

White House Interview Program

DATE: June 8, 2000

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[Disc 1 of 1]

JNC: —But to make sure that not only do they have an overview of how it all works, but most of the Presidential appointees coming out of it said that one of the greatest values for them was meeting the senior staff of the White House, and seeing how we were organized and sort of where to go when they had particular issues or questions, et cetera. But we gave them the ethics piece, *How to Work with Career Employees*, that they're not the enemy. You sort of help set policy and these are your folks who are going to help implement it. And [we] tried to set the tone, from day one, and it was mandatory attendance.

MK: Was there a session for White House staff?

JNC: No. Ours was so much more informal. For those of us who started on the transition, which I did, you had a sense of that, early on. I remember very distinctly our first day being sworn in, Mr. [George] Bush was very clear on what his parameters were, what his guidelines were. He had a lot of the family members for the senior staff there for the swearing in and he said, "I want to tell you from the outset this is going to be really tough on you, the families. It's long hours. The pay is not terrific. But what we're doing is really important and thank you for supporting these people, because it's not going to be easy, always pleasant, and all those good things. You're not going to see them very much, at least from the outset, from the beginning." So I think each department head helped with that. We got a thorough briefing, obviously, from the counsel's office, and I can't remember but I think that probably OGE [Office of Government Ethics] gave us some sort of a briefing, too, to make sure we knew what the rules were. But it wasn't as formal.

MK: Now this [was] in April. Was that something that was earlier?

JNC: I can't remember if that was the first.

MK: During the transition?

JNC: No. This was once people were identified and they were either early into their jobs or they were in the confirmation process.

MK: I see. This one was, yes.

JNC: And then we just continued it through.

MK: I see. So you'd do them when new people would come in? How often did you do the sessions?

JNC: Early on, probably every couple months.

MK: How many people would come—this was for—

JNC: This was for presidential [appointees]. I think we could accommodate maybe twenty-five at a time. We held those sessions in the EOB [Executive Office Building] typically over in Richard Nixon's hideaway office. I now can't remember the name of that room but that's what it was.

MK: That's not the Indian Treaty Room, is it?

JNC: No. It is a small kind of conference room.

MK: I remember, in the [Jimmy] Carter administration, Jerry Rafshoon had that office.

JNC: It's just across West Exec[utive Avenue], close to the steps going up to the EOB, and that was Nixon's "hideaway" office where they actually did the taping.

MK: Right. But those ceilings are so high that the quality of the tape wasn't very good. I notice here, on congressional relations and on media relations, it's a panel. Are these the people here, seminar participants, who would have been involved in that?

JNC: On some of them, we did panels. We might have gotten the head of the office. We might have gotten someone who handled the House side, the Senate side.

MK: I just wondered if you had any media people?

JNC: No. I don't think so. Let me think about that. I don't think we did.

MK: I don't think, in any kind of transition operation, it involved the constituents in a sense.

JNC: I don't remember. I'd really have to dig through notes. That I happened to find in my office so it was easy to pluck. But we tried to get a variety of people on both congressional affairs and on media and that was for a purpose.

MK: So Marlin [Fitzwater] probably would be on that.

JNC: Yes. Then we just provided bios both of participants and attendees and an organization chart and a couple of articles—is my recollection.

MK: Can I xerox this?

JNC: Sure.

MK: Do organization charts mean much?

JNC: Yes. I think so.

MK: They are pretty much followed. Now, was this one followed pretty much throughout the administration?

JNC: No. Offices shifted and things like that. That's sort of the original crowd. What's the date on that? It's March.

MK: I want to get some of these. We've been using for the offices themselves—because in the pieces we write we're going to be writing about the organization of the offices. So one of

the things we're going to do is look, over time, what are some of the different models of organization? *Capital Source* has divisions—

JNC: That's right.

MK: —within offices and that's the only place I know of.

JNC: You know where else you can go is—in the White House structure the keeper of everything, all the records, everything—

MK: You mean the executive clerk's office?

JNC: Yes. You could get it there. Those people are so nice. They were kind of like our godsends, because that's sort of your institutional history.

MK: Right. When did you find that out?

JNC: Early on.

MK: How did you know it?

JNC: Well, I initially started doing boards and commissions. That was my area of responsibility and it was after Ross [Roscoe] Starek, who was Chase [Untermeyer]'s deputy, initially went over to the FTC [Federal Trade Commission] I got promoted to be deputy. So, early on, I had the biggest office in Presidential Personnel just because of the sheer volume of boards and commissions. You couldn't really tell, sometimes, if the records were accurate in terms of when terms were expiring, what the history of it was, who had served, blah, blah, blah. And they had all of that. So I learned very early on who those people were. They were so nice, wanted so desperately to be helpful, and get you launched.

MK: [Ron] Geisler.

JNC: Thank you very much.

MK: It's Tim Saunders, now.

JNC: But Ron was so nice, and everyone in that office was just terrific, and really helped us. I was down there a lot. My staff was parked down there a lot just asking for records and how does this work. They're so intensely loyal to the institution.

MK: That's true. It often seems that people take a while before they find that [out]. And OMB [Office of Management and Budget] is another. For a lot of people, like for somebody who is working on policy, OMB is a good memory, too, and I guess they have a lot of stuff that would trace how things have been done, and what didn't work, and have a sense of that. Usually, it's a painful process.

JNC: It can be.

[Interruption]

JNC: —asked me to do that and I started on it during the transition. It was something that he really wanted to do and we did in conjunction with OPM [Office of Personnel

- Management]. I remember, early, one of the people I met with a lot during the transition, to start on that, was Ed Prescott. You've probably stumbled across Ed in some of your work.
- MK: I've seen his name, yes.
- JNC: Connie Newman is a pal and she was over at OPM and really dedicated a lot of her staff and time to it, too. So it was really heavily supported both by our Office and by OPM.
- MK: That's good to know. There's money that's being put in the budget for orientation.
- JNC: Really? Good.
- MK: Steve Horn was sponsoring it in the House, and it got through the House. I think it also got through the Senate. So that should come about because administrations—
- JNC: It's really helpful.
- MK: —have really varied in how much they've done. So you did this initial session. Would you just wait until there were a clump of people and do another one?
- JNC: Yes.
- MK: So, again, how frequently did you do them?
- JNC: Early on it might have even been once a month. It seemed like we were always doing one.
- MK: And pretty much the same people doing the work?
- JNC: I can lean on my pals only so frequently. So every once in a while it might be a deputy in an office, or whatever. They'd kind of rotate it around. It would depend on who I could lean on most effectively in the mess one day.
- MK: I can see it's also useful for people to get a sense of who is in the White House and it gives them a contact in the White House.
- JNC: And great for the White House staff, too, because they've got an issue over at Energy or whatever, and they've met the person who's handling that and said blah, blah, blah.
- MK: That certainly is very valuable. How long would you be doing this through the administration, because there's a point where you're not appointing as many people?
- JNC: I can't remember precisely, but we did it I think for at least the first three years. We would do it perpetually. I think I did it all for a year, and then I leaned on one of my colleagues in presidential personnel to take it over. You can kind of do it so long. I think probably it coincided with the time when I went to the deputy's position that I just asked one of my colleagues to run it. I think everybody did it about a year.
- MK: In looking at the operation, there are certain rhythms to it. Like this kind of thing you would be doing more early than later. It's an office that's business changes during time and even in the kinds of appointees you're working on. It would seem that in the early stages in the transition, and then in the beginning, you're working on appointees who are going to be generalists in some ways. It's not like filling the position for the head of the Weather Service

