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# The Trump Transition

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The Trump Transition

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**Abstract**

When studying presidencies and the success or failure of a presidential administration in the United States, it is essential to study the presidential transition. By studying this process, a better understanding of why certain events occurred or how exactly different accomplishments were achieved can be explained. Generally, outgoing administrations, regardless of party, are interested in aiding in the peaceful and professional transition of power onto their successor. This transfer of power is a vulnerable time for the United States government so it is of great interest of any political party to make sure that the incoming administration is ready for anything on day one. My focus of research is on how the presidential transition process impacts the effectiveness of the president. The hypothesis I am testing is that President Trump had an ineffective transition that, as a result, led to an ineffective initial presidency. By conducting a qualitative analysis of President Donald Trump's presidential transition and initial term of his presidency, evidence is provided as to the scarcity of staff and its effect on the lack of communication within the administration in addition to the power center and chain of command that is dysfunctional and has been largely nonexistent for part of the first year. This, in addition to other factors, has led to an ineffective initial Trump Administration. However, lessons can be learned from the missteps made and the Administration can begin to take steps in the right direction to become a productive and efficient White House for the remainder of President Trump's term.

**Introduction**

A presidential transition is the period of time from Election Day after the winner is determined until Inauguration Day on January twentieth in which the transfer of power occurs between the outgoing President and the president-elect that is coming into the White House. It is

essential to determine how the presidential transition process affects the president after he has entered into office. In regards to my research, my hypothesis is that a poor transition process negatively impacts the effectiveness of a president in his initial days. Specifically, this research is applied to President Donald Trump in his transition effort of 2016. For a successful transition to be executed, the process begins far before Election Day. Generally, it occurs as soon as immediately after each major party's conventions when two nominees are chosen. Although many of the events that occur in politics and government in the United States become politicized and polarized, transitions are unique in that they are usually bipartisan in nature. By examining the approval rating of President Trump in comparison to previous presidents, some of the impacts can be shown through the lack of legislative action from the White House in addition to the lack of legislation produced by Congress. By studying the appointments and nominations that have occurred thus far in addition to the nominations that have not been put forth, the impact can be shown, specifically regarding the lack of authority within the West Wing and its impact on the Department of State and the National Security Council. President Trump and his campaign staff ran what has been seen as a "non-traditional campaign." It became popularized for controversial messages and statements made by Trump himself, as well as his surrogates. Additionally, prior to being elected President, he had never held elected office. It is important to look at how the President has gone from being a businessman to becoming the leader of the United States of America. That is a transition in itself, let alone transitioning from a political campaign to a period of governing. This has been a unique time in history that is essential to study in order to begin to determine how this administration came to be and what missteps occurred throughout the process. Determining what a successful transition would look like is not something that can be defined in a rigid manner. A successful transition takes into account many factors including the

President and the setting of time. However, factors within the overall transition can be combined in order to determine whether the overall process made a positive or negative impact on the initial governing of the administration. This research will be used to better understand how the presidential transition of Donald Trump has led to an ineffective White House in his first year, in addition to contributing to lessons that can be used for upcoming president-elects so that they can try to avoid the same missteps in the future.

### **Research Design**

The research method used throughout the course of this paper is a qualitative analysis of the impact that several variables have had on the presidential transition of Donald Trump. First, by taking a look at the legislation governing transitions in addition to several transitions throughout history, a better explanation of trends can be determined. Specifically, I will examine factors within the modern presidential transitions of both President Bill Clinton and President Barack Obama to determine what variables led to a more effective administration as well as which missteps should be taken as lessons to future presidents. These findings provide substantive examples of what a modern transition should look like, as well as errors that should not be happening in order to create a smooth transfer of power. For example, factors in President Clinton's transition such as choosing a chief of staff late in the transition process led to a lack of authority in the West Wing during the first months, especially when it came to "walk-in privileges" for staffers.<sup>1</sup> Alternatively, President Obama chose a strong chief of staff earlier on that led to an authoritative voice being present that created a more structured sense of leadership. Ultimately, Donald Trump would make the same mistake that Clinton made by choosing a chief

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<sup>1</sup> Burke, J. P. (2000) *Presidential Transitions: From Politics to Practice*. Boulder, Colorado. Lynne Rienner Publishers Inc. Pg. 317

of staff later on in his transition leading to a lack of authority in his administration for his staff to direct to.<sup>2</sup>

By choosing the transition of President Bill Clinton, examples of a poor transition team affecting an ineffective initial time period of governing can be provided. This case was chosen because President Clinton's efforts had paralleled several of the mistakes that were made by President Trump's transition team and the same impacts can be shown for both cases. The case of Barack Obama was given to better explain how a positive transition can lead to an effective transfer of power that is prepared on day one and effective throughout the initial months of governing. This case is important to study because future presidents can take lessons from the Obama transition and adapt them to use with their own administrations as they transition into the White House in order to create a smooth and peaceful transition as Obama had. Both cases provide different impacts of a transition – a poor transition leading to an ineffective initial presidency and a positive transition that led to an effective initial presidency. It is important to research the factors in both to determine what made these cases have the outcome that they had. There are two other possibilities for transitions and that is that a transition could be negative and still result in an effective administration at the start or a transition is positive and an ineffective administration is the result. My research focuses on the transitions for several of the most recent presidencies due to the changing roles of funding, security threats, and other factors that relate to the modern time-period. Examples were not given as far as the last two types of transitions due to the lack of examples in the modern era. However, if a case like those were to occur it would certainly be of interest to research.

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<sup>2</sup> Cohen, David (Feb. 22, 2017) This is the Real Problem for Reince Priebus. *CNN*. Retrieved from: <http://www.cnn.com/2017/02/22/opinions/reince-priebus-opinion/index.html>

In order to properly understand why the administration has been ineffective over the course of the first year, several factors will be taken into account. For example, the lack of nominations made for key executive staff choices, a lack of a definitive power-center within the West Wing that possesses strong authority (such as a strong Chief of Staff), the President's approval ratings in comparison to other modern president's, and the lack of legislation and a unified policy agenda will all be examined throughout. What constitutes a transition as being effective or ineffective can vary from president to president. However, when the above-mentioned characteristics are combined to create an overall impact on the presidency in its initial days, conclusions can be drawn based off of their impact. For example, the impact of Donald Trump's transition in regards to staffing a communications team that was ready and prepared on day one to create a unified and honest message. However, there were numerous mistakes made within the first weeks by members of the communications team that could have been avoided had the staff been in place sooner and more readily prepared for their position in the administration. There are some limitations when researching the presidential transition of President Donald Trump because it is such a recent event. By using past trends, in addition to research that has already been contributed to understand this presidency, there is a wealth of viable research that is available to use in determining what impact the transition has had on the West Wing already. The findings in this paper can also be expanded after the administration is in place for a longer period of time.

### **Legislation Guiding Transitions**

Before studying specific transitions, it is essential to recognize the legislation that governs this time period. The first piece of Congressional legislation that was passed regarding presidential transitions is the Presidential Transition Act (PTA) of 1963. This act gives the

General Services Administration (GSA) a prominent role in the process. There are two primary purposes of this act, the first being to promote an orderly transfer of power between the outgoing and incoming administration. The act even warns against having disruptions in the process of the transition because it could impact the safety and well being of the citizens of the United States. The secondary effect is a financial one. The PTA led to incoming presidents no longer needing to use private funds to pay for their transitions. This funding now becomes a public responsibility and the GSA primarily handles it.<sup>3</sup> In addition to this original legislation, President Barack Obama also encouraged further legislation to be passed after he had experienced a bipartisan transition himself and realized the importance of a smooth and efficient process. The Pre-Election Transition Act of 2010 and the Presidential Transitions Improvements Act of 2015 both led to advancements in recognizing the importance of early transitions. After these bills were passed, transitions would now be funded prior to election day by the government and there would be laws in place to ensure that the process began even at the time of the parties nominating conventions once a candidate was chosen for the parties.<sup>4</sup> As of 2012, the funds for an incoming president stand at \$5.6 million, with the outgoing president receiving \$2.3 million. The funding has increased overtime as a result of a better understanding of the importance of the period on the impact for the president's first term.<sup>5</sup> These acts have had a large impact on how presidential transitions occur today mainly by placing an importance on federal funding on the

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<sup>3</sup> Light, P. (2000, Dec. 4) Implementation of the 1963 Presidential Transition Act. *Brookings*. Retrieved from <https://www.brookings.edu/testimonies/implementation-of-the-1963-presidential-transition-act/>

<sup>4</sup> GSA (2017, Aug. 14) Presidential Transitions: Laws & Regulations. Retrieved from <https://www.gsa.gov/governmentwide-initiatives/presidential-transition#>

<sup>5</sup> Kumar, M. (2015) *Before the Oath: How George W. Bush and Barack Obama Managed a Transfer of Power*. Baltimore, Maryland. Johns Hopkins University Press. Pg. 8

process and mandating that earlier transitions are in place so that administrations can now start out ready for any possible occurrence on day one.

