

**Elmer B. Staats Oral History Interview—JFK #1, 7/13/1964**  
Administrative Information

**Creator:** Elmer B. Staats  
**Interviewer:** Robert C. Turner  
**Date of Interview:** July 13, 1964  
**Location:** Washington, D.C.  
**Length:** 36 pages

**Biographical Note**

Elmer B. Staats (1914-2011) served as the Deputy Director of the Bureau of the Budget from 1950 to 1953, and from 1958 to 1966. This interview focuses on Staats' role within the Bureau, John F. Kennedy (JFK)'s work habits in the White House, and JFK's interest in the development of science and technology in government affairs, among other issues.

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Staats, Elmer B., recorded interview by Robert C. Turner, on July 13, 1964, (page number), John F. Kennedy Library Oral History Program.

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Oral History Interview

with

ELMER STAATS

July 13, 1964  
Washington, D.C.

By Robert C. Turner

For the John F. Kennedy Library

TURNER: I might introduce this interview by putting into the record the fact that Mr. Staats has had a rather unusual career in Government service and in the Bureau of the Budget. He came to the Bureau of the Budget in 1939 and has now served under five Presidents. Indeed, he has been Deputy Director of the Bureau of the Budget under four Presidents -- Truman, Eisenhower, Kennedy and Johnson. Except for a one-year hiatus when he left Government and a four-year interval when he was with another agency of the Government, Mr. Staats has been in the Bureau of the Budget since 1939 and therefore has had a unique opportunity to observe the operation of the Office of the President.

Perhaps I might start, Elmer, by asking you to give such observations as occur to you on similarities and differences in the decision-making process under Presidents Eisenhower and Kennedy and, if you wish, also President Truman. I have in mind here both the organization of the Executive Office of the President for decision-making and the methods employed by the Presidents themselves in the decision making process. Do you have some ideas and reflections on this that you think would be useful to future students of the Office of the President?

STAATS: First, I would preface my remarks by emphasizing that, under President Roosevelt, my contacts personally with the President were very few, having

come into the Bureau as a junior-grade officer, so to speak, but very early, because of the beginning of the defense program and the later outbreak of the war, my principal work had to do with the organization,

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financing, and coordination of the domestic war agencies and, in some cases, the overseas activities but primarily in the domestic area. This meant that I was thrown into problems which were closely related to the problems of the President in that they involved a considerable number of issues which were controversial and, therefore, of high-level consideration and which, because of the Bureau of the Budget was the only staff agency at that time for the President, naturally were thrown to the Bureau of the Budget for resolution. This involved, for example, questions of the relationships of the Board of Economic Warfare to the State Department and to the War Production Board. This involved issues of the Agriculture Department's interest in food production vis-a-vis the OPA which was concerned with price controls. There were many other problem areas of this type.

The fact that the Bureau of the Budget was the only agency concerned meant that we were, in fact, dealing with issues which were somewhat beyond the formal charter of the Bureau of the Budget. It also meant that President Roosevelt became concerned before too long with the need for a new agency which would be full time with a considerable staff which would be concerned with the domestic mobilization effort.

Eventually, in 1943, there was established the Office of War Mobilization which was headed by Chief Justice Byrnes, who stepped down from the Supreme Court to take this position. He served in this capacity through most of the war period.

The Bureau of the Budget had a considerable hand in setting up this office, and I had an opportunity to work closely with that agency during the time that it was in existence. Also, there became established other mechanisms such as the Office of Economic Stabilization which was concerned principally with areas of controversy in the wage-price field. I mention these only because they dramatized the problem facing President Roosevelt during this critical period and at a time when he came under criticism in some quarters for having tried to run the war effort too much personally and for lacking the necessary staff facilities.

I think it's important to keep in mind that the President had no formal Executive Office until 1939, at which time the Bureau of the Budget was transferred from the Treasury Department to the Executive Office of the President. The Bureau and a few other small agencies likewise located in that office were either merged with the Bureau of the Budget or went out of existence entirely because they did not serve the direct needs of the wartime period.

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One of the reasons that I think this era is particularly important for people who are looking at the background of the development of the Executive Office is that, growing out of the war, there developed a great deal of interest in establishing new machinery for the President to coordinate different problems in both the domestic as well as the foreign military areas. For

example, the Council of Economic Advisers came into being largely because of the great concern which developed about the anticipated problems of conversion from a wartime to a peacetime economy. There were estimates of unemployment ranging up to 18 million unemployed; it was only the conservative person who would have estimated less than 8 million unemployed at that time. Indeed, some of the most reputable economists of the period thought that the figure of 12 to 15 million was the only realistic figure that we should keep in mind in terms of the reconversion effort. But the Employment Act and the Council of Economic Advisers grew very directly out of this concern.

Secondly, many people who had been advising the President during the war period felt that it was essential to have permanent machinery following the war to coordinate all aspects of our national security effort. This led to the National Security Act of 1947, amended substantially in 1949, which established two new permanent agencies concerned with this field. I had an opportunity from the Budget Bureau side to work with the Congress and with the agencies concerned in the establishment of both these agencies. One of them was the National Security Council which was designed to be a top policy-making body for the President, embracing all aspects of our national security program. The President was Chairman and it had other statutory members -- the Secretary of State and initially the three Secretaries of the Services (subsequently, in 1949, the Secretary of Defense), the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, and others on which the record will supply the details. But the important thing is that this grew out of the concern about the need for Presidential staff assistance because of the experience of the wartime period.

The second agency, which I believe many people will regard as being the brainchild of Bernard Baruch and Ferdinand Eberstadt (both industrialists and advisers to President Roosevelt), was the National Security Resources Board which was to be a long range planning body. It, likewise, was made up of the heads of the agencies concerned, emphasizing such areas as manpower mobilization, resources mobilization, transportation -- all of the other components and ingredients which go into a wartime effort.

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This again became machinery which evolved and changed over a number of times. It is now designated the "Office of Emergency Planning" and contains all of the statutory powers and charter of the old National Security Resources Board but has, in addition, added to it certain important functions such as natural disaster planning and direct Presidential advice in connection with major natural disasters such as hurricanes, floods, earthquakes, etc.

The thing which I think is of particular interest to people who are reviewing the development of the Executive Office is that this machinery grew not only out of the felt needs of the President, but also out of the greatly expanded size of the government and expanded number of functions as a result of the wartime and reconversion effort.

I believe that the foregoing will help to explain the setting in which President Truman found himself when he became President. President Truman had very little formal 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 Chief Justice Byrnes previously headed which by this time was headed by Justice Vinson and, subsequently, by Dr. John Steelman, who had been



previously concerned primarily with labor matters, so the President had two principal arms -- one, the Budget Bureau and the other, the Office of War Mobilization and Reconversion. Very shortly after he became President, the Office of War Mobilization and Reconversion was terminated, partly to symbolize the emphasis upon peacetime economy.

Obviously, the Bureau of the Budget was not the proper agency to carry on many of the activities in the area of program and policy, many of a highly political character. Dr. Steelman became the Assistant to the President. You, Bob, will recall this for you were on the staff of that agency and, therefore, are in a position to compare notes with me on this matter. 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 a point very strongly that he thought that this concept was not adequate. I asked him what he had in mind; he said he thought that there had to be developed something more nearly in nature of a Chief of Staff or Chief Assistant so he wrote in the draft The Special Assistant to the President and subsequently obtained President Truman's approval for that change in title. This turned out to be really quite a significant change. One of the reasons that this became such a significant change is that it became the basis for the view held by Dr. Steelman

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that this gave him a charter was the Chief of the White House Staff (which was fairly substantial in size at this point), but even more important because this title was carried over after the Truman Administration into the Eisenhower Administration, and The Special Assistant became clearly the Chief of Staff. This was Sherman Adams (former Governor of New Hampshire and former Congressman.)

TURNER: If I remember rightly, Elmer, I think the title Mr. Truman used was not "The Special Assistant" but just "The Assistant to the President."

STAATS: That is right. The word, though, that we are emphasizing is the word "the" which means the principal.

TURNER: That's right.

STAATS: Now I think that it would be well then perhaps to recapitulate the situation at the end of the Truman Administration. The President had an Executive Office of the President. The Bureau of the Budget had at that time approximately 120 people more than we have now, because of the buildup during the war period. He had the Council of Economic Advisers. He had a National Security Council, and he had a National Security Resources Board.

