

THE WHITE HOUSE

WASHINGTON

February 11, 1970

MEMORANDUM FOR

THE PRESIDENT

For what it is worth, in my view Robert Wood's article "When Government Works" is right. It is essentially a corollary to your own thinking. You can't run the country from Washington, and you can't operate the Federal government from the White House.

The tendency to try this is deep running. It is built into most of our political science, e. g., Richard Neustadt's Presidential Power. (Wood, before going to Washington as an Undersecretary of HUD, would have propounded almost the opposite view.) As he points out now, this view has been the standard fare of all commissions on government organization since Louis Brownlow's Presidential Committee on Administrative Management of the 1930's. The Heineman Commission under Johnson followed this line, as has the Ash Commission. (I don't wish to be acerbic, but any respectable graduate student could have predicted that the Ash group would come up with an "Office of Executive Management" and could have described its proposed functions in more or less accurate detail.)

A good example of this tendency is to be seen in the White House staff this past year. We began holding morning staff meetings in January 1969 in the Roosevelt Room, at which time we all sat comfortably around one table. Slowly the table filled up. Then more rapidly seats started being placed behind the table seats. Eventually we ended up sitting Camp-Fire-Girl style in a great circle in the room, with no table. Haldeman and Ehrlichman realized this was ridiculous, and last Fall you reorganized us.

But you did not put us out of business. There were for a while four, and are now three cabinet officers on your staff. There are project managers and assistants to supervise departmental programs

in detail. The great bulk -- or so would be my impression -- of proposals you send to the Congress originate here, and not in the departments.

Your White House staff is nothing so bad in this respect as was Johnson's, where there was a paranoiac concern about what the Departments were "up to." Wood's article reflects this. Califano made his life miserable. An unending sequence of aborted programs (such as the new-town-in-town program of which Fort Lincoln is the local disaster) were thought up in the White House and pushed onto Departmental staffs that simply wouldn't or couldn't carry them out. (For that matter, Wood was brought to Washington by the White House to plan the Model Cities program in secret. The Secretary of HUD, or such is my firm understanding, did not know about Model Cities until shortly before it was announced. Wood then went over to HUD to carry it forward.)

I was on hand for Bundy's Godkin lectures, and listened carefully. At the time I thought he was right in his argument that cabinet officers need not be antagonists of the President, representing their departments' interest groups, but rather that they could be "Presidential outposts" that carry forward Presidential policy and initiatives in the areas they represent.

In my view, the main program responsibility, that is to say operations concern, of the White House staff should be limited to a half dozen areas to which you really wish to assign priority. You cannot have fifty priority issues. As Wood says, the first half dozen times a White House staffer calls to say that the President really cares about thus or such, he is heard. But after a while it gets too familiar. The iron law of priorities is that they tend to dissolve. Hence the need to keep the number small, and to stay with them until something happens.

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Wood makes several points I would call to your attention.

First. The middle echelon civil service is the key to effective government. Moreover, "a disturbingly large number of career professionals have become seriously undisciplined." (I wrote about this in my little book Maximum Feasible Misunderstanding.) Inevitably, as operations are directed from the top, policy gets made at the bottom. This was so under Johnson, when the recruits of the 1960's were at least nominally sympathetic to the administration. It is almost certainly doubly true today, when many of those persons probably regard the administration with disrespect and antagonism.

As far as I can see, nobody is paying any attention to this. The Civil Service Commission is pathetic. A condition for which we are at least in part responsible. In the meantime, Wood is right: the problem with much professional bureaucratic behavior today is that it is unprofessional and unbureaucratic.

I seriously think this needs to be attended to. I tried to interest the Ash Commission, but they couldn't wait to reorganize the Executive Office of the Presidency. I have been trying to put together a set of proposals for your consideration by way of a message to Congress, and will have them in two weeks or so. But they don't exactly thrill me.

Second. Almost all serious issues are inter-departmental. If they are to be faced the system of "lead agency" needs to be made to work, and their needs to be a reward for cooperation. This is indisputable, and you have responded to it very well, I should have thought. The Urban Affairs Council, and the others, institutionalizes this recognition of the inter-connection of all agencies and issues.

For the past 13 months we have regularly held Undersecretary Meetings here in the White House to follow up on UAC decisions, and generally to work out interdepartmental treaties. I think the effort has been fairly successful. I would suggest, however, that this subject needs your attention: i. e., the matter of rewarding cooperation, and discouraging the opposite.

HUD is a case in point. The Governor is tough, combative, and wonderful. But things tend to be a one-way street with him. Our Undersecretaries Committee has managed to get other departments to pledge resources for Model Cities. But I would be hard pressed to point to a reverse flow.

Nor is HUD that responsive to White House interests. Romney insists that only he be dealt with, which is kind of silly. It leads to his being overburdened. (Thus last Thursday, following our UAC meeting, slightly hurt he asked John Ehrlichman where that "National Urban Policy" had come from, claiming he'd not seen it. I am sure this is so. But I sent copies to him for comment on June 17, and again on October 31.) Also, he has not been notably open on the subject of inherited programs. Urban renewal and Model Cities are really going forward as if nothing had happened. More discouraging to me, in matters where your personal prestige is on the line, I just don't see the fire-in-the-belly that is needed. For example, Seventh Street in Washington, D. C. is still pretty much the moldering ruin you visited January 31 a year ago. It seems to me it was in the power of HUD to get the obscene mess cleaned up in a year's time. Similarly, Fort Lincoln lays fallow: nothing has happened in a year. The day will come when you will be charged with the responsibility. (I don't say what should be done with Fort Lincoln, only that the administration must make a decision.)

Third. Regional office effectiveness is essential. Wood acknowledges that you established common boundaries and head-quarter cities, something previous administrations have not had the stomach to try. But there is so much to be done to improve the quality of regional staffs, and their performance generally. There have to be some rewards, and there have to be some punishments, and I fear they have to come from you. Also, we need some inventions here. Perhaps a regional representative of the President with the rank of Undersecretary.

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I don't want this to get too long. Especially as I am not entirely clear just what points you wanted comment upon.

One parting note: The Wood article is from the Winter issue of The Public Interest. This is a journal I helped to found, and with which I remain active. We have a fairly special view of the world, which fits closely with yours. (You may recall the article by Peter Drucker which I sent you in January 1969.) We also have 9000 subscribers. Including, I gather, the Secretary of HUD.

Daniel P. Moynihan

Attachment