### **History of Transitions**

In order to better understand presidential transitions and their impact, it is essential to first look at the history of transitions and how they have evolved over the years. When the Twentieth Amendment was added to the United States Constitution the Inauguration day of Presidents and Vice Presidents was moved from March fourth up to January twentieth. This change in date for the transfer of power significantly reduced the transition period for administrations to prepare to take office. This Amendment was added in 1933 and it has led to faster paced transitions, especially for modern presidents that have significantly larger staffs to fill when entering the White House.<sup>6</sup>

The first formal presidential transition that occurred after the Twentieth Amendment was between Harry Truman and Dwight Eisenhower. Since then, the details and strategies used from administration to administration have all been unique and vary in their success. This occurs because there is flexibility as to how both the incumbent and the incoming presidents wish to structure their organization including how they choose to allocate funds. This becomes particularly evident when it comes to the ability of the incumbent president to control some of the information that is provided to the president-elect, also the incoming president can choose how interested they are in actually meeting and planning with the outgoing administration.

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<sup>6</sup> Burke, J. P. (2000) Presidential Transitions: From Politics to Practice. Boulder, Colorado. Lynne Reinner Publishers Inc. Pg. 4

Excluding the assassination of President John Kennedy and President Richard Nixon's resignation, there have been nine planned transitions since 1933.<sup>7</sup>

When Truman became the 33<sup>rd</sup> President of the United States in 1945 after President Franklin D. Roosevelt's death he had found out shocking details about what was going on in the government that he hadn't known about before. Even being Roosevelt's Vice President, he had no knowledge of the United States' development of the atomic bomb in what is known as the Manhattan Project. This experience had shocked him, and it also led to him recognizing the importance of an effective transition and informing the incoming administration about what was going on in the government. He saw himself as being unbriefed and unprepared. Although this was an untraditional transfer of power for the two administrations since it occurred after the death of President Franklin D. Roosevelt, it still sparked a need for Truman to ensure that his successor would have all of the knowledge that he wished he had prior to day one had the circumstances been traditional. President Truman began the transition process for the incoming president in the spring of 1952. This was months ahead of the general election that would occur in November of that year. Truman wanted to share domestic, foreign policy, and national security policy information with both presidential candidates, however, the dissemination of information did not go as he had planned<sup>8</sup>.

One of the goals of Truman that did not get achieved for the transition was the balance of information being distributed to both of the major party candidates. Adlai Stevenson, a Democrat of the same party as Truman, had accepted the information offer, but Eisenhower, a Republican, did not. He approached the offer with suspicion and allowed politics to govern his decision not to

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<sup>7</sup> Kumar, M. (2015) *Before the Oath: How George W. Bush and Barack Obama Managed a Transfer of Power*. Baltimore, Maryland. Johns Hopkins University Press. Pg. 14

<sup>8</sup> Kumar, M. (2015) *Before the Oath: How George W. Bush and Barack Obama Managed a Transfer of Power*. Baltimore, Maryland. Johns Hopkins University Press. Pg. 14-15

become more actively involved in working with the outgoing administration. Eisenhower wrote, “It is my duty to remain free to analyze publicly the policies and acts of the present administration whenever it appears to me to be proper and in the country’s interests. I believe our communication should be only those which are known to all American people. Consequently I think it would be unwise and result in confusion in the public mind if I were to attend the meeting in the White House to which you have invited me.” Truman responded by saying, “I am extremely sorry that you have allowed a bunch of screwballs to come between us. You have made a bad mistake and I’m hoping it won’t injure this great Republic.”<sup>9</sup> At this point in history, transitions had not been seen as much of a bipartisan effort as they are today.

One benefit that can occur due to a transition is the effective continuity of government. It was estimated in 2008 that the president and his staff have roughly 7,854 positions that they can fill. This includes around 1,200 presidential appointees requiring Senate confirmation, 1,500 part-time appointees for boards and commissions, 154 commissioned White House staff members, 2,300 non-career Senior Executive Service and Schedule C positions, and 900 people who fill the White House staff offices and executive residence staff.<sup>10</sup> With such a large number of staffers that the administration is responsible for hiring, it is important to set priorities and to begin filling these positions early in the transition process. Continuity is also important due to the vulnerability in national security during the transition of power.

When a new administration enters into the West Wing and various other office buildings, the files, hard drives, drawers, and shelves have all been emptied and wiped clean. The Presidential Records Act of 1978 requires that presidential records leave a White house with the outgoing

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<sup>9</sup> Kumar, M. (2015) *Before the Oath: How George W. Bush and Barack Obama Managed a Transfer of Power*. Baltimore, Maryland. Johns Hopkins University Press. Pg. 17

<sup>10</sup> Kumar, M. (2015) *Before the Oath: How George W. Bush and Barack Obama Managed a Transfer of Power*. Baltimore, Maryland. Johns Hopkins University Press. Pg. 19

president.<sup>11</sup> The information available to the incoming team depends largely on the work that they had done with the previous administration to prepare for this lack of paper and documents to lead in the right direction for their corresponding jobs and responsibilities.

By having a successful transition, presidents can also get off to a faster start by seizing political momentum. “The willingness of the public to give the new president a chance and look at him in a positive way is an important resource for a chief executive.”<sup>12</sup> Within those initial months of the presidency, the public pays more attention to what the president says and does. This also comes along with attempting to minimize the number of mistakes made. Some of the initial mistakes made by incoming administrations are centered on failed nominations and appointments of staff. These mistakes can be avoided with proper vetting and early planning when it comes to filling top-level positions in the administration.

One major shift that incoming presidents need to focus on immediately after Election Day is the transition from candidate to chief executive. When the campaign ends it is often a hard transition for politicians to shift into an attitude of governing and accomplishing the promises that they had made on the campaign trail. This includes shifting from being a party’s nominee, to an ultimate choice for being the leader of the United States, to becoming the president of all of the people no matter what political party they belong to. “If he is to be successful as chief executive, the president-elect needs to make that move during the transition rather than at the beginning of his presidency. One of the ways presidents-elect make that switch is by staying out of view for a time after the initial announcements related to the senior White House staff and

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<sup>11</sup> National Archives (2017) Presidential Records Act (PRA) of 1978. Retrieved from: <https://www.archives.gov/presidential-libraries/laws/1978-act.html>

<sup>12</sup> Kumar, M. (2015) *Before the Oath: How George W. Bush and Barack Obama Managed a Transfer of Power*. Baltimore, Maryland. Johns Hopkins University Press. Pg. 27

domestic and foreign policy and national security teams.”<sup>13</sup> Also, the transition team members need to avoid the “tendency right after the election to still want to fight election battles.”<sup>14</sup>

Now that the initial history has been examined, it is now important to recognize what an actual transition looks like in terms of modern presidencies. Also, by examining how the transition impacted the initial time period of the president’s term in office we can get a better understanding of how the process can be improved upon so that the same mistakes are not made in the future by administrations to come.

### **Transitions of Modern Presidencies**

When it comes to transitions of power and their effect, Bill Clinton’s transition has been viewed as a lesson on what not to do when making that switch. President Bill Clinton’s transition was not completely ineffective. Clinton and his team put forth a strong effort that did pay off in some respects, however, it can be valuable for future presidencies to look at his missteps over the time period and how he could have made the transfer more efficient so that the administration would be able to hit the ground running on January 20<sup>th</sup> and accomplish the goals that had been discussed throughout the presidential campaign.