But there was another significant development here which I think should be brought in with respect to the Presidential staff of facilities, and that was the Korean War. Beginning in 1950, in June 1950, the outbreak of the Korean War, one of the things which became clear very soon was the fact that the President still did not have the machinery in his own office

which could coordinate the mobilization effort that we were making, particularly in the absence of certainty on whether that effort would have to be accelerated or not. No one could be sure, therefore, if the controls had to be developed in such a way as would enable us to move on to much more direct type of controls, much more elaborate and encompassing controls. It became obvious that the National Security Resources Board, a multi-headed and cumbersome agency, was not adequate for this purpose. At this time Stuart Symington, formerly Secretary of the Air Force and now Senator from Missouri, who had been head of the RFC, 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 the Cabinet about it, but the President's decision was to establish under his wartime powers a new agency which was to be headed

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by Charles Wilson, who had been Chief Executive of General Electric. Wilson subsequently appointed General Lucius Clay, who was brought back from Germany for this purpose, as his deputy, and there was developed machinery under him which was to be the center of coordination and planning in the Executive Office of the President for the Korean War period. This staff agency subsequently was merged into an Office of Civil and Defense Mobilization in the Eisenhower period, representing a combination of the residue of the National Security Resources Board and the Office of Defense Mobilization, which had been headed by Wilson. The civil defense function was added later in 1958.

Let's go back to the Truman Administration for a moment. Aside from the question of what formal machinery was established in the Korean period, the thing that impressed me most about the staff work of President Truman was the fact that it operated so informally. The leadership developed under the Special Counsel to the President, Clark Clifford, which was most significant. I suppose the issue was never faced as to whether The Assistant to the President became Chief of Staff, or whether the Special Counsel to the President was Chief of Staff. They 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 individual that the President looked to to write his speeches or to organize the speech writing for him. He handled a great deal of the legislative liaison effort with the Congress. He reviewed draft legislation which had to be seen by the President and reviewed enrolled bills as they came to the President for action. After the review by the Bureau of the Budget, they came through his office on the way to the President. After Clifford left, he was succeeded by Charles Murphy (formerly on the staff of the U.S. Senate and now Under Secretary of Agriculture). who had been his assistant and who likewise tended to follow pretty much the same work pattern.

Now, as you will recall, President Truman held staff meetings. The Bureau of the Budget did not participate in those staff meetings but we knew about them and, indeed, got a good deal of staff work thrown to us as a result of matters discussed in those meetings. In other words, there was a certain amount of effort to bring the staff around President Truman's table. He recognized that the staff had grown larger, recognized the need for some bringing

together the activities of each of his principal staff members to review the status of their work, and so on.

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Perhaps it would be of some interest to note that during this period, growing out of the National Security Act of 1947, Admiral Sidney Souers was appointed as the Executive Secretary of the National Security Council. The President had known Admiral Souers for a good many years. I think that he had his home in St. Louis and was known (like Clark Clifford) to the President long before he assumed the office of President. Souers' job was pretty clearly outlined by the statute as the Executive Secretary of the National Security Council. The title of Executive Secretary, of course, meant whatever the President wanted it to mean in terms of content of his job. In practice, President Truman used Admiral Souers primarily as his liaison with the intelligence community. He used to refer to him as his intelligence man and frequently as his "cloak-and-dagger" man. President Truman never saw the National Security Council as a major deliberating body. In dealing with various problems, he preferred to deal much more informally and, unlike President Eisenhower, he was not used to sitting down with a deliberating body and systematically going around the table for debate and statement of positions.

I do recall, however, that toward the end of President Truman's administration disagreement developed on the issue of 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 obviously was to be carried out by the next Administration. There was disagreement not only because of the differences as to the need -- the level of effort -- but also as to what kind of a foreign policy posture President Truman would 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 Defense, the three Secretaries of the Services, the Joint Chiefs of Staff, the Bureau of the Budget, 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 views of each individual present. I had never seen him to do this before, but in this particular case he made a very special point of asking every principal there what his view was and approximately what level of effort he would say there should be. This, of course, was after the substantive issue had been laid out on the table and with the pros and cons and what the program differences would be at different levels of effort. 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.

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You referred a while ago to the fact that I was out of the Bureau of the Budget for about five years. Four of those five years I was serving as Executive Director of the Operations Coordinating Board of the National Security Council. A bit of background as to this Board

will shape up some of the differences between the manner in which President Truman functioned compared with President Eisenhower.

The Operations Coordinating Board grew out of the campaign in 1952 during which, in two major speeches by the Republican Presidential nominee, General Eisenhower, charged poor coordination of the national security effort by President Truman. One of these speeches, as I recall, was in Baltimore, the other in Pittsburgh. These speeches had been prepared for him by General Robert Cutler, who had served in the Truman Administration as the Deputy Head of the Psychological Strategy Board. The Director of the Psychological Strategy Board was formerly Secretary of the Army in the Truman Administration, Gordon Gray.

The Psychological Strategy Board came about as a result of a proposal made during the Truman Administration, about 1949 or 1950, as I recall it, by the Department of Defense to set up a parallel agency to the CIA to be concerned with covert operations and psychological warfare. The State Department did not agree with this proposal. The State Department did not agree with this proposal. The State Department, in fact, was strongly opposed to it as an infringement on the policy planning responsibilities of the Department. The Defense Department was equally insistent on this, partly because they felt that military power should play a greater part in foreign policy; also, that we should capitalize on the work done in the Military Services during World War II in the field of psychological warfare; and finally because of the intelligence reports which indicated a Soviet psychological warfare buildup in the postwar period. President Truman asked that the Defense proposal be reviewed carefully, and responsibility for this review was placed on Mr. Allen Dulles, who was at that time Deputy Director of the CIA, Director of Central Intelligence Bedell Smith, Admiral Souers, and myself. We had the responsibility for analyzing this proposal and developing recommendations to the President with respect to it. The Psychological Strategy Board was the result of this review. The Psychological Strategy Board was to coordinate the work in the area of psychological strategy of the State Department, the Central Intelligence Agency, and the Department of Defense, primarily. Subsequently, when Averell Harriman became Director of Mutual Security, he was added to this group as a fourth member. The Director, and staff chief for this Board was Gordon Gray.

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Gordon Gray had left the post of Secretary of the Army and had become an Assistant to the President in the field of foreign economic policy. When this Board was established, President Truman asked him to assume the job of Director. At the ouste, one of the issues was the question of the responsibility of the Board, particularly in its relationship to President Truman; that is, was it advisory to the President or was it merely a mechanism to advise him on the agencies concerned and to facilitate their joint staff efforts in this field. But, as with many things, the result was a compromise. The Staff Director, Gordon Gray, had some separate staff, but much of his staff was assigned to him from the various agencies on a temporary basis. He occupied separate quarters on Jackson Place, which tended to get him a place in the, you might say, "Executive Office Complex". But still there was great dissatisfaction among those people who had sponsored the initial defense proposal that this Board had failed in its primary mission.

After Gordon Gray had served as Director for one year, he departed. He was replaced by Mr. Ray Allen, who had been President of the University of the State of Washington, but who announced shortly after he had accepted this position that he would be with it only one year, in order to take a position as President of the University of California. The fact that this was a political campaign year also created a good deal of weakness for the whole effort. It is a fair question whether this Board had a full opportunity to function. The fact that General Cutler, as a known Eisenhower supporter, had been the No. 2 man in the Psychological Strategy Board under Gordon Gray served to make this function and the organization to carry it out one of the issues in the campaign, heightened, of course, by the fact that the Korean War effort was still going forward.

Shortly after the election, the President-elect appointed a group to review the work of the Psychological Strategy Board and the entire question of improved coordination of overseas activities, particularly psychological warfare, psychological strategy, and foreign information. The result of that committee's efforts was to establish an Operations Coordinating Board. This Board was established by Executive order under the National Security Council. It came into being in late 1953. I trace this background partly because it was one of the first actions to establish new machinery in the Executive Office by President Eisenhower to coordinate national security activities. He concurrently formalized the National Security Council's Planning Board, which had been functioning in the Truman Administration primarily as a discussion group. In that period it was chaired

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by the Executive Secretary of the National Security Council. President Eisenhower named General Cutler, Special Assistant for National Security Affairs, as the Chairman of the Planning Board. General Bedell Smith, who had been appointed as the Under Secretary of State, became Chairman of the Operations Coordinating Board. So we had here two formal bodies with quite detailed charters, both of them functioning at very high levels, as the President's principal national security coordinating arm, below the National Security Council.