- who you've got to get a technical background for. So it would seem that the political people come first, then you have to start going out into technical people, and heading agencies and then, maybe, boards and commissions. Or do you do boards and commissions—what are kind of the rhythms, if you think about the rhythms of that office over the course of the administration, starting with the transition, what was the work and how did the work change?
- JNC: During the transition, it was really a major educational process. Chase and Ross had done a wonderful job of putting together books, with what some of the key early appointments were going to be.
- MK: What were those notebooks like? What kind of information did they have in them?
- JNC: In some ways they would be an expansion of what you would see in the “Prune Book”, of what some of the key policy-making positions were. Obviously, the first bit was getting the cabinet secretaries, and the president was doing that. Once those were settled, it was really looking at the key policy-making areas of things that were of [the] utmost to the president's agenda. What did he run on? What did he say were going to be the first things he was going to look at? That's where you've got to get your emphasis, and get those positions filled first.
- MK: Did you then sort of work across the administration and see—did you work from not a real grid, but something like a grid, where you knew what all of the positions involved, what was the substance of each of these positions?
- JNC: Yes.
- MK: So, then you could go and say, ‘Okay, we're going to emphasize education. Where is everything that dealt with education? What are those appointments that dealt with education?’ Is that the way that you did it?
- JNC: Absolutely. And, as I said, Chase had done a great job of getting the notebooks together and identifying what the priorities were. Another thing I think that was very helpful to us—again, I give Chase credit for this—is he was very purposeful about, in terms of the senior members of presidential personnel, selecting people who had previous government experience of some sort, so they knew what the dynamics were, and he got a commitment from each of us that we would stay in the position a minimum of one year before we even thought about what we might want to do next with our lives. So people were really focused on the task at hand and not trying to cherry pick their next job or, “What's going to happen to me afterwards?” So, people really stayed focused. I think that that was terribly helpful in terms of continuity, and making sure that appointments didn't slip through the cracks, and getting a cohesive team together. I found that that was really valuable, that each one of us had had some government experience, so we knew roughly how things were organized. Again, each person, each one of the other associate directors had a portfolio from which they'd had some experience. I think that was helpful.
- MK: What background had you had? Where had you worked beforehand?
- JNC: Well, mine is a little bit different. I'll try not to do a Genesis-through-Revelations for you. I'm a Texan. I had worked for the Bushes straight out of college, when George W. was running for Congress. So I knew a lot of the people who were close to the Bushes. I knew a lot of the Texas crowd. I had also done Party fund-raising, so I knew some of the major donors in the Republican Party, not only just in Texas, but really across the country. So I

- think—and you'd have to ask Chase—part of the reason why I was selected early on to do boards and commissions was there were going to be people who were terribly successful in their own right, who were not going to want to come in to the administration in a full-time capacity, but wanted to be involved in some way, i.e. a part-time board and commission. That's often a place where you'll find some people who are significant Party leaders, again, who don't want to move to Washington and do that full-time thing but want to have a hand in it. So my background had really been more in terms of long-time knowledge of the Bushes, and people who were close to them. So I had quick name-recognition of people.
- MK: That's a critical thing.
- JNC: It is critical.
- MK: I imagine that you have such a huge volume of stuff coming in that how do you separate it out, how do you know what recommendations—when somebody sends in a list of people that they think are good, how does that person, opening up the mail, know that that should be a priority?
- JNC: If there are any questions, it comes by you. The other thing that was pretty helpful in terms of things just floating into the White House is the person who was head of White House correspondence was Shirley Green, and Shirley went back [to] working with the Bushes from “forever.” Again, another Texan who knew the names and knew who was legitimate or not. If it was something that had a political sort of—it wasn't a family or close friend sort of thing, if it was someone who had just been supposedly actively engaged politically, they'd run it by the political shop. If we had any questions, it was pretty easy to verify if the information you were getting was legitimate. And you'd just have to—
- MK: Did you have regular meetings or would you just call them?
- JNC: No. Well, again—
- MK: Or both.
- JNC: —it's always a question of people involved in the campaign, and how to get those people who are interested in participating in a political appointment, sort of plugged in. Chase addressed that a little bit in that roundtable at Heritage. One of the key players early on in presidential personnel for us was Ron Kaufman, who had worked on the campaign and, again, had a long relationship with the Bushes and just knows everyone in politics. So Ron gave a lot of input on the political side, and people from the campaign, et cetera. We also had close relationships with Lee Atwater, Mary Matalin—with whom I would meet. So there were ways of identifying what was most urgent, if you will.
- MK: George W. headed a committee called the silent committee, right?
- JNC: The not-so-silent committee.
- MK: What was the origin of that?
- JNC: I don't know the origin of it. Chase could probably tell you. I honestly don't know. It was in existence by the time I was aware of it. I had not worked on the campaign. I wasn't campaign staff or whatever. I was plucked from the private sector.

MK: But you'd gone back with them.

JNC: Yes.

MK: Making the transition from campaigning to governing is always difficult, and what to do with the campaign people, and you all are at the point there. How do you identify what kinds of people who worked on a campaign are suitable for a White House, and which people you put out in a department, agencies and whatnot?

JNC: That's a good question. I think that, within the White House structure, President Bush and John Sununu selected who the senior people were going to be on their team and then they worked on filling in the blanks from there. I mean Chase largely picked his team, most of whom were people that he knew, and then we filled in from there. Again, particularly in my area, it was terribly helpful to have some who had worked on the campaign in my shop, by virtue of what I was trying to do.

MK: Absolutely.

JNC: So there were any number of people who had worked on the campaign very effectively, who worked in my area, within presidential personnel. Again, you would see people in the middle and more junior levels in presidential personnel who had worked in the campaign. Some were pulled from agencies that maybe had worked in the [Ronald] Reagan Administration or whatever. But you would have seen a concentration of people who brought different skill sets within presidential personnel. I think that's probably true of every division in the White House.

MK: People think of White House people as pretty much generalists, but it's really helpful to have skills, particular skills.

JNC: Yes. If you look at the people who were the assistants to the President from day one, each one of them had experience in that particular area, whether it was Roger Porter doing policy, certainly Brent Scowcroft—

MK: I was thinking of—

JNC: Down in the ranks?

MK: Yes. And young people. Richard Neustadt, a political scientist, has characterized a lot of the youngest people coming into a White House as having in common their arrogance, ignorance and adrenaline.

JNC: I saw that. Well, there's some of that. But I think so much of that—President Bush set the tone. I think every President sets the tone, for what's accepted and what's not. And he was very serious about the business of governing. He knew what he was getting into. He had been doing it as a vice president for eight years prior. So it wasn't a new experience for him and his key senior people also had had that White House experience so it wasn't a whole new territory.

MK: So, in addition to having people with government experience, you also in some places need White House experience?

JNC: I think it's helpful. You look at that early sort of team of [Jim] Baker, [Richard] Cheney and Scowcroft, they had all worked together before. So, when there were big things to do, they'd all work together and spoke the language and knew where each other was coming from and knew how to do that.

MK: In looking at the rhythms of work, during the course of the Administration, you were talking about the beginning of assembling all the information on the Offices and doing the priorities at the same time. That in a sense occurs almost before the election. Some of that information has to be assembled. During the transition itself, what is the bulk of work? And when did you come in?

JNC: I came in, I think, shortly after Thanksgiving. That's my recollection.

MK: Had you known Chase?