The work of Bill Clinton’s transition team started many months prior to the general election in 1992. Mickey Kantor led the transition effort shortly after the Democratic National Convention had ended and Clinton would be the party’s nominee. Kantor was not a member of Clinton’s inner-circle. “The fact that Clinton did not realize Kantor was proving to be a

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<sup>13</sup> Kumar, M. (2015) *Before the Oath: How George W. Bush and Barack Obama Managed a Transfer of Power*. Baltimore, Maryland. Johns Hopkins University Press. Pg. 29

<sup>14</sup> Burke, J. (2000) *Lessons From Past Presidential Transitions: Organization, Management, and Decision Making. The White House 2001 Project: The White House Interview Program Report No. 3*. Pg. 12

controversial choice, and that he was perceived by the campaign way room to be the source of several problems, offers an early sign of Clinton's disinterest in organizational matters, particularly as they might impact the early planning for a possible presidency.”<sup>15</sup> After President Clinton had won the election several rifts and conflicts became public between several of the Clinton advisors. Generally in presidential transitions, the campaign teams and the transition teams are separate entities. They go about their business independent of one another, and this should be expected because they both have unique goals that they are trying to achieve. However, at times, the work of the two groups can collide and cause tension. This is likely the case as the election ends and the nominee is now going to be the President. Members of both teams want to have a say in what happens, and it can become difficult for everyone to join together as was the case with Bill Clinton. The chain of command is also often impacted during that time period from campaign to transition. It can be difficult to determine who is going to be in charge of what for that initial time period. Also, members of both teams are now competing to get the jobs in the West Wing that many of them have been working toward. Some employees do leave the transition and go back to other jobs; however, this can create tension at times for those who are going to be vying for jobs that they both wish to obtain in the coveted West Wing offices.

After Clinton had recognized that the transition team needed new leadership, he chose Vernon Jordan and Warren Christopher to lead the way to the West Wing. However, even after the change in leadership President Clinton still exhibited signs of his lack of organizational skills and he began to act on his own when he felt like it. November 11<sup>th</sup> the *New York Times* had reported that the transition team consists of a “skeletal transition board that has met only twice

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<sup>15</sup> Burke, J. P. (2000) *Presidential Transitions: From Politics to Practice*. Boulder, Colorado. Lynne Reinner Publishers Inc. Pg. 285

and is still trying to work out a timetable to present to Mr. Clinton for his most important transition decisions.”<sup>16</sup> On November 12<sup>th</sup> an official team was established, however, his next misstep would soon follow.

Throughout the transition process, the team had mainly focused on Cabinet positions instead of actual White House staffing. Although the Cabinet is an important part of the decisions to be made before Inauguration Day, it also important to adequately staff the West Wing and the majority of the positions that are available to the Executive. Many president-elects do tend to focus on Cabinet positions in the initial time period after they win the general election, however, an effective transition team would be looking toward staffing the positions that are not seen as being as high profile, but they still possess just as much responsibility, if not more, than Cabinet chairs. Clinton wanted his Cabinet to “Look like America,” and this took up valuable time and led to several nomination failures that could have been avoided. Clinton’s chief domestic policy advisor noted that the toll of not having a workable White House staff in place was that “there wasn’t a decision-making team in place to carry out the strategy, to act on it. The lines of authority weren’t clear.”<sup>17</sup>

Another decision made by the administration that had an impact on the beginning of the Clinton White House was Bill Clinton waiting until December 12<sup>th</sup> to choose Mack McLarty as his chief of staff. This meant that the chief of staff would have less time to plan for the new White House staff. As Andrew Card, George W. Bush’s chief of staff, noted, “They sent a signal early on that they were going to have a weak chief of staff. And that, in turn, invited most of the

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<sup>16</sup> Friedman, T. (Nov. 11, 1992) THE TRANSITION: Political Memo; Change of Tone for Clinton: High Energy to Low Profile. *The New York Times*. Retrieved from: <http://www.nytimes.com/1992/11/11/us/transition-political-memo-change-tone-for-clinton-high-energy-low-profile.html>

<sup>17</sup> <sup>17</sup> Burke, J. P. (2000) *Presidential Transitions: From Politics to Practice*. Boulder, Colorado. Lynne Reinner Publishers Inc. Pg. 302

senior White House staffers to believe that they had- and it turned out they did have- unfettered access and undisciplined access to the President... It invited anarchy into the White House.”<sup>18</sup>

Also, the President and his administration were focused on getting staff jobs instead of considering what those jobs might actually entail in the policymaking process. On January 14<sup>th</sup>, Clinton had unveiled his White House staff.<sup>19</sup>

After January 20<sup>th</sup>, the impact of President Bill Clinton’s transition began to come to light. More than a dozen aides has direct “walk-in” access to the Oval Office in comparison to only three or four aides having this type of access under President George H.W. Bush. McLarty did not control who saw the president, and he did not even monitor the meetings the president had with his aides. The absence of a rigid organizational process during the transition led to Clinton’s own tendencies in decision-making to have a large influence on the policy process. This usually involved long drawn out thought processes before making any decisions. Given the lack of structure in the White House and the strong influence of Clinton as a decision-maker, it is not surprising that in the early days the White House had many policy errors, strategic missteps, and a range of miscalculations including: lack of clarity on responsibilities, memos and phone calls unanswered, and decisions made and unmade in the same day.<sup>20</sup>

Over the course of time, it became evident to modern presidents that an effective and early transition would be key to hitting the ground running on January 20<sup>th</sup> with minimal missteps included. When President Obama was preparing to become president, it has been recognized as

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<sup>18</sup> Burke, J. P. (2000) *Presidential Transitions: From Politics to Practice*. Boulder, Colorado. Lynne Reinner Publishers Inc. Pg. 308

<sup>19</sup> Burke, J. P. (2000) *Presidential Transitions: From Politics to Practice*. Boulder, Colorado. Lynne Reinner Publishers Inc. Pg. 317

<sup>20</sup> Burke, J. P. (2000) *Presidential Transitions: From Politics to Practice*. Boulder, Colorado. Lynne Reinner Publishers Inc. Pg. 337-367

one of the best examples of an overall successful transition to date.<sup>21</sup> As mentioned earlier, this process is generally viewed as a bipartisan effort and President George W. Bush had recognized the importance of getting his predecessor ready to take office, whether that would be John McCain or Barack Obama. After the events of 9-11, there became an even stronger focus on the transfer of power in reference to national security so that the incoming administration would be ready for even a potential attack on day one and that preparation would be put to the test. As David Axelrod once said, “When the reality comes and the baton is being passed and you’re now dealing with the real terrorism threats, it’s a very sobering moment.”<sup>22</sup>

President Obama’s transition team was given the name the Obama-Biden Transition Project. It began during the election process and became a 501(c)(4) organization. The team had three co-chairs that were announced shortly after Obama was elected President in 2008. The co-chairs were John Podesta, Valerie Jarrett, and Pete Rouse. The transition team was formally announced quickly after the election and just as quickly the President chose his chief of staff, Rahm Emanuel.<sup>23</sup> Once the Obama Administration was in place in the White House, Emmanuel was seen as the nerve center of the White House. All of the policy proposals and paperwork had to run through the chief of staff’s office before there were allowed to advance to the president’s desk. Rahm Emmanuel had impressive political experience prior to taking on the role in the West Wing and he was also known for his “abrasive personality, vulgar language, volatile

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<sup>21</sup> Meacham, J. & Gibbs, N. (Nov. 10, 2016) What Makes for a Successful Transfer of Presidential Power? *PBS*. Retrieved from: <https://www.pbs.org/newshour/show/makes-successful-transfer-presidential-power>

<sup>22</sup> Kumar, M. (2015) *Before the Oath: How George W. Bush and Barack Obama Managed a Transfer of Power*. Baltimore, Maryland. Johns Hopkins University Press. Pg. 10

<sup>23</sup> Thurber, J. (Jan. 3, 2011) *Obama in Office: The First Two Years*. *Paradigm Publishers*. Pg. 2  
Retrieved from:  
[http://pfiffner.gmu.edu/files/pdfs/Book\\_Chapters/Obama%20WH%20org,%20Ch%202011.pdf](http://pfiffner.gmu.edu/files/pdfs/Book_Chapters/Obama%20WH%20org,%20Ch%202011.pdf)

temperament, and tactical brilliance.”<sup>24</sup> This early decision gave a reflection that Obama’s transition team was well organized and recognized the importance of getting his staff in place early with a leader in place – a lesson that should have been taken into account from President Clinton’s mistake. Obama had several other early appointments such as his Treasury Secretary Timothy Geithner, National Security Advisor James Jones, Secretary of State Hillary Clinton, and Defense Secretary Robert Gates all within weeks of Election Day.