The National Security Council was to be an important body in the Eisenhower Administration. Great emphasis was placed on this point in the announcements of the President, particularly as to the number of meetings, the frequency of meetings, the length of these meetings. This was to emphasize that the new Administration was overcoming an alleged deficiency in the previous Administration.

I think that this development helped to shape up the role of the Cabinet. Here again there was a formal study headed by Carter Burgess (now President of American Machine and Foundry.) And here again the outcome was to establish a Cabinet on a more formal basis. A Cabinet Executive Secretary was appointed. There was a formal agenda; there was enlarged participation to include, for example, the Director of the Budget on a formal basis whereas in the Truman Administration he came only when there was something involving the budget in one way or another. The Cabinet Executive Secretary arranged for the preparation of action documents in advance of meetings; he prepared minutes of the meetings which were formally circulated for comments. The combination of the Cabinet, the National Security Council and

its two subordinate bodies, the Operations Coordinating Board, and the Planning Board became the framework for formalized interdepartmental effort to advise the President.

The President likewise used the title, as I earlier indicated, "The Assistant to the President." This was given to Sherman Adams. Adams was to be the principal adviser to the President on domestic affairs. No similar charter given to General Cutler, but his role and the role of the National Security Council, in fact, gave him somewhat the same kind of status in the foreign-military area, although this was obscured considerably by the role of the Secretary of State who never, in my opinion, quite accepted the role of the formalized machinery of the national security area. He seemed to be careful at all times to preserve his relationship to the President. In the meetings of the National Security Council, he very carefully but not obtrusively emphasized his role of Secretary of State.

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There was, I think, considerable deference on the part of General Cutler or the Secretary of State in this respect, particularly on the matters where the Secretary of State was personally involved, for example, on the Southeast Asia crisis, on the German question, and on our relations with the Soviets. At meetings of the National Security Council, the Secretary of State would listen politely and carefully to the reports of the Planning Board and the OCB but was careful, it seemed to me, to assert his own position as Secretary of State. This usually came down to a matter of emphasis and indication of desire to say he reserved his position on the matter, or his belief as to the need for further study, or to emphasize the complexity of an issue and therefore one where we had to "play it by ear" or where "we had to watch it carefully."

The reports of the National Security Council, of course, were the official action documents, that is, these were the reports staffed out through the Planning Board and brought to the President and approved in the National Security Council. In many instances, particularly where the Secretary of State seemed to be reticent or reluctant to commit himself on the matter that had been staffed out and brought before the President, the President would say, "Well, the Secretary and I will talk about this further," so that even though the elaborate machinery was there, I think in all fairness, the President still recognized the prime responsibility of the Secretary of State. I think he also followed the same practice with the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff with respect to military advance.

This elaborate machinery, criticized a good deal later on, had many difficulties about it, but it still filled a need which I think some people have understated in that it brought together at a level below the President an opportunity for a full admixture of thinking among all concerned, particularly Defense and State. It provided, for the first time something which had been lacking almost completely up to that point, namely a systematic input from the intelligence community into our foreign policy thinking. I say it had *almost* been completely lacking. The CIA was new. It hadn't been a separate agency very long and had no clearly established liaison channels up to that point in either the State or the Defense Department. Partly as a result of the additional experience and partly as a result of this effort in the Eisenhower Administration, this problem no longer exists to a great degree, even though the formal machinery is gone. In other words, what I am saying is that I do not think that the

absence of that machinery today constitutes a severe handicap to the CIA in terms of its contribution to foreign-military policy.

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In summary, I would characterize the differences between the Truman Administration's method of operation and the Eisenhower Administration, during the period that Sherman Adams was there as benign one which was much more rigidly channeled through a Chief of Staff than it was under President Truman, somewhat more disassociation by the President from direct discussion with his Department heads on these issues, much less opportunity for individuals to come to the President as individuals than there was under President Truman. The situation changed somewhat after Sherman Adams left and General Persons assumed the title of the Assistant to the President.

General Persons (formerly liaison for the Air Force with Congress, and subsequently Adams' deputy) was a much more relaxed individual and very soon adopted the practice of holding preliminary discussions and then taking the group concerned in to see the President. Instead of saying, for example, as Sherman Adams would say, "I will talk to the President about this matter and let you know," he would say, "Let's have a discussion", then would adjourn the session and go see the President, or would say, "We will arrange to see the President at such and such time." In some instances, I am certain, Persons would have had a discussion with the President in the interval so that President Eisenhower was acquainted with different points of view in advance. But still there was the opportunity for everyone to argue their position directly before the President. This was a development which took place in the last two years of the Administration. And in the case of foreign policy, I would say that the development was affected greatly by the death of Secretary Dulles. President Eisenhower assumed a much more direct role in foreign affairs than he had up to that point.

To me, sitting in on many of the meetings of the NSC, this became quite noticeable, that is the degree to which the President was familiar with cables, reports, and detailed developments. He talked more and asked more questions. Therefore, the role of the Secretary of State became somewhat different. Secretary Christian Herter was more reluctant to state strong positions than was Secretary Dulles. The President had come to assume much more personal interest in the responsibilities, particularly after a couple of his trips -- I am thinking particularly about the trip he took to Asia. This began as a matter of degree, but I believe quite noticeable to all of us who were present. There was, in summary, a modification in the importance of the coordinating machinery toward the end of the Eisenhower Administration, partly as a result of the death of Secretary Dulles and partly as a result of the departure of Sherman Adams.

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There was one thing which, I believe, we can learn from the Eisenhower Administration, with respect to the Presidential staff, and that is the importance of each agency knowing who to deal with in the White House staff, short of the President. This was not as carefully worked out in the Truman Administration as it was in the Eisenhower Administration. There

has been some confusion and difficulty in both the Kennedy Administration and in the Johnson Administration. There has been some confusion and difficulty in both the Kennedy Administration and in the Johnson Administration on this score. The fact that there were three assistants, for example, to Sherman Adams and General Persons who had fairly cleared defined areas of responsibility for dealing with agencies simplified the problem a great deal as far as the agencies were concerned in getting problems and issues to the White House.

TURNER: Elmer, could you describe for us some of the steps that were taken to assure a smooth transition in the staff work of the President between the Eisenhower Administration and the Kennedy Administration in the closing months of 1960?

STAATS: As you know, I returned to the Budget Bureau in late 1958 and I became Deputy Director shortly thereafter. The Bureau of the Budget had undergone some changes during this period but it still had been retained as the basic general staff agency to the President. I saw little basic diminution in the role of the Bureau. I believe from what I had been told that the Bureau's role had declined somewhat in that early part of the Eisenhower Administration, partly because of the development of the role of The Assistant to the President. However, the Budget Director, Mr. Joseph Dodge, had the confidence of the President and I believe during the period of time that he was here he maintained close contact with the President. He made it very clear to the President in the early part of the Eisenhower Administration that he found the staff of the Bureau of the Budget highly qualified, objective, and able and willing to serve the new Administration.

I served for a brief transition period from January 1953 to the end of April 1953, and came to know Mr. Dodge. He was tremendously impressed, for example, by the fact that we had no record of the politics of any of our principal staff of the Bureau of the Budget. He had come into the Bureau before the change of administration; in fact, about eight days after the election of President Eisenhower and was invited to participate with us in all of the discussions we had leading up to the budget which was submitted by President Truman. He had an opportunity to see and work with the staff of the Bureau first hand. I think he was impressed by the amount of information

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and the objectivity of the staff work of the Bureau. He was, therefore, able to say to President Eisenhower when he assumed office that he did not wish to see any basic change in either the staffing or the direction of the work of the staff of the Bureau of the Budget. This solved a problem which none of us had known the answer to previously. Because the Budget Bureau had been moved into the Executive Office of the President during President Roosevelt's Administration, there had not been a change of Administration from party to party during the life of the Executive Office of the President. The Bureau was in a controversial position vis-a-vis the President, obviously because of the campaign issues centering around the budget. This was a crucial period in the history of the Bureau of the Budget. Under a different set of circumstances, a different Director could have gone far toward dismantling



the staff of the Bureau of the Budget and altering its role as the principal staff arm to the President.