JNC: Yes. I had. That Texas—we're all tight. The bulk of my time was really figuring out how it all worked [and] spending time with my counterparts over in presidential personnel. They were terribly helpful and pointed out some of the pitfalls, that we were going to be everybody's new best friend, and to just be mindful of that, that "cute and charming" as we were, it wasn't necessarily our personality; questions that you really have to ask and give people examples so you're not totally dependent upon them to fill in the blanks, i.e. is there anything that if made public in your background that would be embarrassing to you or the President. And don't let them define what embarrassing might be, DWI's, blah, blah, blah.

MK: Boyden Gray, some of his examples. I have gotten a lot of examples over a course of time. I guess one of the things that surprised me was Jim King was saying for [Jimmy] Carter and his time in the Carter White House, he said 10 per cent. His figure was 10 per cent.

JNC: Of people who fudged stuff?

MK: That didn't make it through the personnel process, for one reason or another. Is that figure about right? What's your recollection?

JNC: Because of background clearance?

MK: He didn't say. As I remember, he came up with that, the context of people having problems and that for some reason or another—for example, somebody doesn't want to make their net worth available. It would be all of those kinds of things. It's just the process started and it ground to a halt for one reason or another.

JNC: I couldn't give you a number on that. We never saw the—what were they called? —financial disclosures and the confidential forms you filled out, et cetera. That all went to the counsel's office.

MK: You had a Personal Data Statement, too, right?

JNC: Right. All of that information went directly to the counsel's office. If there was a clear problem, then it just wouldn't move. If there was sort of a gray area, I would get a call. They would never tell me precisely what it was. They would tell me what the nature of it was and how important was this, given this sort of gray area. And then we'd take it from there.

MK: I guess the gray would depend on the position.

JNC: Exactly.

MK: So, if somebody's a cabinet secretary, there are things that you can't allow there where, if somebody's going to be an ambassador, it doesn't make that much difference.

JNC: For example, you wouldn't want the head of NTSA [*sic*, National Transportation Safety Board] to have DWT's [driving while intoxicated] in their background, but if somebody was like twenty years old and got a DWI in something totally unrelated—not HHS [Health and Human Services], not transportation and safety—would it be a big deal? Probably not.

MK: So you just have to use—

JNC: Some judgment.

MK: It's a question of judgment. One of the big things that happens is, I guess, during a transition, particularly a friendly transition, you have the one area that's difficult in a friendly transition which is getting rid of people because people naturally assume—if it's a nasty transition then everybody knows they're on the bricks. But, if it's a friendly transition, they assume they've got a job.

JNC: Like chaining themselves to their desks.

MK: So how do you handle that?

JNC: I didn't have to deal with too much with that, to be honest—Chase spoke a little bit about that—because, on the boards and commissions, we didn't kick people off the presidential boards. We just let their terms expire. So mine was a little bit different situation. President Reagan, and I'm very thankful for this, put a lot of their folks on boards that had openings right toward the end. It's sort of "thank you's" and that sort of thing. So it took some of the immediate pressure off of me. For example, I was very grateful that there were no openings on the Kennedy Center board for at least a year. So things that were highly sought after, that were incredibly high pressure points, some of those things I didn't have to deal with. It was just easy for me to say, "I'm so sorry, there aren't any openings currently."

MK: So, in some cases, you don't want everything open, because it would just take a huge workload.

JNC: Yes. But, for my other colleagues it was more of an issue.

MK: Where was the time spent in the transition?

JNC: It was really spent in several areas. I'm sorry. You've asked me that, and I haven't really answered it.

MK: That's fine.

JNC: A lot of just going through the volumes of resumes that were coming in and trying to pull out some that we thought might be appropriate, in terms of the priority appointments and getting those notebooks filled. Like, say, the head of NOAA [National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration] was going to be a critical thing. You'd start trying to pull

resumes that were coming in and put them in that section as potentials. There were people coming through that were important to the President, important to the campaign, important to the Party, et cetera, that you might have a courtesy interview with. But we were not doing really heavy-duty interviewing during the transition. It was really to get ourselves up to speed and to gather as a group and a team and to get our direction. We spent some time with people who had been involved in presidential personnel for President Reagan and were out in the private sector. They came in and volunteered to help give us a feel for what it was going to be like, and what we needed to watch out for. Again, I spent a lot of time with the people over at the White House in presidential personnel to start to get up to speed on the presidential commissions. There were, like, 300. So learning what they were about, what the hot buttons were in those areas, when the first vacancies were going to be, and trying to get that organized, was just monumental. Getting a sense from the political people of what the priorities were going to be in terms of the campaign staff and what some of their abilities were so that we could be more effective in putting them into Schedule C positions, or whatever. There were some of the political field staff, et cetera, who were working on the transition. So we were in conversation with them on: "This person is really sharp, has great media savvy, you might want to consider this person in a Press Office in one of the agencies....," that kind of thing.

MK: When you come in, what do you do first?

JNC: Start interviewing like crazy.

MK: So you don't do much interviewing before the transition is over?

JNC: We didn't. It was really a learning curve for us. Even though we'd been in government, this was a different sort of deal. I did a lot of interviewing but my biggest challenge was the phone calls. I think, my first day, I got 300 phone calls from people, asking specifically for me. You're also trying to get the rest of your office staffed, so you're interviewing, trying to pick out the other people for your division, so you can start to delegate.

MK: So what do you do with 300 phone calls?

JNC: You just die. You just stay incredibly late hours and hope people are going to be sympathetic. And you try and get nice cheerful people answering the phone who can take some of the heat off.

MK: I guess, some of that, you can get people from the campaign.

JNC: Exactly. And I did.

MK: That's a good place for them, because they're people who are going to know people.

JNC: Absolutely.

MK: In what other areas in the White House, can you think of, that campaign people are probably important—because of a certain knowledge they have?

JNC: Literally, almost all of them. Cabinet Affairs. There are people like Josh Bolten, who are down there doing policy for George W., who are going to know precisely—if Bush were elected—what his policy priorities are and where he stands on literally every domestic and

foreign policy issue. So, within Cabinet Affairs, that's an important area. Policy. Legislative Affairs, maybe a little less. I think it's been classic to bring people off the Hill into those positions, who have good relationships on the Senate side and on the House side. Media Relations, there are people who have been working on the campaign who do a tremendous job of representing the candidate, who know the reporters, that they've been working that beat. They're terribly helpful. I can't really think of an area where that input is not helpful. Public Liaison, a great place, again, for people who've been helping to represent those constituencies. And you would see a lot of campaign people probably go into that area because it just makes sense.

MK: Counsel would probably be one that wouldn't.

JNC: Not so much.

MK: And in Legislative Affairs, often there are people who come from previous White Houses, too, on that one; they have handled the House side or Senate side.

JNC: Political Affairs.

MK: Political Affairs is certainly a natural. When you start interviewing people, have they already filled out a Personal Data Statement?

JNC: No.

MK: That they don't do until—

JNC: They don't do that until we've decided they're "the one." Then they fill out the forms. If it's a presidential appointment, requiring Senate confirmation, they don't get signed off on by the President until they've really been cleared FBI [Federal Bureau of Investigation] wise. That's why there's such a backlog, sometimes, with that. The poor FBI gets dumped all this stuff to do at one time.

MK: Well, they hire extra people, right, to do that?

JNC: But, still, the volume is unbelievable.

MK: When you all organized the office, how was it organized and did it change over time?

