

White House Interview Program

DATE: September 1, 2000

INTERVIEWEE: BOB J. NASH

INTERVIEWER: Martha Kumar with Terry Sullivan

[Disc 1 of 1]

MK: [The rules are] are it's on-the-record except where you want to go on-background, or off-the-record. The material will be used in the pieces that we have on the seven White House offices that we're focusing on. We're building something of an institutional memory for seven offices, and Personnel is one of them, all ones that we feel are important to a successful start. The material will be given to the new people coming in, so that they can better understand over a course of time what are the dynamics of the various offices. That information is given to them after the election, when they're appointed.

BN: So, like the middle of November, they'll be given the results of this?

MK: They would be given interviews, yes, after they're designated for Personnel. Also when it's identified who is involved in transition planning—say, for example, Roy Neel is designated for doing planning for [Al] Gore, and he's interested in reading interviews—he's one of the people we interviewed.

TS: [Inaudible].

MK: Say he's interested in reading interviews that have to do with Democrats on personnel, and those particular people would like to give their interviews to him. Then we would do that. If you were interested in having him read your interview, then we would do that.

BN: So the interviews that you're doing of the various people in the administrations for the different offices will be compiled—it won't be just you gleaning from the interviews and producing something. Will it be that, and the interviews, both?

MK: Yes. We have a piece on the personnel office that's being written by Brad Patterson and Jim Pfiffner. They're using material that we've developed in the interviews and, of course, Brad has his own set of interviews, and Jim does, too. So it will be information that comes from a variety of sources.

BN: So, on the personnel end, who have you talked to already, on personnel?

TS: Chase Untermeyer.

MK: Pen James. Fred Malek. Jan Cope.

BN: Jan Naylor Cope.

MK: She worked as a deputy under Chase Untermeyer. She worked in the initial transition and then during the administration in various places in personnel, and then on the way out she worked on it, too. Some people who have spent some time in personnel, like Chris Hicks.

White House Interview Program, Interview with Bob J. Nash, Martha Joynt Kumar and Terry Sullivan, Washington, D.C., September 1, 2000. Bob J. Nash served as a deputy and then later as the Director of the Office of Presidential Personnel in the administration of President Clinton.

Doug Bennett was another one, too, from the [Gerald] Ford Administration. Malek from [Richard] Nixon. Arnie Miller from [Jimmy] Carter.

BN: How about Jim King?

MK: Jim King I talked to the other day. I haven't done a full interview with him, but I had lunch with him the other day after the event at Heritage.

TS: We will also talk to Jan Piercy.

BN: She was a deputy. So the paper that's being done—the results of the previous interviews plus—am I the last personnel-related interview?

MK: Not necessarily.

BN: You mentioned Jan.

MK: On some of them, it depends on whether the people that are writing the essays feel they have enough information, or if their areas are short on an administration, then we do extra ones.

BN: Okay.

MK: So, the interview will come back to you. You go over it for corrections.

BN: Good.

MK: Then, ultimately, around the spring of next year, they'll go to the Archives and they'll be part of the presidential library system, with whatever restrictions are on the interviews. In a sense, there are two records, the disc and then the transcript itself. There are separate Deeds of Gift that we have worked out with the Archives on both. Terry is the associate director of the project, and I'm director. We've got two parts to the project. We've got the interview program, which is this, and then we have a piece of software that we're putting together that I think Paul [Light] talked about, the nominations forms on line.

BN: Is that going to happen?

MK: Terry can tell you about that.

TS: We'll have a prototype in a week-and-a-half.

MK: In fact, we can start with that.

TS: We're very close.

BN: That's very good.

TS: It's a solvable problem. It will be a good example of how private philanthropy can demonstrate to the government something that the government needs to be able to do, and hasn't quite been able to put together. There are lots of agencies that have tried to develop computerized versions of various personnel forms, and some of them have been more or less successful. This program will have advantages over all of those attempts and one of

those advantages—it won't be very sophisticated. As a consequence, it will be easily transmutable to Resumix or Telemagic or any of other contact managers that are out there and used by different agencies. There will be lots of advantages to that.

BN: What's your target, for when that might be available for practical use?

TS: For practical use, our contractual delivery date with our software company is November 1. They have a performance clause to deliver it two weeks earlier. So, we're hoping we'll get a working version that the software company is satisfied with, by the middle of October, and then we'll have an absolute ready CD-burned version, probably in November.

BN: Good.

TS: We will be able to get people off of our website versions of it before the CDs come out.

BN: That's good.

MK: Then, hopefully, I guess also, we'll have forms on the website.