Since I was out of the Bureau of the Budget, I, of course, cannot account for the approach of the two subsequent Directors but, returning in 1958 under Mr. Stans (formerly Deputy Postmaster General) as the Director, I found the staff of the Bureau of the Budget in a strong position. Consequently at the time of the preparation for the change of Administration which we knew would take place, either Republican or Democratic in 1961, the Bureau of the Budget systematically in the summer of 1960 made careful records of campaign pledges, platforms, and all statements which related to the budget and the legislative program in the new Administration. We agreed that there should be prepared in the Bureau documents called "transitional papers" on a large number of issues and problems dealing with the budget, organization, management, legislation, in other words, on all of the matters which come within the purview of the Bureau of the Budget.

Now we recognized that the new budget had to be the budget of the incoming President in the sense that it was still possible for him to modify or amend the budget. Yet a formal document had to be submitted by the outgoing President.

The transitional papers were to serve as the background for the new Administration on these issues. They set forth alternative courses of action, the budget implications of alternative decisions, the history of the issue, and so on. In other words, they were designed to be helpful background documents to enable the new Administration to get under way faster and to enable it to avoid some of the pitfalls that otherwise might be encountered. Decisions would have to be

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made early in the new Administration if the budget submitted by the outgoing President was to be modified in time to meet the schedule of Congress which had already started hearings on the new budget. In other words, the new Administration faced a very tight time schedule.

Now, one of the interesting stories in the transition from the Truman Administration to the Eisenhower Administration was that as soon as the election outcome was known, Mr. Lawton, the Director of the Budget, and I went to see President Truman and indicated that we felt that, because of the short timetable which would be faced by the new Administration, it was highly important that the President-elect name at his first opportunity an individual to come into the Bureau of the Budget to observe what we were doing, either as the Budget Director or as someone who would be in a position to work with the Budget Director. President Truman got on the telephone immediately and attempted to reach President-elect Eisenhower. He found that the President-elect was on his way to Colorado for a vacation, so he dictated a telegram to him to this effect, and eight days later Mr. Dodge was in the office next to mine reading the budgetary documents and participating in our staff discussions. Similarly, in the change from President Eisenhower's Administration to President Kennedy's Administration, this point was likewise emphasized and Dave Bell (formerly in the Bureau of the Budget and an Administrative Assistant to President Truman) was appointed to the post in time to enable him to sit in on a great many of our discussions. He had an office also, either this office or the one next to ours here, Bob, in which he observed and participated in

much the same manner. There had been established the bridge from President Truman to President Eisenhower which set the pattern for a similar bridge to this Administration.

These transition papers served a very useful purpose not only for Dave Bell; they served a similar purpose for other appointees in the Kennedy Administration -- Ted Sorensen, Mike Feldman, Lee White, Larry O'Brien, and others.

One of the actions taken very soon was a memorandum (I believe there was a memorandum,) from President-elect bKennedy to the new appointees to establish meetings between the Budget Director-designate and themselves to review the work that was going forward in the preparation of the budget. Transition papers were made available to those individuals, I think. Out of these meetings the agency heads were able to identify a number of things that they wished to pursue further with our staff and with the individuals that they were planning to bring into

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the Administration with them. There was set in motion a whole series of discussions and further meetings. I recall, for example, almost two complete full days with Secretary of Defense McNamara and similar meetings with Secretary Ribicoff and Secretary Freeman, and with virtually all of the principal appointees of the new Administration.

The White House staff was able to identify issues and problems for the President-elect in a way which expedited the decisions on the President's position in his forthcoming State of the Union Message and the revisions in the Budget. The President-elect, as you know, had appointed a series of task groups made up of people who have worked either with him directly in the campaign or individual whose advice he sought. These were, of course, available in a great many of the cases. In some instances they came along a little bit late for their maximum usefulness.

In some instances, the cooperation was such between the outgoing and the incoming Administration as to make this easier than it was in other cases. The new Presidential transition fund, for which appropriations are made this year for the first time, should facilitate this kind of a transition in the future.

Ted Sorensen soon was to be the catalyst around which most of the program changes were developed. He was assisted by Mr. Feldman and Mr. White very ably. Mr. Sorensen developed by the end of December a list of issues facing the President early in his Administration on various program matters. He had before him the documents prepared by the Bureau of the Budget, some of the task force reports and, of course, various campaign pledges and platform pledges. Toward the end of December, the President-elect was at Palm Beach, Florida. A meeting was arranged in Palm Beach by Mr. Sorensen at which these transition papers were used very heavily. He prepared an agency for a meeting which was attended by Dave Bell, myself, Mike Feldman, Sorensen, and Dick Neustadt (Columbia University and later consultant to Budget Director and the President) in an effort to obtain decisions needed in order to proceed with drafts of the State of the Union Message and to begin staff work on legislative proposals and modifications in the budget. This meeting was participated also in part by Douglas Dillon (formerly Under Secretary of State) who was in Florida on vacation, for discussion of some of the budget issues and the tax issues. The

significance of this, in my opinion, was that a great deal of useful staff work had been accomplished at a

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time which enabled the President to reach conclusions or tentative conclusions in many areas which otherwise would take a great deal more time to accomplish.

TURNER: It is my impression that there was a significant change in the role of the Bureau of the Budget as between the Eisenhower and Kennedy Administrations, and a difference in the type of staff in the Bureau of the Budget with somewhat more emphasis perhaps upon accountants and accounting control in the Eisenhower Administration and upon economists and economic analysis in the Kennedy Administration. Does this impression conform to your own views?

STAATS: In part at least, it does. There is no question that the Budget Bureau role in this Administration, that is the Kennedy Administration and the Johnson Administration, has been much more heavily on the program side and on the analysis of the budget in relationship to the economy. Greater emphasis has been placed upon the dovetailing of the work of the Budget Bureau and the Council of Economic Advisers, for example, than I believe took place certainly in the early part of the Eisenhower Administration. I believe, also, it would be fair to say that the work of the Bureau at that time was affected heavily by the background of the Budget Directors.

The first Budget Director in the Eisenhower Administration had a banking background. I believe this probably was a reflection of the fact that it was a business Administration. Subsequently, with change of Budget Directors, there were three individuals with accounting backgrounds. Although Mr. Stans, I think, approached his problem somewhat differently because he had a tour of duty of perhaps two to three years in one of the large departments where he had been thrown into a little different exposure as to the role of the budget. As Deputy Postmaster General, he had been thrown into a tremendous management problem. Therefore, I think he approached his job in the Budget Bureau in a somewhat different way than his two predecessors, but still I would share your view that there has been a greater program emphasis certainly in this Administration. For example, in your own appointment as Assistant Director of the Bureau, there was a deliberate effort to bring someone to the job with a background in economics. The expansion of the Fiscal Analysis and the Economic Analysis staff of the Office of Budget Review is a further reflection of this. Since your departure, of course,

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Charlie Schultze's (Maryland University) appointment and now Bill Capron's (formerly with Council of Economic Advisers) appointment -- all this, I think, reflects thinking of the need for this kind of background at high levels of the Bureau of the Budget. The Bureau of the Budget in both the Kennedy and Johnson Administrations has functioned very closely with

the White House. The role of the Bureau in providing service to the White House staff, in providing background information and statements of the pros and cons on issues, and in following up on decisions to be sure that they are carried out has been traditional, I would say, going back through all of this period. But the thing which is perhaps new in emphasis is the role of the Bureau in the formulation of legislative proposals and the development of program issues and participating in a very direct way in the White House staff level discussions -- and with the President -- in reaching conclusions. These differences are hard to describe except in terms of examples and illustrations; they are hard to describe because they are matters of emphasis. It is difficult to quantify in other words what I am talking about.

TURNER: I'm not sure of this but I don't recall the Bureau of the Budget having the initial responsibility for drafting a major Presidential message prior to the Kennedy Administration.

STAATS: Well, this was true -- what you say is true, I think. But you will recall that, during the Truman Administration when Dave Bell was here for example, before he went to the White House, he played a major part in the writing not only the Budget Message but also working closely with the Council on the Economic Report. I believe, in part, his decision to go to the White House and the decision of Charlie Murphy to bring him over was that he had worked so actively on these messages.

TURNER: Yes, but what I mean is that the Bureau of the Budget was not as a Bureau assigned the primary responsibility for formulating Presidential messages, as it was in the Kennedy Administration. The Bureau took the primary responsibility for the consumer message and, in fact, for the transportation message. Although the first draft of the transportation message was formulated in the Department of Commerce, when it was found to be unacceptable, the President asked the Bureau of the Budget to take over the job de novo and draft a new message, which they did. There are several other examples.