JNC: Not much. I'd do better if I looked at the chart. We were organized thematically. I had presidential boards and commissions. Anne Gwaltney handled what we called the kinder, gentler portfolio. She had HHS, Education. She might have had Labor. She'd come from the National Endowment for the Humanities, so she had the dubious honor of having the arts and humanities endowments, things that thematically fit in that area. Martha Goodwin who stayed in—that's another thing that was kind of unusual. So many of the associate directors served all four years, which is really unusual.

MK: That's very helpful.

JNC: Martha had the natural resources portfolio. She had Agriculture, Interior, EPA [Environmental Protection Agency], Energy. Again, things that thematically fit together. The national security portfolio would have been State, Defense, AID [Agency for International Development], things grouped there. Then there was a Commerce—

MK: CIA [Central Intelligence Agency]? You'd still have some in CIA.

JNC: But not much. We didn't do much with that. Then, probably there would have been Commerce, USTR [United States Trade Representative]. I'm trying to think if Transportation was in that portfolio as well. So we were really divided thematically. We, I think early on, had staff meetings probably every day to begin with, and then it might have moved to about twice a week, where we'd talk about the key positions we were trying to fill: "Have you interviewed anyone that you think might be appropriate for this?" Or, "I interviewed this person, and I don't have anything in my portfolio, but they're terrific. Have any of you got an opening where it might be a better fit?" So we did that throughout the Administration.

MK: When you had staff meetings every day, what was generally the discussion? "Who would fit in what position?" Is it mostly identifying people and positions?

JNC: Yes. And, also, several things that continued to be underscored: "Don't talk." Leaks didn't come out of presidential personnel. "Be sure you're watching for these sorts of ethics concerns." If we had issues where we felt like another office in the White House, or whatever, wasn't being as responsive as we needed them to be, we'd tell Chase. Those sorts of things. Or, "The President has said we really need to get going on X, Y and Z." "Governor Sununu has indicated that this is just on the horizon, so be prepared."

MK: Did you all provide sherpas [guides] for people who were going up for Senate confirmation?

JNC: Not directly out of presidential personnel. There was always someone who was our liaison out of Legislative Affairs whose job, part of their job, was to try and help shepherd people. They would be responsible, as well as the departments, in trying to do the "murder board" type scenario, and helping them organize the courtesy rounds, that kind of thing. But we did not have someone in presidential personnel—and I heard Chase make that recommendation at Heritage and, to be honest with you, I think that's a great idea. I think having someone in presidential personnel, whose sole job is to try and help shepherd people through that process, would be helpful.

MK: Yes, because it's certainly a thicket.

JNC: It is. And if you're over in legislative affairs you're going to be pulled in a lot of different directions, because some things you have to go lobby on or advocate, or whatever. But if you're within presidential personnel and you know that's your responsibility, you can be a little more focused about it.

MK: And the "murder boards," do you get people that you put on those that come from the opposing Party, as well as your own?

JNC: I don't know. I was less involved with that.

MK: I was surprised to find—I talked to somebody who was in the Reagan Administration, who said he continues to serve on "murder boards" and he's serving on them in this Administration. I was really surprised. I find that a very hopeful kind of thing, that there are people that go between the Parties, because you think of the environment as so partisan that you wonder if there's going to be any kind of cooperation. So it's good to see those occasional areas. I talked to somebody else, who was involved in a particular appointment in

this Administration, that got hung up on the Hill. A Republican came in and helped, because the thing was really stuck. Do you remember seeing any kind of bipartisanship on anything?

JNC: I really was not too involved with that.

MK: How many people were there in the office, and how did that change over time because, certainly, that's going to change?

JNC: I can't remember how many at the beginning. Toward the end it seems to me there was a core group of about forty. We had, initially, offices just trying to deal with the volume of the résumés and doing some sort of political clearance and all of that that was much more manageable even a year and a half into the Administration. By then, you have the majority of the key positions filled. But that first year, year-and-a-half, your staff is going to be huge just trying to deal, again, with the volume.

MK: Did you have a schedule that you set up for yourself? During the transition, was there a schedule that, by this date, you want to be able to have done X?

JNC: If there was, I don't remember.

MK: What people did you work with, in terms of establishing what the priorities were going to be, during the transition?

JNC: You mean what we in presidential personnel were to accomplish during the transition?

MK: Well, where you were going to put attention? There are thousands of positions out there, and you're going to have to hook it up with the President's agenda. So what agenda then—

JNC: Chase really gave us our guidance on that. I'm going to assume that he worked it out with the President, the Chief of Staff, and the directors of the transition.

MK: Over the course of the administration, the amount of time you would have to spend in an office must have changed so that fortunately—

JNC: Thankfully.

MK: —you get some reprieve somewhere. How does it change? Could you see it in, sort of, time periods?

JNC: Yes.

MK: What were they?

JNC: I think, until the summer of the first year, we basically were just parked there at a minimum six days a week and working twelve-, fourteen-hour days.

MK: When would you come in?

JNC: Probably around seven. Early. There wasn't much traffic. Then you'd leave [about] nine.

MK: When there's no traffic either, unless it's Georgetown.

JNC: And you worked some Sundays, too. Then, by the summer, you didn't really have to work Sundays and Saturdays; you didn't have to work quite so long and, in the evenings, you didn't have to stay quite so late. So January to about June-July, were pretty intense and then it started to back off a little bit. Then you get the next round of people who, after about a year and a half, start to leave their jobs or move to different jobs. Then you've got that influx. The other thing that happens is, every campaign cycle, you're dealing with campaign people who were very helpful to the President, and didn't get reelected. So there is that influx of, "What to do with Joe or Betsy who were there for us when we needed them and there aren't any openings...", and you're told to get creative.

MK: So what kind of things do you do?

JNC: I can pitch commissions like you can't believe: "You're going to love serving the President on...blah, blah, blah." Sometimes you just had to do a little bit of a checkerboard thing, just to be honest, depending on who it was and who was in the position. Could one person who was in a position serve effectively going to another position? Sometimes you just had to move things around a little bit.

MK: The kinds of pressures that you have on you would change, too, during time.

JNC: Yes.

MK: What sources of pressure were there at the beginning?

JNC: It came from everybody. One of the challenges in presidential personnel, President Bush had said from the outset that he intended his personnel operation to be a collaboration between the White House and the agencies, that it wasn't going to be sort of dictatorial, "...you're going to take someone and you're going to love them...." So, part of the pressure was, once you identified the top people, making sure that you were working as quickly as the people in the agencies, so it could be a collaborative process. If you've got someone who is doing nothing but trying to fill secretary so-and-so's key appointments, and you're dealing with something much broader, there's that pace that you have to pay attention to. You've got just the sheer volume of people wanting to serve, people who are in the process and want to know, "Have you received my paperwork, what's happened to my paperwork, when am I going to get a hearing?" Just the volume of phones and inquiries related to tracking—sorts of things.

MK: Did you have a system set up that dealt with tracking?

JNC: Yes, but not as detailed as it could or probably should be. A lot of it had to be phone calls and there should be some way—maybe there is in the [Bill] Clinton White House—to do it electronically, where it's a little bit easier to gauge.

MK: I don't think so.

JNC: A lot of it is very subjective. That would be a little difficult to do. It might be helpful to have one person whose job was to be the tracking person who could field those phone calls so that I wasn't getting someone I had to talk to—because they were very close to the President—asking me a question like, "Have you received my clearance papers?", but, because of who they were, you needed to talk to.

MK: I suspect that will cut out some, but not all.