After Election Day and prior to Inauguration Day, Obama’s preparation was already tested. He was about to inherit an economy that was in recession in addition to ongoing foreign conflicts. He also had campaign promises to attempt to accomplish that would be no small task such as reforming healthcare. One threat in particular truly put the administration to the test. That terror threat occurred on Inauguration Day, January 20<sup>th</sup>, 2009. It was not until the day before the inauguration that President Obama had been informed about the threat from his national security team. National security advisors for both President Bush and President Obama had met to discuss the threat in a meeting in the Situation Room. About thirty-six hours before the inauguration the teams had realized that this threat was very serious. The team had to focus on the question of, what does the president do if he is in the middle of the inaugural address and a bomb goes off somewhere in the Mall? The threat had subsided only minutes before the event, but this event had truly put the national security team in a real world situation that needed to be dealt with as the transfer of power was occurring. Fortunately, President Obama had his team in place with enough time in advance as well as being briefed and prepared by the Bush Administration to be able to be accurately prepared for such an occurrence.<sup>25</sup> It is impossible to

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<sup>24</sup> Thurber, J. (Jan. 3, 2011) Obama in Office: The First Two Years. *Paradigm Publishers*. Pg. 8

<sup>25</sup> Kumar, M. (2015) Before the Oath: How George W. Bush and Barack Obama Managed a Transfer of Power. Baltimore, Maryland. Johns Hopkins University Press. Pg. 10-11

tell what would could have happened if the threat had been carried out and the Obama team hadn't been as prepared as they were, but there is no doubt that the consequences could have been massive.

Now that certain aspects have been discussed about two modern presidencies, President Bill Clinton and President Barack Obama, it is now important to take the lessons learned by these men and relate them to the presidential transition of President Donald Trump. Did President Trump take the mistakes that were made by Bill Clinton and turn them into lessons to be utilized? Did he take advantage of the evidence from President Obama's successful transition to apply it to his own? By looking at the recent past of modern administrations this can bring to light evidence in trends of things that work and processes that simply do not when it comes to this fragile transfer of power.

### **Transition of Donald Trump**

In May 2016, the transition effort of Donald Trump began. This was prior to the Republican National Convention even being held. Trump had put his son-in-law Jared Kushner in charge of beginning a blueprint for a transition team. Kushner also worked with Paul Manafort, a senior adviser, and Corey Lewandowski, the campaign manager at the time, to come up with ideas for the team.<sup>26</sup> Three days after the announcement was made that Kushner would be structuring the team it was determined that Chris Christie, the Governor of New Jersey, would be the leader of the transition effort. In his role Christie would be serving as the chairman that would be

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<sup>26</sup> Parker, A. (May 6, 2016) Trump Asks Son-in-Law, Jared Kushner, to Plan for Transition Team. *The New York Times*. Retrieved from: <https://www.nytimes.com/politics/first-draft/2016/05/06/trump-asks-his-son-in-law-jared-kushner-to-plan-for-a-transition-team/>

assembling experts on both domestic and foreign policy to begin to structure the future Trump administration.<sup>27</sup>

One week before Election Day members of both Trump and Hillary Clinton's transition teams met at the White House with members of the Obama administration. White House Chief of Staff Denis McDonough had invited both teams to D.C. to review transition processes that would be occurring in the coming weeks for whoever won the election. The Trump transition executive director Rich Bagger and the director of agency action Ron Nichol were in attendance.<sup>28</sup>

Although many polls had Donald Trump trailing Hillary Clinton in the general election, this did not stop the Trump transition team from continuing their efforts to work together with the Obama team to prepare for a potential victory. This is yet another example of the bipartisan nature of the process by setting aside politics and getting these three groups in meetings together at the same time, both sides can become better prepared.

On November 8, 2016 it was determined that Donald Trump would be the forty-fifth president of the United States. One of the first tasks to be done once this was determined was to figure out what would be happening to Trump's businesses. Initially, the businesses were going to be handed down to his kids in a blind trust and Donald Trump would no longer be involved in the companies while he was serving as president. However, later on, when it was determined that Ivanka Trump would have some role in the Trump Administration, Donald Trump decided that he would be handing over his business empire to his sons, Donald Jr. and Eric, and the chief

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<sup>27</sup> O'Donnell, K. (May 9, 2016) Donald Trump Taps Chris Christie to Lead Transition Team. *NBC News*. Retrieved from: <https://www.nbcnews.com/politics/2016-election/donald-trump-taps-chris-christie-lead-transition-team-n570581>

<sup>28</sup> Viebeck, E. (Oct. 28, 2016) White House Meets with Clinton, Trump Transition Teams as Election Approaches. *The Washington Post* Retrieved from: [https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/powerpost/wp/2016/10/28/white-house-meets-with-clinton-trump-transition-teams-as-election-approaches/?utm\\_term=.1e628cdc0c04](https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/powerpost/wp/2016/10/28/white-house-meets-with-clinton-trump-transition-teams-as-election-approaches/?utm_term=.1e628cdc0c04)

financial officer Allen Weisselberg before Inauguration Day. Specifically, there would be no new foreign deals made with companies and even domestic deals would be monitored to ensure that there were no conflicts of interest.<sup>29</sup> Critics have argued that there is not a rigorous enough ethics procedure in place to hold the Trump Enterprise accountable for their business deals and negotiations; however, this is an ongoing topic that will likely be monitored closely throughout the course of the President's term.

On November 11, 2016 the Trump transition effort known as "Trump for America" received quite the shake-up. On this day it was determined that Chris Christie would no longer be leading the transition team and Vice President-elect would be taking over the effort. Several of Chris Christie's aides were removed from the effort as well. Rick Dearborn, chief of staff to Jeff Sessions, would be serving as the transition's executive director, replacing Christie's former chief of staff Richard Bagger. This decision for a shift in leadership was made after two former aides to Christie were convicted for their roles in politically motivated lane closures on the George Washington Bridge – "Bridgegate". In a statement made by Donald Trump he said, "The mission of our team will be clear: put together the most highly qualified group of successful leaders who will be able to implement our change agenda in Washington. Together, we will begin the urgent task of rebuilding this nation – specifically jobs, security, and opportunity."<sup>30</sup> At this point several other Trump allies joined the team such as Steven Mnuchin, Steve Bannon, Kellyanne Conway, and Reince Preibus – all familiar names who would receive more prominent roles. One Republican who spoke in anonymity had claimed that, "The Trump high command

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<sup>29</sup> BBC News (Jan. 12, 2017) Trump Hands Over Business Empire to Sons. Retrieved from: <http://www.bbc.com/news/business-38587628>

<sup>30</sup> Costa, R. Ricker, P. Viebeck, E. (Nov. 11, 2016) Pence Replaces Christie as Leader of Trump Transition Effort. *The Washington Post*. Retrieved from: [https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/powerpost/wp/2016/11/11/pence-to-lead-trump-transition-effort/?utm\\_term=.23506fd3a598](https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/powerpost/wp/2016/11/11/pence-to-lead-trump-transition-effort/?utm_term=.23506fd3a598)

felt like the president-elect needed to get control of his transition. It was populated with Christie loyalists, not that they weren't for Trump, and it didn't appear to be as ramped up as it should have been. So taking a page from George W. Bush's book, he decided to put his vice president in charge."<sup>31</sup> Although this claim has not been indefinitely confirmed, this provided valuable insight into the transition team under Christie. If the efforts were not as far along as they should have been at that point it is late in the process to start from scratch on planning that should have been done months prior to November.