TS: We'll have the forms on the website so people can see them shortly, not a version of the program, but at least versions of the forms so they know what kind of questions they need to be prepared for.

BN: Okay. The specific questions.

TS: Yes.

BN: That's good.

TS: That's so they know, for example, that they've got to get seven years' worth of their residences lined up, and that sort of thing, because the FBI [Federal Bureau of Investigation] form asks for that. They have to know where is their former spouse living, because the FBI wants to know the address of their former spouse. For some of the men, they have to try to remember where it was they were married, because the FBI is going to be asking them where they were married, and when.

BN: We've done a pretty good job here recently, of sort of gently making people understand the level—there's a little piece of paper that I give out now—it's two pages, if you're sitting confirmed or not sitting confirmed—here are the kinds of things you need to start thinking about now. And we'll give this to people we're even talking to, to people who have been selected, but people who have said, "I'd like to be on the board of the National Council on the Arts, sitting confirmed, and I'd love to do that." In their mind, they just think, "Once the president's selected me, that's it." A lot of people think that. So when you give them this paper, I've had people who say, "I don't want to do this. Do I have to do this? I'm a good person." And I say, "Right now you do."

MK: What percentage of people that you give it to, have that kind of response?

BN: Five per cent. Five, no more than ten. Closer to five than ten per cent.

TS: That's the sort of estimate that Jan was giving this morning, about what she thought.

BN: Who?

TS: Jan Pearson. I asked her about that, in the negotiation process where you haven't gone to an intent-to-nominate or anything else, what's the percentage of people who say, "Back off."

BN: When you get to the intent-to-nominate phase, the individual has been selected, they have filled out a name check, they've filled out a tax check, and that information is back. We never do an intent-to-nominate until we know that they're not wanted by the law and that they've paid their taxes, an intent-to-nominate.

MK: So they don't fill out the intent-to-nominate form at the same time as the tax check and the permission to have the FBI investigate?

BN: Yes. You fill the 86 out and the Personal Data Statement. That all goes in simultaneously, but because the field investigation takes longer, and if there is a need to do—. An intent-to-nominate is a voluntary, as-needed activity. We do that when we feel comfortable that the person does not have a problem with the law and they pay their taxes. The FBI field investigation is still going on. They turn it all in at the same time, but the name and tax come back quicker. If someone says, "You're not even working on that. This thing should have been passed a long time ago and you haven't done anything," what you do then is you've got a board and five of those six people, the name and tax check is back, you do an intent, to show movement. That's one of the reasons you do it. There's no other reason to do an intent. Every time you nominate somebody it's an intent, because when you do it the nomination is not actually there. Do you know what I mean? It's not physically there. So they're all called "intent." But sometimes you do an intent and you don't do the nomination because the field investigation is still going on. Sometimes when you do an intent it's actually the real nomination, too, because it will be driven up that afternoon.

TS: Up to the Senate.

BN: Up to the Senate.

MK: How do you decide which is which? How do you decide what's going to be on hold for a while?

BN: It depends upon whether or not there is a need, a public need, to publicly say, "We intend to appoint this particular board." We just do it on a case-by-case basis. If someone says that legislation was passed twelve months ago, and no one's been appointed yet, and we haven't heard anything yet. We know we've been working on it—maybe we've had two people tank in vetting, maybe we've had a couple people change their mind. There are all kinds of reasons. It doesn't get done as quick. Maybe the people you've selected have traveled to fifty countries and are gazillionaires. Then people say, "You're not doing anything." Well, we're doing something. What do we do? Four or five of them we know have passed a certain level of acceptance. You're not being investigated by the FBI; you've paid your taxes. It doesn't mean something couldn't come up in the field investigation but, you feel comfortable enough and you weigh it. You say it's worth going ahead and putting out five names publicly. So it's a case-by-case basis.

MK: So when you're doing that, in a sense what you're doing is, you have a press release. Is the press release in effect—?

BN: That's what it is. It's the press release only.

TS: But this is not driving it up to the Senate, because you still haven't done the field investigation.

BN: No. It's a press release. "The President intends to nominate Bob Nash to the National Council on the Arts."

MK: When you first begin to be interested in somebody, or they become interested in being appointed to something, what are the different levels of information that you gather, and of questions that you ask—going up to the point of getting the intent to nominate? What are the stages? Do you have stages that you think of before that, and what kinds of questions do you ask in those stages?