JNC: Media pressure. Chase told us from day one, “This is going to be a deliberative process, be prepared. We will be beat up by the press for being slugs in terms of the pace of our appointments, but the president has clearly instructed me get it right; I don’t want surprises; I don’t want to hurt people. I want to get good people in these positions and it may take you a little while, fine.” So Chase said, “I’m going to be pilloried in the press for being the slowest person who ever drew a breath, but I’d rather be slow than get killed for doing a stupid appointment.”

MK: Look at the momentum that got ground down with [John] Tower, with the Tower appointment. I guess, in a way, that kind of appointment—what it does is, it takes the space that you would have had to use for something else.

JNC: And it sucks a lot of emotional energy, too. So media, agencies, internal White House pressure. “Can’t you move this faster? Why isn’t this moving faster?”

MK: People probably go to their other sources—

JNC: Sure they do.

MK: —like political affairs, and they put pressure on.

JNC: Put the screws—getting a call from cabinet secretaries, or deputy secretaries, saying, “Where are my people?” People on the Hill saying, “Why hasn’t my chief constituent gotten this job?” “What’s the problem over there?” People, whether it’s the RNC [Republican National Committee] or state Republican parties, or whatever, hammering you about one thing or another. A major donor is out there hammering you about one thing or another.

MK: In the case of media and, I guess, through it, the public expectation of when things are going to be done: is there some way that you can try to shape what people’s expectations are? Like saying, “This is a process, that you can’t expect everything to take place immediately, and also, you can’t expect that the first five appointments are going to be a representation of America.”

JNC: We tried that. You can read the press clips. Chase is a former reporter. He’s very media savvy. But it doesn’t sell papers. You’re just sort of stuck. I think our press was actually pretty fair. And Chase was able to get some stories out that, to date, we had set the record on women and minority appointments. That was another thing that sometimes—and the Clinton folks would tell you this, too. There was a commitment to really have a diverse appointee group, and it just takes longer. It just flat does.

MK: And, especially because the Cabinet is not going to be a reflection. The Cabinet is going to be people who have already been in some position for some while, so it doesn’t tend to be women and minorities that are in those positions. So it’s going to be in the middle range, which doesn’t come immediately. For Clinton, he really did get beat up on that, because he said that it was going to look like America, and that’s the phrase that sticks.

JNC: That, everybody remembers.

MK: So, in a sense, one of the first things that has to be done during a transition is to try to walk back on that and explain it: how that's going to come about, that it's going to take a long time to do. But maybe now, even with the press, there is a recognition that that is the case.

JNC: It depends on if they're friendly or not. I think, to some extent, any person who has followed it and puts a little logic to it knows this is not going to happen overnight. We've made the process so excruciating for people that it just gets harder and harder and longer and longer.

MK: Did you find that there were people that said when they looked at the paperwork that they didn't want to do it?

JNC: Some.

MK: Was that particularly true—I talked to somebody who had an offer of being on a board and when he got the paperwork he said this doesn't pay anything and why should I go through all this stuff for that. He said no, he didn't want to do it. He talked to somebody else who had turned down the same board. How often does that happen?

JNC: Not often enough that it's a real concern. But it's a sad state of affairs, and that's the case with full-time appointments, too.

MK: Because it's the same thing they have to fill out, right?

JNC: Well, it depends on the level of the board. If it's a board like Fannie Mae, that requires Senate confirmation so, sure, they've got to get the full FBI clearance. Other boards don't require quite that level of a clearance, quite that level of disclosure. I mean, you could hire accountants and attorneys to spend untold hours, if you've got kind of a complicated or somewhat sophisticated—if you've been alive for more than twenty-five years, it's just going to take longer.

MK: That's right. And have headed something, too.

JNC: Some of these people serve at tremendous financial sacrifice, both in terms of divesting and then in post-employment restrictions. That story really doesn't get out. The people out there who—I'm sure [Robert] Rubin served at unbelievable financial sacrifice to be Treasury Secretary. Do people really understand what a commitment that is? Probably not as much as they should. I think there's a perception that people come and get these big, fat-paying jobs and I think that regardless of the administration that that's a story that probably doesn't get the attention it deserves.

MK: Do most people—I was thinking of Rubin. At least with Rubin he's got a lot of people to fill out his paperwork.

JNC: That's true.

MK: Somebody can go back and find it.

JNC: He's not sweating over his desk late at night.

MK: Right, trying to figure out where exactly did he live, what countries did he go to? The thing of going to foreign countries—that must be horrible for people like that.

JNC: Keep your passports.

MK: That's true. One of the things that we were going to do is make available easily from our website, either links or have questions that have existed on previous forms. Like, for example, the Personal Data Statement that the White House currently has is not available. But we thought we'd make that available. It's actually printed in Cal MacKenzie's book *Obstacle Course* and I've got recent—someone gave me one who has been through the process. He gave me a recent one that's exactly the same. So we'll put that up as an example of the kinds of questions.

JNC: I think that would be great.

MK: You'd think there are people that, when they look at some of those questions, would decide: maybe it wouldn't work. I think, was it Chase or Pen James who said they had somebody—I think it was James—who had had a conviction, a criminal conviction. Once they saw what kinds of things they were going to go through—

JNC: Said, "No thanks."

MK: Yes. But I guess there are a number that don't do that. When Boyden Gray was talking about a person who hadn't paid income tax—somebody told me, who was not in your administration, about somebody also who had worked out of the country and it turned out he hadn't paid them for seven years. So, somehow people just don't think of this in the way it needs to be thought of, that all that stuff is going to come out.

JNC: And that's why you help fill in the blanks, for precisely those reasons. You don't want to be surprised. And you don't want to have their name get out, and then there is some sort of an issue, that just ruins their reputation.

MK: Did you find that it didn't come out, that information did not come out?

JNC: I don't remember, really, a case where we had a big ethical surprise after someone had gotten through the process. I'm trying to remember if there were any. There may be some things that were gray, but nothing that was just blatantly illegal, that I can recall.

MK: And nobody who had a problem who you didn't appoint—

JNC: And it leaked out afterward?

MK: —and then it leaked out. I can't remember.

JNC: I can't.

MK: Of all the stories people have told me, I don't remember any of them ever coming out.

JNC: Boyden's shop was really great about that. They were just really good at what they did. Again, there was a lot of stability in that office. People tended to come and stay. I think it's grueling, but I think it makes a difference, because you're not passing something off, half done, to someone who's new. There's a lot more continuity, so things don't slip through the cracks inadvertently.

MK: And in White Houses generally, the staff positions are around eighteen months, although some of the heads of units, it's maybe a little closer to two years. But one of the things that seems to happen—say in personnel, Pen James talked about the degree to which, because he did in the interview I had with him, you're really a target, you make a lot of enemies, so you can't stay all that time, that your life does become somewhat difficult. That's true in a lot of positions. Like for a chief of staff, a chief of staff is a target because he's the person who has to say no to people, and it's not the president.

JNC: We joked a lot about that, that for every appointment you make you get—

MK: Nine enemies.

JNC: —nine enemies and one ingrate. I guess that was true to some extent but, as someone who was in that job for four years and has stayed in Washington and is involved in recruiting even now, I have found that that hadn't really been a problem. I guess there are some people out there, maybe, who are harboring terrible ill will toward me because I prevented them being Secretary of State, but no one really jumps to mind.

MK: How do you let people down when they want a job that they're not just right for?

JNC: You try really hard to find some other way, that's more appropriate, and in some instances, you just have to say I'm sorry, it's not going to happen.

