to the president became chief of staff, or whether the special counsel to the president was chief of staff was never faced directly. The two offices functioned in different areas, and in fact, there was no particular need to resolve this point. Clark Clifford tended to exert more and more influence, it seemed to me, partly because he was the one the president looked to either to write his speeches or to organize the speech-writing. Clifford handled a great deal of the legislative liaison work with the Congress. He reviewed draft legislation.
which had to be seen by the president and looked over enrolled bills as they came to the president for action. After being reviewed by the Bureau of the Budget, the bills came through his office on the way to the president. After Clifford left, he was succeeded by Charles Murphy who had been his assistant and who tended to follow pretty much the same work pattern.

President Truman's staff meetings brought his staff around the president's table. He recognized that his staff had grown and saw the need for some discussion of the activities of each principal staff member to review the status of his work, and so on.

Perhaps it would be of some interest to note that during this period, growing out of the National Security Act of 1947, Adm. Sidney Souers was appointed as the executive secretary of the National Security Council. The president had known Admiral Souers for a good many years. Souers's job was pretty clearly outlined by the statute; as a practical matter, of course, the title of executive secretary meant whatever the president wanted it to mean. In fact, President Truman used Admiral Souers primarily as his liaison with the intelligence community. He used to refer to Souers as his intelligence man and, frequently, as his "cloak-and-dagger" man. President Truman never saw the National Security Council as a major deliberative body. In dealing with various problems, he preferred to operate much more informally; unlike President Eisenhower, he was not used to sitting down with a deliberating body and systematically going around the table for debate and statements of position.

Toward the end of President Truman's administration disagreement developed over the level of our foreign aid effort, particularly for the budget year 1953-54. This was the budget President Truman had to prepare but which would be carried out by the next administration. There was disagreement not only over the question of need—the level of effort—but also over the kind of foreign policy posture President Truman should leave in this very controversial area. One suggestion was that this matter be brought before the National Security Council for action. After the matter had been reviewed in the Bureau of the Budget, President Truman ended up by having a meeting in the cabinet room. Present were Averell Harriman, director for mutual security; Dean Acheson, the secretary of state; Robert Lovett, the secretary of defense; the three secretaries of the armed services; the Joint Chiefs of Staff, the director of the Bureau of the Budget, with some of his staff; and various representatives of the White House staff. On this particular occasion, the president went out of his way to go around the table asking for the views of all those present. I had never seen him do this before, but in this particular case he made a very special point of asking every principal
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there what his view was and approximately what level of foreign aid effort he would recommend. This, of course, was after the substantive issue had been laid out on the table, along with the pros and cons and differences in the program at different funding levels. President Truman made his decision before he left the room. This was the first time I had seen him take this kind of action in such a formal way.