BN: First of all, the answer to, "Are there stages?" the answer is, "Yes." For an example, the newly created Advisory Commission on Asian and Pacific Affairs. I think there were fifteen members. Legislation was passed. [There was] a lot of interest in that. When it was passed, we here immediately started getting letters and resumes in from groups, Asian-Pacific groups, congressmen, senators, even some people in the White House said, "Here's a great name." So we start compiling these names and we put them on a grid: name, state, party. Maybe there wasn't a party requirement. Where there's a party requirement, we ask for it. Race. Then we put a little short description of lawyer, businessman, whatever. That's just to say, "What do we have here?" You're not cutting anybody. So you look at a hundred names. I assigned that to a particular associate director.

I have two deputies, Maria Haley and Marsha Scott, and they have distinct duties. Then I have three associate directors who split the government up into parts. Somebody does, like, our "guns and money." They do Treasury; they do CIA [Central Intelligence Agency] and Defense. I've got sort of an environmental and ag[riculture] person. Then I have a human services, health person. That's sort of the rough division. Sometimes I'd move the responsibilities back and forth depending upon the volume. If you've got like a hundred vacancies you're working on, and you've got twenty, I might for a period of time move some of yours over here. I'd just do that as a management tool.

Anyway, so these hundred names are here. Some of them they just sort of automatically eliminate because they're—if we don't have a resume, which happens sometimes, we say, "Give us a resume." We've got to have a resume. So you look at that. This person knows nothing about this, nothing. So you sort of put that over in a stack and you wind up with a smaller list. Then you say, okay, geographical dispersion. Look at geographical dispersion. We don't want everybody to be from the northeast. You don't want everybody to be white. You don't want everybody to be black. You don't want them all to be men. They do that, and then they come down to a smaller number. At the same time, you're always looking at, "Is this person qualified, do they have the interest, do they have the knowledge, do they have the experience?"

Then, at a certain point in time, I meet with these associate directors every week for about two hours. We'd go over their portfolios. They'll say, "Bob, we've now got a hundred names in. We're down to six because we did this and we did that. We've got a good core and a good mix." And we'd talk about the names. Then we'd look at sponsorship, who is sponsoring these people? Well, if the sponsor of the legislation is one of the sponsors of an individual, that would carry more weight as one factor than a congressman or a senator who is not a sponsor of the legislation.

MK: Right.

BN: It really is time-consuming, and there is no—how do I put it—it depends on the particular board, how much interest there is in it. Some of them are easier because people don't care much about them. Then we come down to a list of twenty-five, and then they will talk to me about these individuals and say this is a good person because of this and we've got three people west of the Mississippi and four east of the Mississippi, all that kind of stuff. Then we get to a list where, depending upon the nature of the board or commission or job, we'll start making telephone calls, where they worked, checking references. In some cases, we'll do a LexisNexis [search]. Depending upon the complexity of what they're going to do, that takes some time. I've got a person on my staff, two actually, who do LexisNexis work. But we don't do it on anybody. It just depends. It depends on the nature of a particular appointment. We might not do a LexisNexis on everybody, but if you look at the resume and a person says they published twenty-five books, we better look at some of what they've said. So we do all that. Then the list gets narrowed down again.

By this time, I've had two meetings, three meetings with this associate director and then they get to a point where they make a recommendation to me: "Bob, I think you ought to recommend to the President to appoint these twelve people," and why. I'll look at that and I ask questions. "Did you talk to Sandy Berger? Did you talk to his staff? Are you sure she was recommending this person? Look at this. This senator is recommending four people. Why are four of the—?" It's all this kind of work back and forth. Then, I'll finally get to a point where I make a recommendation to the President. He will look at it and make a decision with a simple check mark. What we provide to him is: here is the job description and any specific challenges facing the job; here is the background of the persons that I'm recommending, and why I'm recommending them. The "why" is relatively short. Then I say: here are the sponsors of the person. Then at the end of the decision memo I'll list other people we considered—not everybody, but ones that came close, with a little short paragraph on them: who they are, where they're from, education, that kind of thing. Short, very short. He [President Clinton] has a tremendous ability to consume piles of information. It's just amazing to me how quickly he gets through these decision memos. It's amazing to me, but he does. I've worked with him for twenty years so I—so he checks that. He approves them or disapproves them.