MK: Did you all use headhunters at the beginning?

JNC: No, we didn't except—

MK: People that are now headhunters that—

JNC: Like Mo Marumoto or Pen.

MK: Right.

JNC: Eric Vautour is another one who comes to mind. They gave us their advice and counsel but did we outsource? No. They gave us their tried-and-true tips and things to look for, that were helpful.

MK: What kinds of things?

JNC: Just serious questioning. The one that really sticks in my mind is the one I mentioned: "Don't just ask is there anything potentially embarrassing and let them say, 'I got a parking ticket in 1963.' Say, 'Have you paid your taxes?' 'Have you done this?' 'Do you have any DWI's?' Kind of tick off a half dozen things." I remember Bob Tuttle having a list of about twenty recommended questions that they had used, again, just by being burned a couple of times, that he handed over. I remember him telling me an anecdotal story of why he does it the way he does it now.

MK: What was the story?

JNC: Don't you dare repeat it. It was someone who was close to the president, who was up for some sort of appointment. The background check came back and there was an issue. He said that he had the lovely joy of calling the person and saying, "So-and-so, I'm afraid this is not going to work out. We've done the background check and I'm sorry that we can't move this forward." Most people will say, "Okay, thank you very much," because they know if they've got something and it's popped up—most people are cognizant of the fact that they haven't paid their taxes, or whatever. But, apparently this individual just persisted and said, "What are you talking about?" He said, "Well, you know." "No, I don't know. What are you talking about?" And he said, "It's the wife beating." He goes, "Oh, she hit me first!" "That was sort of..." "But it's a big public [thing]. The police came..." and blah, blah, blah. So you have to spell it out. I will also say that people like Mo Marumoto were terribly helpful as the administration ended, coming over and doing seminars on how to get your resume together; where are places to look, and that kind of thing. People were very generous with their time on the flip end of it.

MK: That's right. Let's talk about leaving an administration, the transition out and what kinds of things. That's a good example there. How do you find people jobs? The first year you're there, I guess you're helping them organize themselves.

JNC: That was particularly excruciating, because the Democrats were in control of Congress, the Democrats were coming into the White House. No one wanted to hire a Republican in Washington, given what we do.

MK: What about minority staffs on the Hill?

JNC: Just a few. But there just was this huge influx of unemployed Republicans, and where were they going to go? Unless they had been in law firms, or were going back to law firms, or had been in some sort of position, or they were going home, to go back to wherever and do what they were happily doing before they came, it was just a very difficult time. We helped set up networks. There were a couple groups that were incredibly innovative and put together what they called "job pods" where people would get together, almost like little support groups, once a week, and they would just share tips on jobs they'd heard about. So there was a lot of that that happened informally.

We tried to organize, as I said—Mo was very helpful. Eric Vautour was incredibly nice and tried to meet with as many people as he could. But it was very difficult. A lot of people became entrepreneurs, and started their own business, like me. So the early bit was tough. A lot of people tried to stay in Washington, but there just wasn't an opportunity for them to do that, so they moved.

MK: What about interest groups?

JNC: There just weren't people out there wanting to hire Republicans.

MK: So what did they end up doing?

JNC: They started their own businesses, moved away. Some things eventually opened up. Heritage ran a job bank-type thing, and some of the think tanks would try and be helpful in that regard, too, but it was just a huge volume of people. Some went to trade associations, which is also the third largest employment sector in this area, the first being government, and the second being things related to travel and tourism, interestingly enough, hospitality.

- The third are professional societies, associations, think tanks. Isn't that an amazing statistic? And it's still true today. And corporations are the fourth.
- MK: Well, you think of all of the groups that have come to Washington since the 1960s. Particularly as government has done more, they have to have a presence, and they also need people with experience. I guess for some of them, when the Party changes, then some of their people end up in the government, so they're going to need to replenish people. So, maybe some people end up going there because they want to have both. They want to have Democrats and Republicans both.
- JNC: I'm getting a lot of calls and initiating a lot of calls to the people in the Clinton administration, for recruitments I'm doing now at different associations for this, that or the other that require some discipline expertise as well as public policy expertise. It's great fertile ground.
- MK: And you know a White House well, so you know where people are doing things.
- JNC: Where to look.
- MK: What do agencies do at the end, for the new people coming in? Are they involved in developing the job descriptions, or is it going to be Chase that's doing that?
- JNC: Agencies pretty much do it on their own, although they're going to get some guidance from the White House. I can remember that President Bush was, again, very clear that he wanted us to be as cooperative and helpful as we could be to the Clinton Administration - Clinton transition, which was tough. It just was. But at that point in time Connie [Horner] was the head of presidential personnel, and I just leaned on my colleagues and said, "We will put notebooks together on the key things our successors coming in need to know." I can remember Connie and I meeting with Secretary [Richard] Riley, who at that point was sort of key—.
- MK: You had so many different people that came in that, in a way, it's really difficult for them to have gotten started.
- JNC: In the early days we were meeting with Riley. We met with a few people who had been identified who might be working in the personnel area.
- MK: But most of the people didn't get appointed before five days before the inauguration. That was for a lot of the White House people, I think. McLarty, I think, was named pretty early, but otherwise, it was very late, which means you lose that time period. Is there a lot of pressure to put people on boards and commissions at the end, and where does it come from?
- JNC: Primarily, it's something a president, I think, wants to do for people who have worked really hard in their behalf and wants to do something. It's kind of a thank you. I was with President Bush on election day—there were a lot of different emotions, but part of it was he felt so badly about the people who worked for him. There was a huge sense of that.
- MK: I remember somebody telling me, maybe when you had pictures taken with him, and he would tell everybody how badly he felt. They were talking about that.
- JNC: "Is there anything I can do to help you?"

MK: Yes, as if it was something he had personally done.

JNC: Yes.

MK: What are the numbers of people at that point that you're dealing with, that you have to work with?

JNC: Well, there are a limited amount of boards that are open. By that point in time we were pretty much on track. Everything was filled. And I'll say this about the Clinton Administration, for people who were appointed to presidential boards, who came from the White House, they left us alone, they just let us serve our terms. They didn't ask the people, who came off the White House staff, to resign. They could have, but they didn't.

MK: In looking at White House work life—you had those horrible hours at the beginning—what did they settle down to?

JNC: Probably about—well, you still got there at an ungodly hour—eleven-, twelve-hour days as opposed to fourteen.

MK: You would still start—

JNC: Sort of, seven to seven.

MK: But no Saturdays.

JNC: Well, I probably just didn't manage my time as well but I pretty much worked every Saturday.

MK: Did you work for a full day?

JNC: No, that was one day you could sort of sleep, so I wouldn't get in at the crack. I would work sort of until dinner time.

MK: What are the benefits? Those are just terrible hours, and the pay is not that great, so what are the benefits of working in the White House?

JNC: This is going to sound really corny. For me, I had worked for this man and his family a million years ago, so the opportunity to serve—. I was there because of my relationship with him and with Mrs. [Barbara] Bush. So it was a different dynamic. I wasn't someone in Washington who has jumped in or out, and maybe this puts you in a better position to do X. Subsequently the benefit was, it was very helpful to me as I started my own business and had a credential for recruiting and interviewing people. The other perks that go with it, you got a nice parking spot. There's the mess.

MK: The mess isn't that great, though. There are no windows.

JNC: Yes. But if you need to entertain people, they're impressed. It's also helpful—Mr. Bush or Mrs. Bush would periodically drop in and eat in the mess, so that was always a thrill for people. You could go to some cool things. You had some invitations to things.