By November 13<sup>th</sup> Donald Trump made two of his first key appointments. He named Reince Priebus as his chief of staff and Steve Bannon as chief strategist and senior counselor. Reince Priebus came from the Establishment side of the GOP while Bannon came from Breitbart News who is known for producing a large amount of "anti-establishment" which aided in Trump's rise to power. Trump said that the two would be "equal partners" in their positions, however, it became clear that this would be a risky arrangement when it comes to who would be making the final decisions. Bannon had become the Trump campaign CEO in August and began to persuade the President to adopt a more populist rhetoric.<sup>32</sup>

It was not until December 22, 2016 that Donald Trump had chosen Sean Spicer as his press secretary, Jason Miller as director of communications, Hope Hicks as director of strategic communications, and Dan Scavino his director of social media- not including Trump's own Twitter account which he would continue to personally tweet from throughout the transition and presidential term. By comparison, President Obama had announced that Robert Gibbs would be

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<sup>31</sup> Costa, R. Ricker, P. Viebeck, E. (Nov. 11, 2016) Pence Replaces Christie as Leader of Trump Transition Effort. *The Washington Post*.

<sup>32</sup> Aljazeera. (Nov. 14, 2016) Donald Trump Makes First Key White House Appointments. Retrieved from: <http://www.aljazeera.com/news/2016/11/donald-trump-key-white-house-appointments-1611140404089.html>

his White House Press Secretary on November 22, 2016. His communications director, Ellen Moran, was also chosen on the same day.<sup>33</sup> By President Trump putting his communications team in place just one month shy of being inaugurated, this led to many missteps and poor planning that could have been avoided by getting these positions chosen sooner so that they could be better prepared for the media barrage that was inevitable as the administration entered the West Wing.

In reference to the national security aspect of the transition there had been some decisions that could have had an impact on the security of the United States during the fragile transition of power, in addition to the start of the administration. On December 28, 2016 Donald Trump tweeted, “Doing my best to disregard the many inflammatory President O statements and roadblocks. Thought it was going to be a smooth transition – NOT!” - @realDonaldTrump. Regardless of politics, transitions are a time for both parties to come together and work to find out the roles of the positions and how to respond to any situation that may arise. It became clear through Trump’s tweet that he was allowing partisan politics to enter into what should be a bipartisan effort. President Obama’s evidence of an Inauguration Day threat had shown just how quickly the new administration must be ready, and it became clear to the Trump transition team was continuing to waste valuable time.

Just prior to Inauguration Day, Trump had nominated 28 of the 690 federal government positions that require Senate confirmation, according to the Partnership for Public Service. The Trump transition had put together “landing teams” to meet with the Obama administration to get briefed on their new roles and learn about the responsibilities. However, there seemed to be a

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<sup>33</sup> Byers, D. (Dec. 22, 2016) Trump Picks Sean Spicer as White House Press Secretary, Jason Miller as Communications Director. *CNN*. Retrieved from: <http://money.cnn.com/2016/12/22/media/sean-spicer-jason-miller-white-house-press-secretary-donald-trump/index.html>

large amount of miscommunication. In some departments, after officials in a particular department had briefed one landing team, another team would show up and ask to be briefed on the same exact information. Other Trump staffers had stepped down or been fired before they even started. One Obama administration official said, “We’ve briefed at least ten people, but they’ve all gotten fired by the transition after we trained them.”<sup>34</sup>

On January 21<sup>st</sup>, the day after President Donald Trump’s inauguration, Sean Spicer had come out to give his first press conference. This first appearance set the tone for the administration, and it was not one that was looked at as a good first impression of the Trump White House. Sean Spicer took to the podium in the John S. Brady Press Briefing Room and lied to the American public. Mr. Spicer claimed that Trump had drawn “the largest audience to ever witness an inauguration.” This was a statement that photos from the event clearly proved to be false. Spicer attributed the smaller looking crowd size to white tarps that had been on the ground at Trump’s Inauguration in addition to an increase in security measures in the Mall. Both of these claims were false. This first appearance was seen as an attack on the media and President Trump further emphasized his belief the following day in remarks made at an appearance at the C.I.A. At this visit he called journalists “among the most dishonest human beings on earth” and again emphasized that he had the largest inauguration crowd. While these remarks were being made hundreds of thousands of people were protesting against President Trump in a national Women’s March on Washington that appeared to dwarf the size of the inauguration from the day before.<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>34</sup> Hartmann, M. (Jan. 19, 2017) Is the Trump Team Ready to Run the Government? *New York Magazine*. Retrieved from: <http://nymag.com/daily/intelligencer/2017/01/is-the-trump-team-ready-to-run-the-government.html>

<sup>35</sup> Davis, J. and Rosenberg, M. (Jan. 21, 2017) With False Claims, Trump Attacks Media on Turnout and Intelligence Rift. *The New York Times*. Retrieved from: [https://www.nytimes.com/2017/01/21/us/politics/trump-white-house-briefing-inauguration-crowd-size.html?\\_r=0](https://www.nytimes.com/2017/01/21/us/politics/trump-white-house-briefing-inauguration-crowd-size.html?_r=0)

No recent transition has been so full of problems and subsequent media and elite criticism as has the Trump transition in relation to foreign and national security policy areas. On January 28, 2017 the Trump Administration issued National Security Presidential Memorandum-2 (NSM-2). The document outlined the organizational structure of its national security process. This document received a lot of backlash from the media primarily for the addition of Steve Bannon to the principals committee, a move that was seen by many to cement his influence on the Trump White House. The memorandum also separated the homeland Security Council from the NSC as it had been under George W. Bush.<sup>36</sup> These changes to the memorandum were highly scrutinized by the media, a response that could have been handled by a well-prepared and professional communications department. As a result of inefficient transition planning, this was not the case. The White House communications director would usually be the strategy center for explaining the memorandum and responding to any fears from the public about it or criticism from the media. However, the Trump administration did not settle on a director for White House communications until mid-February after the initial appointee has stepped aside. Mike Dubke finally accepted the position, but even he was gone by May. Hope Hicks is the current director. The entire backlash about the memorandum was moot once General H. R. McMaster was appointed as Trump's second National Security Advisor after General Michael Flynn resigned after only serving two weeks in the administration. A revised memorandum then took Bannon off of the principals committee.<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>36</sup> Burke, J. (Sep. 2017) The Trump Transition, Early Presidency and National Security Organization. *Presidential Studies Quarterly*. Vol. 47, No. 3. DOI: 10.1111/psq.12402 Pg. 575-576.

<sup>37</sup> Burke, J. (Sep. 2017) The Trump Transition, Early Presidency and National Security Organization. *Presidential Studies Quarterly*. Vol. 47, No. 3. DOI: 10.1111/psq.12402 Pg. 581.

President Trump also hindered the national security process due to the delay in appointing staff members. This resulted in a failure to obtain all of the necessary security clearances so that they would have been able to utilize the briefing meetings offered by the outgoing Obama administration. Further, on May 9<sup>th</sup>, 2017 President Trump fired FBI director James Comey. In a statement made before the Senate Intelligence Committee Comey stated, “It is my judgment that I was fired because of the Russia investigation. I was fired, in some way, to change, or the endeavor was to change, the way the Russia investigation was being conducted.”<sup>38</sup> Currently, there is still an investigation ongoing by Robert Mueller who was appointed as special counsel to oversee the investigation of ties between the Trump Campaign and Russian officials.

After the April memorandum was issued, it became clear that this should have been the memorandum from the start. It led to a more effective national security system being put in place and it should have occurred during the transition period. Trump failed to take the lessons learned from previous modern presidencies on how to better plan his national security and communications teams. As John Burke argues, “The Trump administration’s transition planning in the area of national security will likely serve as a case study on opportunities missed and mistakes made.”<sup>39</sup>

Another factor that could lead to further disarray as far as foreign policy goes is the lack of positions that have been filled all the way into November of 2017 – approaching one year of being in office. As of November 22, 2017 President Donald Trump still had not nominated seventy-two positions in the Department of State that are considered key executive branch nominations by *The Washington Post*. These positions include a number of Assistant Secretary

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<sup>38</sup> Burke, J. (Sep. 2017) The Trump Transition, Early Presidency and National Security Organization. *Presidential Studies Quarterly*. Vol. 47, No. 3. DOI: 10.1111/psq.12402 Pg. 588.

