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32	39	n.d.	Report	By Norman C. Thomas (University of Michigan) and Harold L. Wolman (University of Pennsylvania), "The Presidency and Policy Formulation: The Johnson Task Forces," 27 pgs.

A partial departure from the pattern of dependence on the bureaucracy for new legislative proposals occurred in the Kennedy Administration. Upon returning his party ~~to~~^{to} office after eight years of Republican rule, President Kennedy moved quickly to establish a legislative program. By the time he was inaugurated, Kennedy had commissioned 29 task forces in various areas of foreign and domestic policy and 24 of them had reported back to him.⁶ The task force reports served to collate for the new Administration some of the nation's best thinking on the critical problems confronting it. They ^{also} aided the new President in formulating his program. Subsequent publication of the reports enabled them to provide a ready reference for policy proposals for individuals and groups inside and outside of the government. While most of Kennedy's legislative proposals were scaled down from the broad scope of the task force recommendations, the thrust and direction of the reports survived.

Although the pre-inaugural task forces were an important innovation, they were not to be repeated. Kennedy did experiment with other variations of the task force, however. The pre-inaugural task forces composed largely of outside experts gave way to intra-governmental groups which Kennedy used to deal with foreign policy crises and domestic problems on an ad hoc basis.

The Johnson Pattern

Soon after President Johnson assumed office, he faced the necessity of developing a legislative program which could be identified as "his own." There apparently was a feeling within

the White House and in the Bureau of the Budget which the President adopted, that such a program was not likely to be developed on the basis of proposals submitted by the departments and agencies. The need to obtain outside advice and suggestions was especially critical in an Administration where most key personnel and the basic values and goals remained unchanged from those of its predecessor.

Early in 1964, a number of President Johnson's close advisers including Budget Director Kermit Gordon, presidential assistants Bill Moyers and Richard Goodwin and Chairman Walter Heller of the Council of Economic Advisers, all of whom were familiar with the pre-inaugural Kennedy task forces, suggested that the President commission a series of task forces to study specific policy areas. In order to avoid the pitfalls encountered in the Kennedy task force operation, e.g., charges of overrepresentation of intellectuals in their membership and of a consequent lack of realism in their proposals which forced the Administration to defend their reports even before they had become the basis for action, the Johnson task forces operated under a cloak of secrecy. The members agreed not to reveal their assignments to the press or to professional associates and not to disclose the substance of their deliberations or reports. The Administration promised to reciprocate.⁷

The 1964 experience with task force operations was deemed successful and was refined and developed in the following years.

Under the direction of Special Assistant Joseph A. Califano, the White House staff assumed the paramount role in setting the framework for legislative and administrative policy-making. As we have observed, policy planning prior to the Johnson Administration was primarily a function of the departments and agencies with review by the White House staff and the Bureau of the Budget. President Johnson brought that function more effectively under his control through the integration of the task force operation with legislative submissions and budget review and the creation of a small policy-planning staff under one of his key assistants.⁸ The impact of the departments and agencies in the development of the presidential legislative program may still have been considerable, but it tended to come more through the participation of their policy-level personnel in White House meetings where task force reports were evaluated. A high-ranking official in the United States Office of Education (USOE) acknowledged that in the past few years "much policy development in education has moved from here to the White House." Similarly, a career official in the Bureau of the Budget observed that "at the stage of developing the presidential legislative program, the task force reports play a more significant role than any documents or proposals emanating from the agencies."

The agencies proposed a substantial amount of technical legislation which corrected defects and filled gaps in existing

statutes but many of the most important substantive contributions came from elsewhere. "The task forces presented us with meaty propositions to which we could react," recalled a former Budget Bureau official, "not the nuts and bolts stuff which we usually got from the agencies." The agencies also made major contributions to public policy in the course of drafting bills and implementing programs, but their participation in the formulative stages was somewhat reduced during the Johnson Administration.⁹ Perhaps the distinction which should be made is that task forces and key presidential advisers operated at a much more general level than all but a few top-ranking agency personnel. Department and agency personnel took what were often vague task force ideas and fashioned specific legislative proposals from them. As an HEW official explained, "we had to come up with the conception of the idea in legislation, not task force rhetoric."

The processes of policy formulation in the Executive Office of the President varied widely in the period from 1964 through 1968, but a general pattern appears to have emerged in the cycle of the task force operation as it developed under Califano and his staff.¹⁰ Each year in late spring, Califano and his assistants visited a number of major university centers throughout the country in order to glean ideas for new programs. At the same

time, the White House canvassed the Administration for new ideas. Various officials who were regarded as "idea men" were invited to submit proposals on any subject directly to the White House. This permitted them to by-pass normal bureaucratic channels and departmental and agency hierarchies. For example, according to a White House staff member, former Secretary of Defense McNamara submitted over 50 proposals on various domestic problems in one year.

After receiving them, Califano's assistants prepared written one-page descriptions of all the ideas. These "write-ups" included a "proposal" section which briefly explained the idea, a description of the problem and its relationship to on-going programs and a recommendation for action. Next, these papers were categorized and a high-level group within the institutionalized Presidency reviewed them. This group also reviewed the reports of previous task forces, presidential commissions and other advisory bodies which were filed during the course of the previous year. In 1967 this group included Califano, Budget Director Charles Schultze, his deputy Phillip S. Hughes, Chairman Gardner Ackley of the Council of Economic Advisers, Special Counsel to the President Harry McPherson and Califano's staff. Following the review, Califano and his assistants compiled a loose leaf book in which the remaining ideas were grouped by substantive policy areas. The screening

group then reconvened for a second examination after which it sent the book to the President with a cover letter indicating the areas which it felt required further study. The President and Califano then reviewed the proposals deciding either to abandon them, study them further or mark them for additional study if time and staff were available.