MK: Did you all have to deal with the Kennedy Center box or is that the Management and Administration? That was Rose [Zamaria]. That's probably Rose.

JNC: Rose guarded that like nobody's business. Rose paid very close attention to the Kennedy Center box. So it was something that you could use, so there was a pecking order on all of that. Early on, who had the time? I can remember this—and it's just funny enough that I'll repeat it—the first time that I really went out was to the big Senate-House dinner, the big mambo, everybody in town goes to it, sort of a command performance. Huge, enormous thing. And, in presidential personnel, we avoided those things like the plague because you just get bombarded. So I had gone to this thing—it's the first public, big thing outside of the White House complex.

MK: When was it?

JNC: It was probably—isn't it normally April, May, somewhere in there?

MK: That's what I was thinking, yes.

JNC: So I had gone to this thing. You're black tie. You have some little baby purse that basically has your lipstick and enough money to get out of the parking garage. Some woman—I'm not kidding. I had gone to the restroom and somebody backed me into a stall with their resume. I thought okay, this is why I don't go out. I thought, "This is ridiculous." Just cornered me. Just kept talking, pressing their resume on me and I just kept backing up. I thought, "Okay, this takes the cake."

MK: So I guess one of the things you did not—Chase had talked about not traveling with the President.

JNC: You don't. [First], you don't really have a reason to. There is so much—people come to you to interview. You don't go out to them, unlike the private sector, where you jump around and go see people wherever they are. Just every minute counted. It really was a volume issue, particularly early on. No. People in presidential personnel would tend not to travel. Periodically, it might make sense to do some speeches. I did some of that and Chase did some of that, but not early on. Although he did go to China.

MK: Did you go on any?

JNC: No, not like that. That was a little secret expedition.

MK: I guess there nobody's going to get you for jobs.

JNC: No. I think he was safe.

MK: But definitely no U.S. travel. I know he was talking about what would happen if he did. You walk down the steps and there you have a governor and two senators and a House member, everybody with a list of people.

JNC: Sure.

MK: I guess you must have developed defensive strategies. Did you find people would go after you in restaurants or that sort of thing?

JNC: Yes. Church.

MK: Church, too.

JNC: It's tough. And I didn't resent it, because I understood it, other than getting backed into the restroom. It's just, there are only so many hours in a day. You can only return so many phone calls. You can only interview so many people. You can only look at so many pieces of paper. So I didn't resent it. It was just a fact.

MK: What were the rhythms of your day? What kinds of things did you do during the day? You had a meeting early.

JNC: Early on, you would try and set whatever the priority for the day is, and that went out the window. You'd spend the rest of the day—well, first you would pick up the *Post* and see what was on the *Federal Page*. That would help gauge what your day was going to be like. Did someone explode? What was the latest and greatest crisis? So you would scan the papers and then you would know part of how your day was going to go. It was just really a mix of phone calls, dealing with staff, interviewing. When I went into the deputy's position, it was much more of a management position than when I was doing boards and commissions. Boards and commissions was very hands-on, interviewing, paper flow, blah, blah, blah. When I went into the deputy's position, it was more trying to keep a pulse on everything else in all the other departments, dealing with people who had a busted chair or a bigger window. We didn't have those issues.

MK: Did you talk to everybody that would be appointed to a board or commission?

JNC: Yes. Staff would do the early screening, et cetera, but then I'd definitely talk to everybody.

MK: How long did you talk to them? What kinds of things did you talk about?

JNC: Their interest. Did they understand—if the President had a policy position on Pacific salmon, did they know what it was and did they support it?

MK: Where would you get that information?

JNC: Again, some from—if it had a strong agency component to it, whether it was energy-related or whatever, you'd get that from the agency. I spent a lot of time with people in cabinet affairs within the White House. Sometimes OMB. I had a lot of buddies, one floor up, which I'd get a lot of information from. Sometimes, it was dealing with people on the Hill who—particularly on some of these commissions there would be a mix of Presidential appointees, people from the majority leader's office, blah, blah, blah, bipartisan. So, the mix of all those things.

Where else would I get the information? From the organization itself. "What's important to you? What expertise do you not have that you need?" One that comes to me, probably because it was a pet interest of both Chase and mine, was the Commission of Fine Arts, which is pretty important in Washington, and we both knew that. When we came in, there wasn't an architect on the commission. There wasn't an historic preservationist on the commission. That was something that Chase and I just happened to know something about, and really cared about. So, we purposefully went out there and recruited some people to fill in those holes in terms of expertise. So you'd do some of that.

MK: When you were the deputy—let's take boards and commissions first. In your week, your days would be pretty similar.

JNC: Yes.

MK: What about as deputy? Were there certain days when you pulled meetings together?

JNC: Yes. Now my memory is a little bit fuzzy, but at least once a week, maybe twice a week, and it wouldn't involve Chase or Connie. We'd have meetings in my office with the other associate directors and we would go over—I think we actually called them “fallout meetings”—people who had been interviewed but, for whatever reason, didn't fit in a particular portfolio area, again trying to match talent with openings. Or in some areas, again, some of the technical areas were tough to get filled, for any number of reasons. [For] people in academe, why in the world would they come in and subject themselves to this for X period of time?

MK: Did you have trouble getting people to fill those?

JNC: Sometimes, yes. They were very tough. Martha Goodwin had one of the toughest portfolio areas, again sort of science and the environment, and some other things that were just a lot trickier. So you'd have someone say, “I've really been working on this and I am not coming up with people who really sort of fit. Do you have any ideas? Do you have anybody you've interviewed, any ideas of people I can call?” We'd do that at least once, twice a week. That would also be a place that, if I'd gotten word that someone had lost an election and, gee whiz, they'd really like to serve in the Administration, then I'd say, “Okay, let's be creative.” We'd do that sort of thing.

Again, in the deputy's role, it was much more day to day with each of the associate directors. Did they have adequate staff? What sorts of problems were they doing that I could try and troubleshoot for them? If we really needed to get someone's paperwork out of the counsel's office, could I please help them. They'd tried a couple of times. That sort of thing.

MK: But it wouldn't be things like, up on the Hill?

JNC: Sometimes. We might have strategy sessions on, “I really think so-and-so is going to have a tough confirmation. What do we need to do? What can we do to be helpful in that regard and not step on someone else's turf or toes?” Or, “So-and-so from the Hill has been calling me and they're just hammering me on X, Y, and Z. Can you help me?” And it would be any number of issues. It could be, “They really want Suzie from [inaudible] Iowa involved some place, and that person's really not supportive of the President; what am I supposed to do with that?”

MK: What did you do about evaluation, once people got in?

JNC: That's an excellent question. If there were people who were really going off the range, you would basically get the information, and pass it up the line. It might be dealt with by cabinet affairs. It might be dealt with by the Chief of Staff. If someone was really tough on staff not representing the President well, you might talk to that Cabinet secretary. It just depended on what the situation was.

Now, on the flip side of that, on a positive note, if someone was doing a really terrific job, and there was a more senior position, somewhere else, that became available, you would just keep a memory bank of people who had been serving extremely well, and had a lot of talent, and might have potential to move up.

MK: How did you find out about it?

JNC: People within the agencies were only too happy to tell you about people who were doing a great job, or people they weren't happy with.

MK: Did you have regular meetings with them?