<sup>39</sup> Burke, J. (Sep. 2017) The Trump Transition, Early Presidency and National Security Organization. *Presidential Studies Quarterly*. Vol. 47, No. 3. DOI: 10.1111/psq.12402 Pg. 593.

positions in addition to thirty-two Ambassador positions (Figure 1). Among those positions are Ambassadors to Ireland, Saudi Arabia, Turkey, Ambassador-at-large for global women's issues, and Ambassador-at-large for war crimes issues.<sup>40</sup> As Lieutenant General Ben Hodges stated, "It hurts not having ambassadors."<sup>41</sup> When President Trump's Administration had taken over the President orders all of President Barack Obama's political appointee ambassadors to resign immediately and leave their posts. Since, then the White House has struggled to fill those positions. Hodges further explained that this is sometimes the case when administrations transition, however, many of the posts are traditionally left in place at least for a period of time while a new nominee is chosen. Further, Hodges said that one of his priorities was to "demonstrate constantly to foreign partners the importance in the U.S. of the military answering to an elected, civilian political leadership."<sup>42</sup>

Once the Trump Administration was underway after day one, it became clear that there were several competing centers of power within the White House. Depending on Trump's decision making that day, the most influential voice that day would likely get their ideas implemented. Also, within the first year of President Trump's first term there were two divided eras of power that represented a shift in the administration once the one ended and the other started. These two time periods will be referred to as the "Reince Priebus Era" and the "John Kelly Era" represented

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<sup>40</sup> Partnership for Public Service. (Nov. 9, 2017) Tracking How Many Key Positions Trump has Filled so Far. *The Washington Post*. Retrieved from: <https://www.washingtonpost.com/graphics/politics/trump-administration-appointee-tracker/database/>

<sup>41</sup> Herszenhorn, D. (July 19, 2017) 'It hurts not having ambassdors,' Says US Army Commander in Europe. *POLITICO*. Retrieved from: <https://www.politico.eu/article/it-hurts-not-having-ambassadors-says-us-army-commander-in-europe/>

<sup>42</sup> Herszenhorn, D. (July 19, 2017) 'It hurts not having ambassdors,' Says US Army Commander in Europe. *POLITICO*. Retrieved from: <https://www.politico.eu/article/it-hurts-not-having-ambassadors-says-us-army-commander-in-europe/>

by the two chiefs of staff that were in charge of the West Wing throughout that point in the administration.

### **The Reince Priebus Era**

Within the Priebus Era of the Trump White House, which occurred from Inauguration Day on January 20<sup>th</sup> until July 28<sup>th</sup>, there were distinct power hubs within the White House. These power hubs include the Establishment Hub, Breitbart Hub, Trump Family Hub, Conway Hub, and National Security Hub.<sup>43</sup> Each of these power centers were unique and each had their own key players that were a part of them.

The Establishment Hub contained members such as Chief of Staff Reince Priebus, Deputy Chief of Staff Katie Walsh, White House Press Secretary Sean Spicer, and Vice President Mike Pence. These were members of the White House that were seen as being able to work with House Speaker Paul Ryan and other prominent “Establishment” Republicans to be able to achieve the goals of the administration. Although this power-center would traditionally possess a lot of power, they did not often influence President Trump as much as other actors in the West Wing. In the beginning weeks of the presidency, it had become clear that Priebus would be a weak chief of staff competing alongside the other power centers. With many of the President’s advisors possessing “walk-in” privileges to the Oval Office, the President’s time was managed poorly and the decision-making process became confused which resulted in decisions that were not executed properly.<sup>44</sup>

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<sup>43</sup> Cohen, David (March 2017) Lecture Notes, Inside the White House: Spring 2017.

<sup>44</sup> Cohen, David (Feb. 22, 2017) This is the Real Problem for Reince Priebus. *CNN*. Retrieved from: <http://www.cnn.com/2017/02/22/opinions/reince-priebus-opinion/index.html>

A second, and highly influential power center was the Breitbart Hub. This group consisted of Chief Strategist and Senior Counselor Steve Bannon, Senior Adviser Stephen Miller, and Deputy Assistant Sebastian Gorka. All of these members have come from Breitbart News, a far-right leaning conservative news outlet. This influence comes in direct contrast with the Establishment Hub as Breitbart News often posts articles and commentary criticizing Speaker Paul Ryan and other prominent Republicans. In an article published by *The New York Times*, Bannon was even referred to as “President Bannon.” In a photo released on May 2, 2017 by Rabbi Shmuley, Bannon’s list of goals was shown in the background written on a white board. This list emphasized the influence that he and his associates have had on the administration as many of the goals had already been checked off. A few lines from the list include: “Hire 5,000 more boarder patrol agents,” “Suspend the refugee program,” “Triple the number of ICE agents,” “Suspend the Syrian Refugee Program,” among other goals.<sup>45</sup>

A third hub consists of Donald Trump’s family. This consists of Senior Adviser and son-in-law Jared Kushner, and his daughter Ivanka Trump. Jared Kushner and Ivanka both have played a role in Donald Trump’s success even going back to the campaign trail. Further, both family members were involved in the transition process of Trump’s administration. Ivanka has had various job responsibilities since being in the White House, but perhaps her most influential role is in her trusted advice to the President. Jared Kushner has been given several large responsibilities, several of them relating to foreign policy and national security with specific reference to peace in the Middle East and Israel.

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<sup>45</sup> Wolf, Z. (May 3, 2017) Steve Bannon’s White House Whiteboard Revealed. *CNN*. Retrieved from: <http://www.cnn.com/2017/05/03/politics/steve-bannons-white-house-whiteboard/index.html>

Kellyanne Conway has also played a prominent role in the Trump Administration in addition to his successful presidential campaign prior to 2017. She has been viewed as his spokeswoman or, in some cases, his spin artist. She has been caught lying to the press on several occasions (i.e. the Bowling Green Massacre)<sup>46</sup> in order to vehemently defend President Trump no matter what the topic is on. The President has still been traditionally loyal to Conway. He recognizes her intelligence in being able to successfully turn his campaign into an effective one by carefully crafting his message and mobilizing and targeting portions of the electorate to vote for him.

A final hub is the National Security Hub. This consists of National Security Adviser H.R. McMaster, Secretary of Defense James Mattis, and Secretary of Security (at the time) John Kelly. Trump attended a New York Military Academy in his youth and has always admired the toughness and discipline of military life. He has appointed several former generals to high ranking administrative positions. Retired brigadier general, Thomas Kolditz states, “I think that he likes the idea of military leadership, because military leadership is very divisive and audacious at times, and general officers are very good at simplifying problems and then getting the job done.”<sup>47</sup>

All of these competing sources of influence have agreed to some extent on several issues, however, they have largely caused conflict and missteps throughout the start of the administration. For example, Trump’s travel ban highlighted the inability of the administration to be able to work together and effectively communicate on something such as an executive order,

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<sup>46</sup> Schmidt, S. & Bever, L. (Feb. 3, 2017) Kellyanna Conway Cites ‘Bowling Green Massacre’ That Never Happened to Defend Travel Ban. *The Washington Post*. Retrieved from:

[https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/morning-mix/wp/2017/02/03/kellyanne-conway-cites-bowling-green-massacre-that-never-happened-to-defend-travel-ban/?utm\\_term=.2e58a893d9e6](https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/morning-mix/wp/2017/02/03/kellyanne-conway-cites-bowling-green-massacre-that-never-happened-to-defend-travel-ban/?utm_term=.2e58a893d9e6)

<sup>47</sup> Zarroli, J. (Aug. 23, 2017) Why Donald Trump Like to Surround Himself with Generals. *NPR*. Retrieved form: <https://www.npr.org/2017/08/23/545289536/why-donald-trump-likes-to-surround-himself-with-generals>

which likely falls back on President Trump's decision-making style. Trump signed the executive order on January 27<sup>th</sup>, 2017 banning travel from seven Muslim-majority countries for 90 days and all refugee admission for 120 days. It was not until that day that the homeland security staff was even allowed to see the final details of the order. Trump claimed that the government was "totally prepared," but it became clear very quickly that this was not the case. The policy team at the White House avoided the traditional interagency process that would allow the Justice Department and Homeland Security to provide feedback and guidance about the order. As further evidence, the DHS has interpreted the travel ban as still allowing green card holders to legally enter the United States, however, overnight the White House overruled that guidance. They decided that it would be on a case-by-case basis. Before Trump issued the order, the White House did not even seek any guidance or opinion from the Office of Legal Counsel.<sup>48</sup>