STAATS: There are several other areas, too. The natural resources message, I believe, first draft was prepared here; in fact, I think the Bureau became the major source of staff effort in the very early part of the Kennedy Administration -- the preparation of not only background papers but also first drafts of messages.

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I couldn't be positive that this is "new" in the sense that this would be the first time that this has been done; I'm sure that some of this must have been done during the Eisenhower Administration but, again, I think as a matter of emphasis your statement is correct.

TURNER: Could you add a little information on the way in which President Kennedy utilized the formal instrumentalities of policymaking in the National Security Council and the Cabinet, as compared with his predecessor in office?

STAATS: I think what I have said so far has been in the way of emphasis on the point that President Kennedy did not use the formal machinery to nearly the same degree that President Eisenhower had used this machinery. To understand this, you have to point out two things: One was the difference of the personality of the President himself and his own methods of operation. He, I recall, in the sessions at Palm Beach, went into this in some length more or less ruminating in his own mind as to, in effect, how does the President spend his day? How does he organize it? For example, he raised the questions of the number of cases where the President would schedule formal meetings as against the number of cases where he would simply be talking to people. I recall he asked a question, perhaps it was of Dick Neustadt, who had written a book about the Presidency, as to how does the President manage to hold to a planning schedule? How does he arrange to spend his day? Who organizes it? -- and this sort of thing. He was obviously puzzling how he could relate his own work habits to the fact that he would be President and therefore in demand by everybody who wanted to see him.

I think the personality of the President has to really take first place in any effort to evaluate the method by which the President functions. On the other hand, there had been some reaction to the overformalization as it was called in the Eisenhower Administration. This came out particularly on the foreign side where, in contrast to the criticism that took place of President Truman in the Eisenhower campaign that this machinery had not been used sufficiently. The criticism arose, in part, as a result of the controversy about the individual foreign policy matters. The organizational issue was raised particularly by a Subcommittee of the Senate Government Operations Committee, chaired by Senator Jackson, which issued a number of reports which took to task the Eisenhower Administration's emphasis upon formal machinery. The general purport of the argument behind these reports was that the machinery had gotten

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in the way of adequate personal contact by the President with the responsible operating officials and alleged inadequate exposure by the President to the pros and cons on individual issues, that the machinery tended to water down issues and had, in effect, resulted in the lowest common denominator-type advice, that is, advice which everybody can agree to. Whether this criticism is fair or not is immaterial. The main point is that these reports received considerable headlines and obviously, with the change of Administration, there was a desire to make changes.

Also, I think that the advisers to the President such as McGeorge Bundy and Secretary Rusk were persuaded that the State Department could and should assume a larger role in coordination of our foreign affairs effort. It followed, therefore, that the machinery of the National Security Council should be minimized. There was no decision taken initially to abolish the Planning Board and the OCB in any formal way, but this decision was made within a matter of six months. In the meantime, while there were meetings with the National Security Council and there were meetings which tended to be in the nature of substitutes for the OCB, that is, regular luncheon meetings held in Mr. Bundy's office or in this building;

nevertheless, these were not assumed to be meetings of the OCB. Now these informal meetings continued well on beyond the demise of both the Planning Board and the OCB but they were never formalized, and as time went on, even these meetings have fallen into disuse. There are now staff meetings which Mr. Bundy has of his own staff to which certain other agency representatives sit in on to exchange information and ideas, etc.

The President, as you know, had Ted Reardon (subsequently on staff of FDIC) serve as the Staff Secretary of the Cabinet for some time. Reardon subsequently left the White House staff and no one has been designated to assume this role. The role of the Cabinet has been diminished also by the fact that there are no regular meetings of the Cabinet nor is there a formalized agenda, record of the meetings. Early in the Kennedy Administration there were efforts by Reardon to set up agendas for the meetings of the Cabinet. I recall sitting in on a number of those meetings where President Kennedy had agendas before him, but it was quite clear that he was impatient with them and much more interested in getting on to current matters on his mind. These Cabinet meetings were not as long by any means as in the Eisenhower Administration. Perhaps this helps to point up the difference in the methods by which the two men operated in relationship to the Cabinet.

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TURNER: Did President Kennedy use the Cabinet as a decision-making instrumentality?

STAATS: Not in the same way that the Eisenhower Administration Cabinet was used for this purpose. Since the Budget Bureau had been a participant in the Cabinet meetings in the Eisenhower Administration and on an ad hoc basis in the Truman Administration, the Bureau has continued to be invited to the Cabinet meetings in the Kennedy Administration. The Kennedy Cabinet meetings, as I have said, were nowhere nearly as formal, nearly as fixed; in short they did not serve the same purpose. Many years ago in the Roosevelt Administration it was said that people come to the Cabinet meetings in order to see the President before or after the meetings, that this is the function that they performed. I think that this applied to the Kennedy Administration Cabinet meetings. Individuals would try to catch the President either as he came in or out on matters that they wanted to check out with him and for which they had not arranged an appointment. I don't mean to imply by this that President Kennedy was not accessible. My own feeling is that as far as accessibility is concerned, he was probably the most accessible to subordinates of any one of the four Presidents that I have served under. His work habits were quite different and it was just as likely that meetings would take place in his bedroom during the times he was suffering from his injury, or in his sitting room upstairs, or in the outer office, or in his office, or in the Cabinet room. These were many times arranged on the spur of the moment and if we had...

TURNER: You're referring here to -- not to Cabinet meetings but...

STAATS: Only in the sense that the Cabinet meetings afforded the opportunity for people to do business with the President rather than in a formal deliberative

sense. The Cabinet and the National Security Council tended to meet less frequently as time went by. There was no fixed timetable as was the case in the Eisenhower Administration. The thing which was kept in common with both the Eisenhower and the Truman Administration was the fact that the Counsel to the President in both these Administrations served as the focal point for speeches, legislative programs and actions on enrolled bills which came to him.

In the Eisenhower Administration, there was Jerry Morgan (Deputy Assistant to the President) who, under Adams and subsequently under Persons, performed this same work. He did not have, perhaps, as close a relationship to the President that

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Clark Clifford and Charlie Murphy had had in the Truman Administration, nor the same relationship that Ted Sorensen had in the Kennedy Administration. This role, however, was the same in that it encompassed the same "package" of responsibilities. The reason that this is important is that this "package" has tended to center in one person many of the crucial processes of Presidential decision making. I think an analysis would indicate that more Presidential decisions have been expressed in speeches or actions on draft legislation going to Congress, Messages, State of the Union, Budget, Economic Reports, Special Messages, and statements that he makes on enrolled bills, than any other single process; much more so than press conference, for example, or statements that he would make when he meets with delegations on different problems, announcements made by groups after the visit with the President, etc. So this is a crucial process and a crucial package of responsibilities for any individual.

The Budget Bureau has, of course, worked closely with these individuals because of the responsibilities we have had on legislative coordination, budget, and on program matters that are part and parcel of the budget process.

The Bureau's relationship to the White House has been affected also by difference in the relationship of the President and the Congress. President Eisenhower relied very heavily on his staff for liaison with the Congress -- Bryce Harlow (in charge of legislative liaison for White House), primarily. Jerry Persons had very close relations with the Congress and had also served in this capacity and particularly so after he succeeded Sherman Adams. Larry O'Brien assumed this role for President Kennedy. The President having been in the Senate made a difference here in this relationship. But even so, there was a great deal, I think, that O'Brien and his staff learned from Harlow and patterned their staff somewhat along the lines he established. The workload on the Budget staff in answering inquiries addressed to this staff has been very substantial in both Administrations.

President Kennedy had far less contact with the Congress directly than President Johnson because of President Johnson's own personal role he played there. President Kennedy was regarded by many of the people in the Congress as a relative newcomer. But the difference which I would emphasize is one of background and personal proclivities; however, the institutional arrangement established in the Eisenhower Administration is probably there to stay, partly because of the importance of direct White House contact with

the members of Congress in relation to accomplishing the President's legislative objectives. I don't see much diminution in the need for staff working in this area.

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TURNER: Elmer, could you give us some indication of who the key people were in the staff of the President, defining the term "staff" rather broadly to extend beyond the White House staff and beyond the executive offices in some cases. That is, who were the individuals who influenced the President most directly and most frequently and most significantly? What were their respective roles?