JNC: We have a White House Liaison in each one of the agencies—and I think the Clinton Administration has done this, too—who would help keep tabs on how appointees were doing, work with you in terms of openings in their agencies. After we got over the huge crush of trying to get the jobs filled, we got out a little bit more, got out in the agencies, had people over to have lunch over at the mess or whatever, again, just trying to stay in touch. “How is it going? Do you feel like you have the resources that you need?” So we were able to do more of that.

MK: In a department, for example, what kind of person would that be, that you would keep up with?

JNC: It might be a deputy assistant secretary, assistant secretary, Schedule C. There were some people who were presidential personnel alum who went out into agencies, and they were terrific about saying, “I love my job, the secretary's great....”

MK: I know it probably bubbles up from a lot of different places.

JNC: After you're been in it you have pals everywhere, who are only too happy to stay in touch.

MK: White Houses, it seems that things are organized very much for making a decision and making sure that that decision has all the components that are necessary, but once the decision is made, it's as if things move on. So its implementation is a subject that doesn't seem to get as much interest. It's always moving ahead, because there's so much to do. Making sure that something gets done—

JNC: I think that's fair.

MK: —in a way is difficult. I remember Nixon at various times complaining that hadn't they decided that something—there were some old buildings that were from World War II, temporary buildings, that were down on the Mall and I think he had been complaining about them, and that they were supposed to have been removed and they were still there. I think it was those; it could have been some others. Things just didn't get done quite like they thought.

Were there sessions that you all had to step back and evaluate what was going on?

JNC: Yes. We had a couple of retreats. I can remember one, first year, and then one a little bit later, where we would literally go off-site.

MK: Where would you go?

JNC: One time we went I think to an Air Force base.

MK: Some place where you could control the phone.

JNC: Well, that was it. It was mandatory, you won't take calls unless it's the President. And we went to another time—I hadn't even thought of this in such a long time. I think we went downstairs in that little room at Old Ebbitt's. There's a little private room down there.

MK: You can see stairs down.

JNC: I think we did a retreat there one time. And it would be about a one-day thing, where we'd set priorities and do a reality check on how things were going and what we needed to do differently. Again, what resources—if it were in our ability to deliver—would help to do what you were doing, better?

MK: A lot of offices, they just did not do that. It seemed difficult to do.

JNC: It's tough to do, but there is a lot of value in it. Sometimes it was just nice to get away from that place, as a group, for a few hours.

MK: Were there people that you had, that you talked to, who maybe had been in earlier administrations, that might give you a sense of how things seemed to be going from their advantage outside? Like somebody like Ken Duberstein?

JNC: Yes. That's a good example, as a matter of fact. Yes. It's a funny thing. There's such a courtesy in all of that, that you would tend to get things like, "It looks like things are going great, you're doing a terrific job!", or, if you'd really blown something, someone might step up to the plate and say, "Did you ever consider such and such?" But, more than anything, it was an empathetic sort of supportive—"I know this is a tough time, but it seems that you're right on track."

MK: Right. "In our administration, we had this, at this particular time." So you have some benchmarks to use for evaluation.

JNC: Yes. And I can also remember some of my counterparts who had been in the Reagan personnel shop, if they were coming through town, they would stop by. I always enjoyed that, because it was somebody to talk to. Because, that's one of the things, you really can't talk. There's too much stuff, and you really have to leave it there. So it's a little frustrating.

MK: Were there people other than Duberstein, that you can think of, that were helpful, that were good as sounding boards, or people that knew Washington well?

JNC: This is more of a personal thing, but I can remember there was one time in particular where I had sort of a challenging situation and, again, a very long-time relationship. And that was Frank Donatelli that I visited with. I had worked with Frank on Jim Baker's campaign for attorney general in 1978. We had a long history together. But it was not the kind of thing that he necessarily would have initiated.

MK: What about Tom Korologos?

JNC: I didn't interact with Tom much, but certainly a lot of other people did, who knew him well.

MK: I'm just trying to see what—

JNC: Ken, I knew a little bit better.

MK: Who were some of the people that you had known, going back in Texas, like to Baker's campaign or George W.'s campaign, who then ended up in a White House?

JNC: Shirley Green. Jim Cicconi. David Bates. Bob Estrada. Fred McClure. I had known Andy [Card], but not from Texas, obviously. Let me just quickly look through here. Some of these people you spent so much time with, you can't even remember when you first met. Chase, obviously. A lot of these people, I knew from just having been around the Bushes. So, sort of identifying the Texas ones is a little more—dating back to that time—is a little more of a challenge for me. Those are some of the ones who jump to mind immediately, particularly as I look at this organization chart. But David Bates certainly falls in that category. People like Andy Card, and some of those I knew from other iterations. But in terms of going way back, Chase, David Bates, Jim Cicconi. Cicconi worked on Baker's campaign, too.

MK: Is he from Texas?

JNC: We were all children together.

MK: Did you all grow up in Houston?

JNC: No. I met Margaret Tutwiler in 1978. So some of those relationships just go way back.

MK: What difference does it make, who is Chief of Staff?

JNC: I think it makes a big difference. Again, you have the tone set by that person and their relationship to the President I think is really key. Some people are known and perceived to be terribly close to the President. Does that person really speak for the President? There's always sort of that "whose agenda is this? Is this the President's or the Chief of Staff's?" It's not just internally within the White House. It's the public perception and on the Hill. So I think from that perspective it really makes a difference.

MK: I was thinking how you do your job. You had three different chiefs that you worked under. How did it affect your operations?

JNC: It didn't affect me personally that much. The workload was essentially the same. The intensity might have been a little different. Obviously, I knew Jim Baker well, but he was in for such a short period of time and in such a different situation. If you have a personal relationship with the Chief of Staff, you probably get less questions because they know you, and they know where you're coming from. If you have an agenda, they know what it is. You know, the personalities are different and how they organize and go about what they do is different even within their own immediate circle. For example, people knew that if you got a call from Andy Card, it was like a call from John Sununu, or a call from the President, just because of the relationships there. Some chiefs of staff would delegate a lot to a deputy chiefs of staff. Others probably less. I don't know that I'm answering your question.

MK: Just what I wanted, kind of different rhythms. One person said—and he had served under many different chiefs; he was in several Republican administrations—that the best chief of staff he served under was Jim Baker and the worst chief he served under was Jim Baker. That it was very different in the two. So you didn't see him under the first one.

JNC: No, I really didn't, because I was in the Reagan administration, but certainly not for the entirety—.

MK: Where did you work?

JNC: The National Endowment for the Arts, before it became quite so famous. Frank Hodsoll was chairman when I was there. So get another connection with OMB because, again, that relationship—and so I didn't work with Baker then.

MK: When he came back, was it mostly as the “campaign director” more than anything?

JNC: Yes. I think it was just to ensure that there was better coordination. He's got such a smart political mind. He just really understands, and was so close to the President, that in order to just make this thing function—if there was a chance for it to be successful, they came in like storm troopers.

MK: Then the White House effort has to move toward the campaign, and try to integrate it.

JNC: Yes.

MK: In previous Republican administrations, say in [Gerald] Ford's Administration, one of the things that they were very, very good at was pulling together those two, the Presidency with the election campaign in their case. It's obscured by the fact that they lost, but it was an operation I think that often is repeated.

JNC: Baker was involved in that, too.

MK: The President Ford Committee. And, generally, in successful operations, it seems to be that way, to use the White House as a podium.

Thank you very much.

JNC: You're sweet to invite me over.

MK: I'm glad you came. It's very helpful.

[End of Disc 1 of 1 and Interview I]