An ABC News/Washington Post poll found that at the six-month marking of being president, Donald Trump had one of the lowest approval ratings of any president during the same time frame in seventy years. Only thirty-six percent of the people surveyed approved of the president's job performance, while fifty-eight percent said they disapproved of Trump's performance. By comparison, at the six-month mark, both former Presidents Barack Obama and George W. Bush were at fifty-nine percent.<sup>49</sup> As of November 26, 2017, *FiveThirtyEight* has determined that President Trump's approval rating is at 38.4% while his disapproval rating is at 55.5%. In regards to past president's approval ratings, Barack Obama was at 50.3% approval, George W. Bush was at 85.1%, Bill Clinton had 48.1% approval, and George H. W. Bush had

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<sup>48</sup> Perez, E., Brown, P., Liptak, K. (Jan. 30, 2017) Inside the Confusion of the Trump Executive Order and travel Ban. *CNN*. Retrieved from: <http://www.cnn.com/2017/01/28/politics/donald-trump-travel-ban/index.html>

<sup>49</sup> Morin, R. (July 16, 2017) Poll: Trump's Six-month Approval Rating Hits Historic Low. *Politico*. Retrieved from: <https://www.politico.com/story/2017/07/16/trump-approval-rating-historic-low-240598>

69.8%. Perhaps most interestingly, there were only two time periods in which Donald Trump had a higher approval rating than former President Bill Clinton. This occurred from day 130 to day 140 of their first terms as well as days 156 and 157. Trump, at his highest margin, had 39.2% approval while Clinton was at 36.8% (Figure 2).<sup>50</sup> With this lack of support it becomes more likely that Congress is not going to be as supportive of the President's legislative agenda as they may have been if President Trump had better support from the public. After all, these congressmen and congresswomen are going to be going home to their constituents and facing reelection in the future so they want their district to be happy with the work that they are doing.

### **The John Kelly Era**

July 21<sup>st</sup>, 2017 Sean Spicer resigned as White House Press Secretary after an eventful length of time in the position. He resigned saying that he disagreed with President Trump's hiring of Anthony Scaramucci as the new communications director after Mike Dubke had stepped down. He believed that Scaramucci would add to the confusion and uncertainty that surrounded the West Wing already (he would inevitably only last ten days). Spicer's top deputy, Sarah Huckabee Sanders, would be the next press secretary.<sup>51</sup>

On July 28<sup>th</sup>, 2017 President Trump pushed out Reince Priebus from his chief of staff position and brought on John Kelly to fill the position. Kelly had previously been the secretary of homeland security. In a response made by Mr. Priebus he stated, "The president has a right to change directions. The president has a right to hit a reset button. I think it's a good time to hit the

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<sup>50</sup> FiveThirtyEight (Nov. 26, 2017) How Trump Compares With Past Presidents. Retrieved from: <https://projects.fivethirtyeight.com/trump-approval-ratings/>

<sup>51</sup> Thrush, G. and Haberman, M. (July 21, 2017) Sean Spicer Resigns as White House Press Secretary. *The New York Times*. Retrieved from: <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/07/21/us/politics/sean-spicer-resigns-as-white-house-press-secretary.html>

reset button.”<sup>52</sup> It had become clear over the course of President Trump’s first six months that Priebus was unable to reign in both the President as well as the members of the Trump Administration and effectively lead the West Wing.

Mr. Kelly’s arrival as the new head of Trump’s staff was seen as something that could finally provide a sense of order to the West Wing. However, this would depend on how much authority Mr. Trump would allow him to have. In contrast, Reince Priebus had rarely exhibited any top-down authority over the president’s staff that is typical of a chief of staff. Mr. Kelly also has publically supported Trump’s views of a need for a travel ban on visitors from seven predominantly Muslim countries. “Mr. Kelly had told his staff, time and time again, that his goal is to rationalize the chaos that has engulfed the management of the West Wing. Managing Mr. Trump is beyond his – or anyone else’s powers, he has said repeatedly.”<sup>53</sup>

The next shake up on the Trump White House really led to a shift in the influence of the major power centers that had been previously mentioned in the Reince Priebus era. On August 18, 2017 Steve Bannon left the White House. His removal was seen as one of the initial victories of Chief of Staff John Kelly in attempting to restructure the Trump Administration to bring more organization and stability to the process. Before the end of the night that same day, Bannon was back at his desk at Breitbart News getting back to work.<sup>54</sup> Although Bannon can still advise the

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<sup>52</sup> Baker, P., Haberman, M. (July 28, 2017) Reince Priebus is Ousted Amid Stormy Days for White House. *The New York Times*. Retrieved from: <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/07/28/us/politics/reince-priebus-white-house-trump.html>

<sup>53</sup> Thrush, G and Haberman, M. (Sept. 1, 2017) Forceful Chief of Staff Grates on Trump, and the Feeling is Mutual. *New York Times*. Retrieved from: [https://www.nytimes.com/2017/09/01/us/politics/john-kelly-trump.html?\\_r=0](https://www.nytimes.com/2017/09/01/us/politics/john-kelly-trump.html?_r=0)

<sup>54</sup> Haberman, M. and Shear, M. (Aug. 18, 2017) Stephen Bannon Out at the White House After Turbulent Run. *The New York Times*. Retrieved from: <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/08/18/us/politics/steve-bannon-trump-white-house.html>

president in an unofficial capacity, it remains to be seen how much influence he can still have on the White House even as an outsider.

Under the initial structure of Trump's White House, many aides had direct "walk-in" privileges to the Oval Office. For example, when Omarosa Manigault, former celebrity apprentice contestant and current adviser to the president, wanted to tell President Trump anything she could walk right into the Oval Office and speak to the President. In addition to Omarosa, the other members at the start of the administration that possessed walk-in privileges were Steve Bannon, Stephen Miller, Reince Priebus, Jared Kushner, Kellyanne Conway, Don McGahn, Hope Hicks, Keith Schiller, and Ivanka Trump.<sup>55</sup> Trump has been known to accredit this style of leadership to his leadership while running his businesses, however, the Oval Office is a far different entity from Trump Tower. There needs to be a governmental structure in the West Wing in order to be efficient, and it is now up to Chief of Staff John Kelly to establish the order that Trump needs to begin to become an effective leader.

In order for Donald Trump to accomplish more of his legislative ambitions and campaign promises, it is essential for him to appoint more of the positions needed in the executive branch to accomplish those tasks. As of November 22, 2017, according to the Partnership for Public Service, President Donald Trump has had 249 out of the roughly 600 key executive branch positions confirmed that require the nomination process. He has only had fourteen failed nominations to date, which is impressive given the lack of proper planning of positions, however the average time take to confirm the nominations is sixty-nine days. This is nineteen days longer

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<sup>55</sup> Karni, A. (Feb. 23, 2017) Trump's Open-Door Oval Office. *Politico*. Retrieved from: <https://www.politico.com/story/2017/02/donald-trump-white-house-oval-office-235278>

than the average time taken for Obama's appointees (Figure 3).<sup>56</sup> Although this could be related to political influences in the Senate, it is also a result of the nature of Trump's appointees. Many of the men and women that he has chosen to hire are wealthy and possess complex and lengthy financial histories and records. Therefore, it has taken longer to adequately approve of these nominees.

## Conclusion

By researching how the presidential transition process impacts the effectiveness of a president several conclusions can be drawn in regards to the most recent transition of President Trump. The hypothesis of Donald Trump's transition leading to an ineffective administration at the start of his first term has been proven to be correct. Aside from executive orders executed in Donald Trump's first term, there has not been a significant amount of meaningful legislation that has flowed from the West Wing. As explained earlier, one of Trump's largest "accomplishments" thus far has been his issuance of a travel ban on members of several Muslim nations, however, this executive order has faced immediate and strong legal backlash in addition to a rocky start when the administration did not go through the transitional process of sharing the order with fellow agencies prior to President Trump signing it into law.