STAATS: We've talked about the role played by Sorensen in this picture and the fact that he played this role not only because of his relation to the President, but because of the vital processes that he was concerned with -- legislation, speech-making, and so on. I think that one way to give this particular role a bit more concreteness is the fact that we had many meetings with Sorensen in which Sorensen would meet with key people in the Executive Office and the agencies concerned to hammer out the issues involved in legislative programs. Everyone understood that he was doing this as a result of the President's request, with the President's knowledge, and that 9 chances out of 10 whatever we came out with would be Presidential policy. Here around his small conference table would be Cabinet officers, Dave Bell almost without exception, Walter Heller (in most cases if the issue involved anything in the domestic area), Larry O'Brien or one of his staff and, of course, Ted Sorensen's own immediate staff (Feldman and White). But the thing that needs to be understood about these meetings is that it was always clearly fixed as to who had the followup, who would prepare the next draft. Sorensen always kept notes. He would always summarize, go down through his notes before we were finished so that there could be no misunderstanding on conclusions or next steps. If so, he could raise the issue at that point.

The thing that impressed all of us as we went along was Sorensen's ability to absorb information rapidly, his keen analytical mind, and his articulateness and the fact that he was never satisfied with a draft. He always worked it over and it ended up being largely his own personal product. He had a tremendous capacity to absorb details. Therefore, by virtue of his ability and his relationship to the President and the processes with which he was concerned led to the conclusion that he was the key man on these issues.

There was a practice that prevailed for a good many months at the beginning of the Kennedy Administration whereby Dave Bell and Ted Sorensen and McGeorge Bundy would arrange staff meetings in the sense that they would get together to compare notes as to the status of various matters. This tended to become kind

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of an inner White House-Executive Office coordinating device although it never had any formalization and had not been requested by the President in any way. It was simply a device hit upon by the three individuals to exchange information and collaborate on the various staff efforts.



TURNER: Am I correct in the impression that Dave Bell as Director of the Bureau played an extremely important role as an adviser to the President in a very broad sense as well as being Budget Director per se?

STAATS: Yes, as you know, the President had not known Dave Bell before he was appointed, but I think he very rapidly gained confidence in him. I don't think there was any doubt that on domestic issues Sorensen, Heller, and Bell, and Sorensen and Bundy in the foreign area tended to become key sources of advice to the President. I don't mean to diminish in any way the role of some of the principle operating heads; I am speaking now of the Executive Office of the President. On any major matters on which we were raising a budget issue with the President we did not do so without checking it out in advance with Sorensen or one of his staff. Similarly, we could always expect to get a very early rough draft of messages and speeches from Sorensen for checking out and for comment. These tended to become operating devices by which we related our work to that of Sorensen's. Then too, of course, there were many, many meetings at the White House by other officials that had been initiated in Sorensen's office for the same purposes -- with Feldman, for example -- in the area of the consumer problem on which President Kennedy had made important commitments in his campaign. Lee White was given assignments in the conservation area, the water resources area, the civil rights area, and so on. But here in the hands of three people in the White House almost complete responsibility for pulling together the President's legislative program, backed up by the budget staff, was centered. It became a potent arrangement for developing program and policy.

Now there were many matters that we soon got to learn that President Kennedy had relied very heavily on Kenny O'Donnell to advise him. More frequently than not, these had their origin because of the key concern of some committee in Congress or some outside group. From where we sat, O'Donnell served more and more in the role of a trouble-shooter, a person to put out fires, to deal with problem situations, which he did very effectively and very quickly. We soon learned that on these kinds of matters we didn't bother Sorensen; we would take them directly to Kenny O'Donnell.

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On legislative matters -- the timetable to Congress, or whether or not we would reply to Senator X at this particular point or in this particular way, we touched base with Larry O'Brien and usually did not bother anybody else. But many times we would take issues in to the President and he would get on the phone with Sorensen or O'Brien and he would have them join us -- or if we knew that all were involved when we went to see the President -- we made it a point to get it mailed down with O'Donnell as to who should be in on this session with the President. He would line it up or he would ask us to line it up. That was the way it was done. These meetings with the President, particularly on the key budget decisions that were taken in the early part of 1963 where the changes were benign made in the previous year's budget --

TURNER: Do you mean 1963?

STAATS: I mean 1961 -- sorry. Changes and modifications took place in the budget. From the military side, for example, we had a large number of meetings in the Fish Room around the table with McNamara, Bundy, Sorensen, Dave Bell and myself and others where we tried to reach as near agreement as we could. We knew generally the President's thinking. There was no set pattern by which these matters got to the President, but Sorensen was involved in practically all of these meetings.

TURNER: Would you say that Sorensen was almost an alter-ego of the President?

STAATS: I wouldn't put it in terms of an alter-ego relationship, although I think in more cases than not if we talked to Sorensen on some matter we could predict what the President's thinking was likely to be, but Sorensen never attempted in any sense of the word to try to set himself up as a person who could speak for the President. I don't recall any cases where he put himself in such a role. If there was any question he would say he would check with the President or say "Why don't you go check with the President?" He would give you what background he had on it, but I don't recall that he ever attempted to fix his role as being the intermediary.

TURNER: No, I didn't mean that. His thinking and even his manner of talking and writing was so similar to the President that if you took a matter up with Sorensen you got a pretty strong clue as to what Mr. Kennedy's decision was.

STAATS: Oh yes, there's no question about that. But, in their respective fields, you could get the same kind of

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judgment from Larry O'Brien and Kenny O'Donnell. The thing that has to be understood is that these three fellows worked very closely with each other and they also met very frequently with the President so that, in their respective areas, they probably would have as clear an understanding of the thinking of the President as anyone could have.

I haven't mentioned one other thing that relates to President Kennedy's work habits. He liked to work with memoranda. He had no fetish about the length of the memoranda, but we found he could usually read a memorandum faster than we who had written it could re-read it ourselves. He had a tremendous capability of a quick read-through a memorandum, to sort out the essential issues. Frequently he would say, "Well, we have these three matters or these five matters to discuss." On many instances where we had to get his signature or obtain a quick decision on a budget matter, a simple question or two was all that he needed while he was doing business with somebody else. Many of our meetings would be "in and out" meetings -- very fast, where he would simply want to know who was interested Member of Congress, whether we checked with so and so, or if we checked this and this matter.

He learned, in other words, the answer to the question he had raised with us at Palm Beach very fast. "How do I spend my time?" How do I deal with all these matters that come to the President? He learned how to sort out those things that were essential from those things which could be settled quickly and without much deliberation. I think he realized very soon that we tried to have completed staff work when we brought matters in for decisions. He was reasonably certain without having to ask the question that we had checked out with everybody who might have been concerned in the Executive Office as well as the affected agency. I'm sure this was partly the explanation as to why he was able to make decisions quickly.

TURNER: President Kennedy was well known for his very lively interest in cultural and artistic affairs. I understand that you had one experience which evidenced this interest in a very real way. That is the proposal to build a new Executive Office Building on Jackson Place in a fashion that might involve tearing down several buildings there of historical interest. Could you recall for the record some of your experiences with the President in this regard?

STAATS: I think the incident we are discussing here is very revealing in that it brings out the President's interest in

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the beauty of the Nation's Capital. It also reflects his own willingness to get into some of these matters personally -- to make them a personal matter, rather than turning them over to somebody else.

There had long been plans for an additional Executive Office Building to be located in the block just across from the White House to the north and west, bounded by historic Jackson Place, Pennsylvania Avenue, 17th Street and H Street. Located in this block is the Decatur Museum, the Blair House, Blair-Lee House which for a good many years have been Presidential guest houses for foreign visitors and was the home of President Truman during the restoration of the White House.

A number of architectural plans had been drawn to provide for the new building. The old historic buildings on Jackson Place had been acquired by the Government several years ago; some of them had been vacated. The plan which had been drawn for the GSA, which is responsible for construction of Government buildings, and made available to President Kennedy when he came into office, would have removed virtually all of these buildings except for the Decatur Museum, the Blair House, and the Blair-Lee House, and would have located in the major portion of the space a large modernistic limestone type building. This building would have dwarfed the other buildings, aside from destroying a number of the old historic buildings. The President became interested in this plan at a very early date, in part because of the interest of an old friend of his in Georgetown, the artist-painter Bill Walton. Bill Walton had no official responsibility for the matter at this time, but had visited with the President on a personal basis about the matter. Probably more important was the interest of Mrs. Kennedy in these matters. You will recall her interest in the refurbishing of the White

House and the preservation of the antiquities associated with the early period of the history of the White House -- to bring back either the original furnishings or furnishings of the same period. Therefore, when the plans for the building for Jackson Place were well along it was agreed that President Kennedy should have an opportunity to review them. His consternation with the original plans was quite evident from the beginning. Therefore, he requested that new plans be drawn more in keeping with the original architecture and also preserve as much as possible the buildings already there.