Further development of the ideas which were not abandoned occurred through referral to individual consultants or formal advisory councils, study by departments and agencies, or examination by task forces. Reports of individual consultants are not often made public and their impact is difficult to assess. Advisory council reports usually are public documents. Their influence appears to vary with the reputations of their members, the quality of their content, and the current political significance of the subject matter. Agency studies also vary greatly in impact, but generally they can be regarded as contributing to internal bureaucratic thinking and policy development.

The assignment of a task force to examine an idea or a set of related ideas signified that the President and his top advisors regarded the problem as one of considerable significance. Although task forces did not routinely operate in all of the Great Society areas, they did function fairly frequently. In 1967 a total of 50 separate task forces were operating in various domestic policy areas. Task force assignments, which varied in

scope and purpose, determined whether their members would be drawn from people outside or inside the government or from both groups.

Outside task forces were the primary means of securing new ideas for the development of policy. According to participants on various task forces in education and housing, they received broad directives which accorded them maximum freedom to come forth with ideas. "The President," observed a high-ranking presidential staff member, "wants their judgment on substance-- not political feasibility."

There was some adjustment in the functions of outside task forces after 1964. In the words of one participant, the 1964 task forces were "happenings." President Johnson used the 1964 task forces as ad hoc devices to develop proposals which almost immediately became part of his legislative program. By 1966 the task forces were a normal and rather elaborate aspect of the operations of the Presidency. The President began to use them to take a long-range view of major policy areas and problems as well as to develop/^{some} immediate legislative proposals. He and his staff took steps to institutionalize the task force operation by integrating it with the highly structured and formal budget review process.

As compared to outside task forces, inside, or interagency task forces functioned more to coordinate agency approaches and to obtain some measure of interagency agreement in areas of dispute. Inside task forces also provided agencies with a

vehicle for a broad ^{review} / of the reports of outside task forces.

While interagency groups may have generated some new proposals, their major purpose was to provide the President with a coordinated overview of functional problems that cut across departmental and agency lines and to suggest alternative solutions to them. An important aspect of this coordinating function of the interagency task forces was to conduct a "detailed pricing out of all proposals." Members of inside task forces usually included representatives of the Bureau of the Budget and Califano's staff and agency heads or departmental assistant secretaries.

Task forces did not displace that older and more familiar advisory mechanism, the public study commission, some of which are actually authorized by Congress (e.g., the Douglas Commission in housing). President Johnson employed a number of public commissions including the Kaiser Committee, the Heineman Commission on income maintenance, the Crime Commission, and the Kerner Commission. Public commissions can, as cynics have suggested, give the illusion that something is being done to attack a problem. Establishing a commission is a safe response--it is action yet at the same time it disturbs none of the very real political opposition which would emerge if substantive action were attempted.¹¹ The impact of the report of a public commission is likely to be through its educational effect on public opinion rather than through direct translation into the Administration's policy proposals. Occasionally when the President has complete confidence in the commission chairman and stays in close contact with him,

the report may have a direct impact on Administration policy. This was the case with the Kaiser Committee (President's Committee on Urban Housing) in 1967-1968.

Public commissions can also function to develop support for the Administration. By establishing representative groups and then exposing their deliberations and their reports to public attention, it is possible to develop support for the recommendations. The consensus-building functions of public commissions are no doubt advantageous, but the problem associated with their use is that reports and recommendations which are at all innovative tend to be "controversial" and hence an embarrassment to the White House.¹² The noncommittal response of President Johnson to the report of the Kerner Commission (President's Commission on Civil Disorders) in March, 1968 and the open criticism of the report by Vice President Humphrey and Secretary of Health, Education and Welfare Cohen illustrate the risks involved in creating public commissions--they may file reports and make recommendations which place the Administration in a less than favorable light. Nor are public commissions likely to serve as sources of information or new ideas. According to one of our respondents, "the basic ideas in the Kerner report came to us at least two years ago in various task force reports." Furthermore, most task force reports are likely to undergo more intensive scrutiny than that accorded the reports of public commissions.

Once the task forces had written their reports, they submitted them to the President and deposited them with the Bureau of the

Budget. Usually, outside task forces reported during the fall.¹³ The Bureau of the Budget and the relevant departments and agencies (if the latter were consulted as they frequently but not always were) forwarded their comments directly to the White House.

Following the initial evaluation, the White House staff, under Califano's direction, took the lead in winnowing down task force proposals. (If, in the case of an outside task force report, it appeared that an interagency task force should be created, that decision was made by Califano, the Budget Director, the Chairman of the Council of Economic Advisers and the appropriate department and agency heads). In a series of White House meetings, department and agency heads and their top assistants, representatives of the Bureau of the Budget's examining divisions and of the Council of Economic Advisers and members of Califano's staff examined all task force reports,

The purpose of these meetings was to secure agreement on major areas of concern and proposed courses of action. The participants received continuous direction from the President as to his priorities. After much discussion and bargaining, they developed a proposed legislative program which was presented to the President who then made final decisions on it.

The process of developing presidential legislative programs in domestic policy areas established under the Johnson Administration occurred in a more or less orderly temporal sequence. (See Figure 1). It can best be described as an irregular but definite pattern which was fairly well systematized.