Further, the communications department has been largely criticized on basically a daily basis. This is something that could have been avoided from a better transition effort put forth by the Trump transition team. Even when controversial legislation or politically motivated achievements come from the West Wing, an effective communications team would be able to

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<sup>56</sup> Partnership for Public Service. (Nov. 9, 2017) Tracking How Many Key Positions Trump has Filled so Far. *The Washington Post*. Retrieved from: <https://www.washingtonpost.com/graphics/politics/trump-administration-appointee-tracker/database/>

handle the backlash and better neutralize the situation in a manner that reduces the damage done to the administration. This has predominately not been the case for President Trump. For example, when the new NSC Memorandum was issued this could have been diffused quickly by a team of policy experts and effective communications team members that could explain why the change in the memorandum was made in addition to what the goal of the administration was in choosing to make such a change.

Although several acts governing modern presidential transitions led to Donald Trump having a team in place early during the primary season, when Chris Christie was ousted as the transition director, it was as if the transition team started from scratch. President Trump did not take the lessons learned from Bill Clinton's transition of the impact in appointing a chief of staff late that would lead to confusion in who was in charge of the West Wing as well as where the power would lie. In Trump's case, it clearly did not lie with Reince Preibus. President Obama's team came to the table ready to provide the same effort that was given to them from George W. Bush's team especially in the case of a potential nationally security threat, but the Trump team simply did not bring the players to the table from their end. Also, President Trump has continued to remain lax in his appointments to key positions in the executive branch. It is essential for the President to recognize that if he wishes to accomplish successful healthcare reform (or replacement) and a working tax reform plan, there needs to be employees in the executive agencies to accomplish such a daunting task. It cannot be simply tweeted about and then legislation produced. These types of legislation take an enormous amount of resources, time, and hard work to be able to be made into possible plans.

By having a new chief of staff in the West Wing, this is the time for President Donald Trump to make up for missteps in his presidential transition that have caused his initial days to be

everything but smooth. Although the effects of an inefficient transition have led to delays in workable legislation and a unified message from the Trump Administration, it is not too late to change direction and become a more effective administration. By defining a source of power and stability within the White House, in addition to reducing avoidable administrative missteps, the Trump team can begin to fulfill the campaign promises that his constituents have been waiting to come to fruition.

Figure 1:

<b>NO NOMINEE</b>	Ambassador-at-large and coordinator of United States government activities to combat HIV/AIDS globally
<b>NO NOMINEE</b>	Ambassador at-large for war crimes issues
<b>NO NOMINEE</b>	Ambassador-at-large for global women's issues
<b>NO NOMINEE</b>	Ambassador, Egypt
<b>NO NOMINEE</b>	Ambassador, Argentina
<b>NO NOMINEE</b>	Ambassador, Australia
<b>NO NOMINEE</b>	Ambassador, Belgium
<b>NO NOMINEE</b>	Ambassador, Belize
<b>NO NOMINEE</b>	Ambassador, Venezuela
<b>NO NOMINEE</b>	Ambassador, Congo
<b>NO NOMINEE</b>	Ambassador, Jordan
<b>NO NOMINEE</b>	Ambassador, Honduras
<b>NO NOMINEE</b>	Ambassador, Ireland
<b>NO NOMINEE</b>	Ambassador, Jamaica
<b>NO NOMINEE</b>	Ambassador, Saudi Arabia
<b>NO NOMINEE</b>	Ambassador, Austria
<b>NO NOMINEE</b>	Ambassador, Hungary

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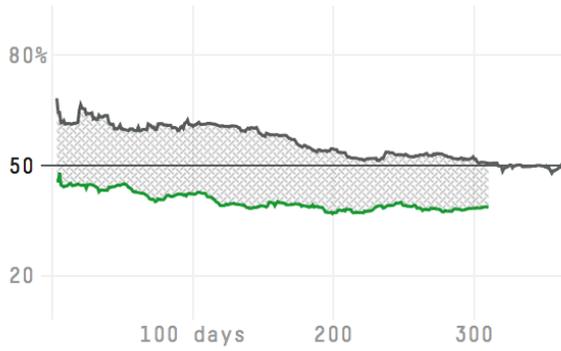
<b>NO NOMINEE</b>	Ambassador, Iceland
<b>NO NOMINEE</b>	Ambassador, Republic of Korea (South Korea)
<b>NO NOMINEE</b>	Ambassador, South Africa
<b>NO NOMINEE</b>	Ambassador, Tajikistan
<b>NO NOMINEE</b>	Ambassador, Trinidad and Tobago
<b>NO NOMINEE</b>	Ambassador, Somalia
<b>NO NOMINEE</b>	Ambassador, Qatar
<b>NO NOMINEE</b>	Ambassador, Sweden
<b>NO NOMINEE</b>	Ambassador, Syria
<b>NO NOMINEE</b>	Ambassador, Tanzania
<b>NO NOMINEE</b>	Ambassador, Ivory Coast
<b>NO NOMINEE</b>	Ambassador, Cuba
<b>NO NOMINEE</b>	Ambassador, Turkey
<b>NO NOMINEE</b>	Ambassador, Yemen

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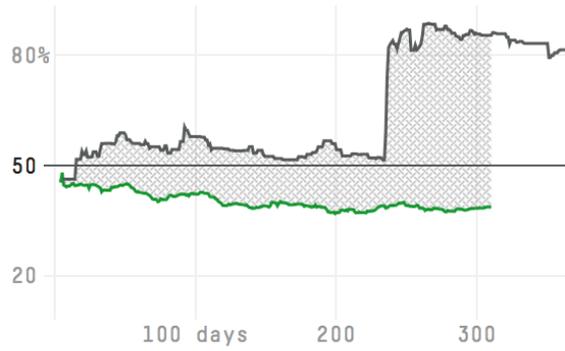
Retrieved from: <https://www.washingtonpost.com/graphics/politics/trump-administration-appointee-tracker/database/>

Figure 2:

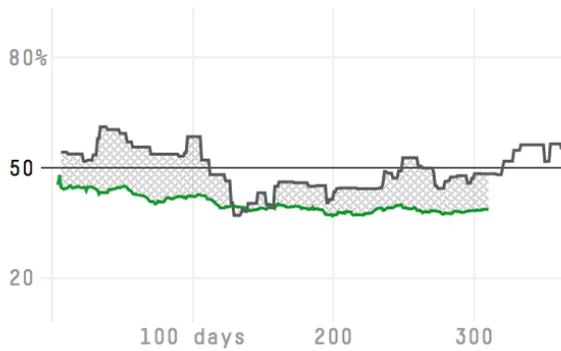
**Barack Obama 2009-17**



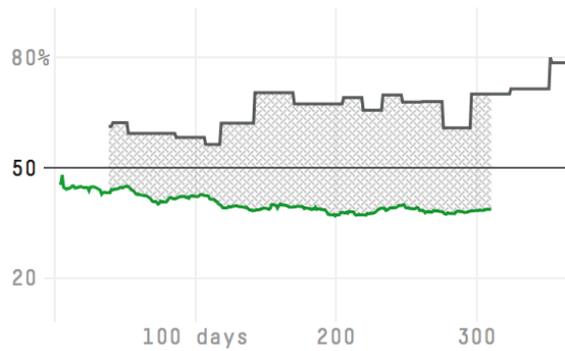
**George W. Bush 2001-09**



**Bill Clinton 1993-2001**



**George H.W. Bush 1989-93**



Retrieved from: <https://projects.fivethirtyeight.com/trump-approval-ratings/>

Figure 3:

**Presidential appointments sent to Senate by Nov. 22**



\* Totals include some posts that are not being tracked as 'key positions' in the appointee database. Sam Clovis is not yet included in the failed nomination count, as he has not been formally withdrawn.

\*\* The Senate returned all of George W. Bush's pending nominations before its August recess.

Note: Judiciary and non-civilian positions are excluded

Source: Partnership for Public Service

THE WASHINGTON POST

Retrieved from: <https://www.washingtonpost.com/graphics/politics/trump-administration-appointee-tracker/database/>