While this was in process, he was visited by a friend of his from California, Mr. Warnecke, a well known and highly reputable architect in San Francisco. He asked Mr. Warnecke,

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on a personal basis, if he would take a look at these plans, go over and take a look at the square, and let him have his reaction as to the best type of development for the area.

Mr. Warnecke not only took a look but spent a week or 10 days in Washington. In that time he came up with a sketch of his own of a different type of building which would preserve all of the old historic buildings on the square, removing only the four buildings built in the last 30 years. The President liked the plan and asked him to pursue the matter with GSA. A contract was entered into with his firm. As a result, a completely new design was developed.

I recall in particular one interesting aspect of this that had to do with the old Court of Claims Building, a red brick and sandstone structure (and not too appealing, to me) located on the corner of 17th Street and Pennsylvania Avenue. The issue was whether that building would be retained or demolished or something else placed there instead. The President's first reaction was "Let's go take a look at it." He got his car and took a trip around the block. His conclusion was that the building should be torn down. He had not reckoned with the thinking of his wife on the subject, who appealed to him not to tear the building down. The result was a "unanimous" vote to keep the Court of Claims Building.

The new plan will be not only to keep all the old historic buildings but will provide a new Executive Office Building, using brick instead of limestone, in keeping with the rest of the square. Lighting and street fixtures of the original Jackson Place will be provided. I think this incident is revealing in the amount of time, interest, and personal involvement that President Kennedy and Mrs. Kennedy took in the restoration of the square. The building is now under way and everyone seems to be well pleased with the outcome.

TURNER: I understand that President Kennedy also took a very real interest in the Year 2000 Plan. Could you give us a few recollections on this?

STAATS: The Year 2000 Plan was developed to provide a long-range plan for the development of the Nation's Capital and its environs. The physical development of the City of Washington has not had a basic relook for many years. The idea behind the Year 2000 Plan was to set a pattern for the future growth of the

Nation's Capital, recognizing that the Federal Government will play the dominant role in that development. The location of Federal structure, Federal

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decision with respect to construction of highways, etc., are most important aspects of the physical planning of the Nation's Capital. The President, therefore, had a more than usual interest. He directed that a long-term plan be developed by the National Capital Planning Commission, working with the planning boies of Maryland and Virginia. The result was a very excellent plan which he personally approved and directed the agency heads concerned to carry out. He requested the Budget Bureau to follow up to make sure that actions were taken consistent with the Year 2000 Plan. This fitted in with two other innovations. One was a directive to develop a plan for renovating historic Pennsylvania Avenue, the route of parades and ceremonial functions, which has deteriorated on the north side badly over many decades.

The President, therefore, appointed a well known group to study what could be done by the way of developing a re-planning for Pennsylvania Avenue. I do not need to go into the details of the plan other than to say that this is an ambitious idea and will require a great deal of Federal capital as well as private capital to carry it out. The plan, completed subsequent to the President's death, has been submitted to President Johnson. President Johnson has directed that the matter be carefully studied. I believe he fully supports the concept that President Kennedy had developed with respect to it.

The third matter that I would like to mention, reflecting his interest in the Capital, is the appointment for the first time on his staff, of a Special Assistant for National Capital Area Matters. In part, this decision reflected concern among many of the groups in the Washington area that there was no single point in the Federal Government which could advise the President on all the matters relating to the National Capital Area, embracing racial relations, the physical development of the Capital, the appointment of local officials, and so forth. The appointing of an individual who was well known in the area, Mr. Charles Horsky, to serve in this capacity provided for the first time an individual on the President's own staff with full-time responsibility for the oversight of the Federal Government's interests in connection with the Nation's Capital.

TURNER: One of the issues that President Kennedy had to concern himself with in his years in office was the matter of civil defense and I have in mind now both the substantive aspects of it -- that is, how extensive a civil defense program we needed, that its character should be, what it's urgency was -- and the organizational aspects of it -- who should have the responsibility for doing what needs to be done. Could you put on the record here some of your recollections about President Kennedy's interests and attitudes in this respect?

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STAATS: The organizational aspects of civil defense are significant to students of

organization, management, and public administration. The major significance, as I see it, of this issue which arose early in the new Administration because of an organizational issue, was the question of how large a program we should have. How should the civil defense program relate itself to the military preparedness of the country? And to what extent could political support be marshaled for a civil defense program? Civil defense has never been an issue with wide appeal in this country. This civilian population was never directly a part of the battlefield in World War II, although there was an extensive civil defense organization established in that period. But civil defense was not considered a real national security need as far as most of the Congress is concerned. Congress probably has accurately reflected the views of the majority of the population on this score. A number of groups such as the Rand Corporation and a number of individuals have written extensively on the illogic of a vast military preparedness program with little concrete effort taken to protect the population from nuclear attack.

The civil defense program had for a period after World War II limped along as a small operation, a separate program. In 1958, in the Eisenhower Administration, it was located in the Executive Office of the President. The decision to locate the function in the Executive Office of the President was a controversial one but the logic behind it was that the function pervaded all aspects of Government from the standpoint of continuity of Government, including, for example, food, power, water supplies, transportation, as well as shelter. The argument also was that this function should be located in the Executive Office of the President and associated with the mobilization planning responsibilities of the Office of Defense Mobilization.

The issue, therefore, when President Kennedy took office was whether he wanted to continue this function in that location, but more significantly, associated with the decision, was the decision as to his program in the civil defense area. He disliked having an operating program of this type in the Executive Office of the President; he visualized it as being a small advisory group to him -- a staff arm to the President -- but he was also motivated, I think, in his final decision by a much more pertinent consideration, namely the relationship of the function to the military services. I believe that he was convinced that the public would not support an adequate civil defense program which involved any kind of shelter program except as a part of our military defense.

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The decision to associate the function with the Department of Defense, and placing a responsibility there undoubtedly, it was argued, would relate civil defense in the mind of the average citizen to its military importance. For the first time it would place responsibility in the Secretary of Defense and in the Joint Chiefs of Staff for a discharge of a function which many felt was an important part of continental defense.

The President, in a number of meetings with Bureau of the Budget, McGeorge Bundy, Ted Sorensen, Carl Kaysen, and Secretary of Defense McNamara, considered these alternatives. He was finally persuaded that this function was important, and that its chances of succeeding would not be great unless it were made a responsibility of an operating department, and that the logic of its location in the Defense Department was convincing.

Secretary McNamara assumed this function somewhat reluctantly because of his concern as to whether the transfer would stir up concern about “military control” of the civilian population in time of emergency. While President Kennedy was likewise concerned with this, he was finally persuaded to take the action, but on the basis that the function’s direction would be preserved for a top civilian within the Defense Department. Initially, this function was located as an Assistant Secretary of Defense for Civil Defense, Mr. Steuart Pittman, who had clear-cut charter to preserve this as a civilian function of the Defense Department.

Thus the transfer of responsibility, while taken as an organizational decision, had behind it a careful review with respect to the role of civil defense in the United States.

Related to this, of course, has been the thinking about civilian defense as related to other aspects of continental defense, particularly the decision with respect to the anti-ballistic missile which has been under development for several years in the Defense Department. It had been recognized, I think, generally in the Defense Department, that the deployment of an anti-ballistic missile employing a nuclear warhead would not be accepted without some measure of protection for the civilian population against nuclear fallout which would be involved, whether from an enemy weapon or from our own missiles using a nuclear warhead to detonate or destroy an enemy nuclear missile. Therefore, the planning which has taken place with respect to the anti-ICBM also clearly had in it the concept that we would need fallout shelters with any deployment of an anti-ballistic missile. This deployment decision has not yet been taken as of this date, but I think the transfer of

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responsibility to the Defense Department sharpened this issue and made it more clear to all concerned that these two issues were tied together. I should hasten to say that civil defense was justified apart from any employment of any ICBM.

Subsequent to the transfer of the responsibility, the Defense Department recommended and President Kennedy approved a legislative proposal to the Congress to provide for a fallout shelter program. This legislation, submitted late in the administration of President Kennedy, was approved by the House of Representatives and was pending in the senate when President Kennedy was assassinated. This action by Congress bears testimony to the validity of his decisions to move the function. This initial program provided for using existing buildings and other areas for shelter purposes that could be made suitable by minor alterations and by provisioning with food and water.

The second step in the overall civil defense plan was the construction of new shelters. This first step could produce shelters much faster, so it really wasn’t necessary for the Congress to commit itself to the second step absent completion of the first. President Kennedy recommended and Congress appropriated funds to proceed with the designation of spaces in existing buildings that were suitable for shelters and for provisioning of these shelters. This program has wide acceptance and it moves the civil defense program for the first time into a practical operating program and out of the discussion and debate stage.

TURNER: Another area in which President Kennedy took a very active interest was the significance of developments in science and technology to Government

affairs. It is true that previous Presidents had had science advisers but Mr. Kennedy probably moved farther in this respect than had any of his predecessors in that he established a new agency, a staff arm for himself, to advise him in the area of science and technology. Could you tell us some of the origins of this Office of Science and Technology and President Kennedy's interest in it?

STAATS: More than in any other way that I can think of this action reflected the personal interest that President Kennedy had in the role which science and technology played not only with national defense but with many domestic problems. His decision to recommend to Congress a permanent Office of Science and Technology reflected an understanding of continuing Presidential interest in this matter. President Kennedy turned to the Science Adviser, Dr. Wiesner, on many occasions on issues ranging from the desalination of sea and brackish water to a

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whole series of defense issues related to research and development. The position of Science Adviser was not a new position. This position was held by Dr. James Killian, head of the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, and subsequently by Dr. Kistiakowsky of Harvard University. Nor was the Science Advisory Committee, known as PSAC -- the President's Science Advisory Committee, new. What was new in this picture was the close personal relationship the President had with Dr. Wiesner, who was appointed as Science Adviser and Chairman of PSAC. Also new was the decision, as I have mentioned, to establish this role on a permanent statutory basis. Lying partly behind this decision was the criticism that here was an area involving \$15 billion -- roughly 15% of the total Federal budget -- and the unavailability of any official who could testify on Government-wide scientific matters before committees of Congress. The President knew of this criticism.

A small Office of Science and Technology came into being in June 1962. The functions which were transferred to this office were principally the evaluation and coordinating functions in the basic scientific research field of the National Science Foundation. The President saw a great deal of the Science Adviser. He met frequently with the Science Advisory Committee but again displayed his intolerance with long meetings.

TURNER: I had the impression from watching Dr. Wiesner work that the President had the very high regard for him and there was a very personal relationship between them. Was this your impression?

STAATS: Yes, indeed, there was no question about that. The relationship was one which made it easy for Jerry Wiesner to sit in with the President on a large number of matters on a very informal basis. There was, I think, heavy reliance on his judgment. I think the one area perhaps which he did not accept Dr. Wiesner's judgment which ought to be put in the record has to do with the decision to move forward with the manned lunar landing program. There is no secret that Wiesner did not agree with the decision to move forward with the manned lunar landing program. There is no secret that



Wiesner did not agree with the decision to request the resources required to move this program forward on a 1970 schedule. Only time will tell if that schedule will be met or whether or not this will prove to be a wise investment. But the President had before him the various points of view leading up to that decision. I think we would all agree that the decision had foreign policy and political implications as well as scientific. It represented a decision based in part on national prestige and the leadership which space achievements imply in the eyes of the world, the domestic area, as well as on the issue of whether or not we are lagging behind the Russians in the space race.

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TURNER: As I recall it was only two or three months after President Kennedy assumed office that the Russian Cosmonaut Gagarin was put into orbit. No doubt that influenced his thinking.

STAATS: I am sure that it did and I believe that he placed in this position an individual who had been recognized as a good operator, a good administrator, James Webb, partly because he recognized that Webb would make as good a showing as could be made in organizing a group very rapidly. Also I think he recognized that Webb was well liked and had great support from important quarters in the Congress, particularly from Senator Kerr and many others who had worked closely with Webb and who had great confidence in his ability. In making this selection I think he was mindful of the political problem as well as the need for a rapid acceleration of a very major operating undertaking.

TURNER: This is a change in the subject, but do you know what Dr. Wiesner's attitude has been toward the supersonic transport?

STAATS: Yes, I do, and I was present on a great many of the early discussions on the supersonic transport. I always understood Wiesner to be in support of the supersonic transport. I was not convinced that he was in agreement with all of the detailed plans developed by the Federal Aviation Agency, but unlike his views with respect to the manned lunar landing program, I think he felt that the supersonic transport matter had important psychological prestige values. He also thought that it might prove to be a very doable thing in roughly the same period we are talking about with respect to the manned lunar landing, namely 1970 or the early 1970s.

TURNER: Elmer, I would like to raise the subject of President Kennedy's interest in and attitude toward conservation. I believe his thinking in this area was fairly complex. Would you say he had a strong personal interest in conservation as we usually think of it?

STAATS: To be very frank about it, I would say you have to divide this into two parts; one, his interest in the more traditional aspects of conservation such as

reclamation and flood control, river and harbors programs, etc, and the other aspect which had to do with outdoor recreation, preservation of natural beauty, our seashores, developing our recreation potential in places where we have natural opportunities for recreation. But on the first, I would have to say frankly I

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doubt that he had strong personal convictions on the values of these programs. When we needed approval on reclamation projects he continued to be dubious as to why we were adding projects in the face of agricultural surpluses, whether or not we should be approving projects that had only slightly more than margins of 1 to 1 cost-benefit ratios, and whether the level of budgetary effort in this area was giving us as much payoff as other areas of the budget. From this kind of questioning I became convinced that he recognize the importance of the political problem for him and an issue of great concern in the western part of our country in particular. But he seemed to be without any real conviction that the program was based on solid economic analysis and of high priority from the standpoint of national need. He certainly recognized that the projects in the fields of reclamation, rivers and harbors, flood control, agriculture, etc., which have long been the province of special interests by local communities, had to be handled carefully because they commanded the attention of key Members of the Congress, and therefore his. I recall one project to which I personally devoted a great deal of time and interest. This was the Burns Ditch Harbor project in northern Indiana, where the issue became one of whether a Federal project should be built which would destroy the Indiana Dunes. A very potent group headed by Senator Douglas was desirous of preserving the Dunes as against a rivers and harbors project designed to increase the port facilities of the State of Indiana, hence making it possible for two steel companies to come into area. The project had the strong suppose of the Governor, a Democrat, and the two Senators, both Democrats. At one meeting Senator Douglas came to the President's office and introduced the subject by saying that "this was the first I have come to you for a favor although you, Mr. President, are well aware of what I have been through for you." He then proceeded to pull out pictures of a beautiful beach area on the Great Lakes which was to be destroyed. This discussion proceeded for nearly a full hour. The President handled it beautifully, but ended the conversation by pointing to the new garden just outside his office which replaced the old Rose Garden and said, "Now, Senator, you've been talking about natural beauty, come over here and let me show you some unnatural beauty."

This issue was finally resolved, but not until it had the personal attention of the President at least four times, in addition to many telephone calls back and forth. I cite this only as one, perhaps extreme, illustration of the fact the President recognized the political potence that was involved in the program.

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The other aspect of conservation that has to do with the preservation of our seashores, fishing areas, open spaces, etc. This side of conservation was of greater personal interest to the President, I'm sure. His own background in the New England area and his interest in the

Cape Cod Seashore probably carried over and spilled into a broader interest which reflected itself in the conservation message he submitted in 1961 and another conservation message in 1962. A White House conference in 1962 on conservation was assembled representing all the major recreation and conservation interests in the country. He fostered wilderness legislation, he promoted actively the land acquisition fund which was to be a special earmarked tax to support purchases of land for outdoor recreation purposes, he established the Bureau of Outdoor Recreation in the Department of the Interior, and an Outdoor Recreation Council. In short, he had a great deal of interest in the recreational aspects and preservation of natural beauty aspects of this whole problem, but I think a good deal less conviction with respect to the more traditional aspects of conservation.

[END OF INTERVIEW]

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