That comes back over here to the central office, to Maria. Then she notifies the associate director that these people have been approved. Then the associate director will prepare what he or she calls a start memo. The start memo says to the lawyers upstairs or down the hall, the President has approved these individuals going forward. It's a confirmed board, or it's not confirmed. Now by that time we know already, because of the work we've done with the Counsel's Office, what's going to be required. Is it a name check and a tax check only? Is it a name check, a tax check, and a Personal Data Statement? Is it a financial? Is it a 278 or a 450? If it is a Senate-confirmed position, there is always an 86. Always. That's required. The committee wants to see an FBI report. But I push here for less rather than more as it relates to non-confirmed positions. Basically, it's talking about PA, non-confirmed boards. I want less. And I've won a lot of battles internally. I'm saying, why do we want a financial statement if a board member is not making any decisions on a grant, a contract, or a loan? They're not making policy decisions; they're simply advisory. What difference does it make what their financials are? I won some of those battles for ones that were requiring financials and I'm saying: "What is this?" So we don't, now.

The Personal Data Statement is—again, it depends upon the nature of what they're going to do. You may want to do a Personal Data Statement even if they're not doing grants, contracts, and loans because—maybe—what they say could be dictated by some previous position. And the Personal Data Statement has some information on finances.

What happens is, the start memo goes to the lawyers, and then they look at that and they know a name check and a tax check is required. They will send it out. They will send out to the applicant, the Counsel's Office, a name check, and a tax check. My staff will call them and say, "You're getting a name check and a tax check. Would you please sign those and get those back in right away?" Then the Counsel's Office sends that out when they get it back. We don't get it back. The Counsel's Office gets it back. We have a system where we know when it comes back. If it doesn't come back within a certain period of time, the Counsel's Office tells us, the associate director gets on the phone, or one of his staff, and says, "You have to get that form in now!" I have a new system in place now. I call it my blow-up system. It's a three-letter system. This is a problem that never comes in—in all the discussions that we've had at the Hay-Adams, and I've never brought it up, one of the problems we have is people get these forms and they don't fill them out. They look at them and they say, "Oh, god!" and they put them down, and it's thirty and sometimes forty-five, sixty days and ninety days.

TS: This is just, "I'll think about it tomorrow?"

BN: Yes. I have a system now that I started some time after I came here, where you get a letter from me that says, "The Counsel's Office sent you some forms. We really thank you for accepting this appointment, but there's a process you have to go through, as you've been told. We'd like for you to get your forms in, please." They don't get them in. The first one says, "Please get your forms in within ten days." They don't do it. The second letter says, "We asked you to get your forms in and you didn't. This is very important. We know it's a chore, but you've got to do it. If you don't get them in by this date we must assume that you decided not to go forward and we're going to find another candidate." It still doesn't come in. The third letter: "Thank you very much. We will be happy to consider you in the future but we have selected another candidate." Now we may not have selected another candidate—actually a lot of times we have, you have also considered, you have people sitting there. So I put this into place and now that doesn't count—what happens is some time during that three-letter period, 98 per cent of the people get their stuff in, but it really takes that. The 10 per cent are people who get this little thing on the front end that I show them—let me see if I have a copy.

MK: You could just run it by the xerox.

[Interruption]

BN: —White House letterhead. I want to do a memo. It's only intended to give you a general idea of what may be required.

MK: The maximum.

BN: The maximum. A lot of it might not be. But they would look at that—once we get down to a point where we're honing in on a short list, and we may want to use those folks, we will send that to them or show it to them. This is not something I publish, or I put out, but it has been very helpful in terms of giving people a picture of what's happening.

And then I do something like—have you seen this?

MK: No.

BN: Again, this is not official stuff. This is my effort to help people understand—

Mk: Rationalize the process.

BN: Yes. Just kind of see it.

TS: Give them a picture that they can look at.

BN: A picture. I'm not trying to tell you everything. I'm just trying to give you a picture of what you're dealing with. Now some people have been—people that have been in the Carter administration, I don't show them. They know. But if it's somebody that's new, I say, "Hey, look at this!"

Anyway, then what happens is the Counsel's Office sends the stuff out to the IRS [Internal Revenue Service] and the FBI. Then the Counsel's Office gets the information back. They read it. The next thing I hear, eight times out of ten, is, "This person has been cleared." They e-mail it down to Maria here. Then she tells the associate director. Then I have another office that, sort of, is my computer systems paperwork thing. They prepare what they call a nomination memo which goes to the clerk. The clerk does their thing. My office prepares the press releases. We do. We get the press release over to the press office. We get the nomination down to the clerk's office. The clerk drives it up [to Congress]. The press office issues a press release, and they're nominated.

MK: Now on the boards, it sounds as if most of the names that you're working with are names that come in from the West Wing or from other places. They are not ones that you go out and generate yourselves. Is that right, they come in from groups, from the Hill, and what-not? And, is it different for different levels, where you have to go out and recruit for some boards and commissions, where you have a gazillion names?

BN: Well, sometimes we recruit. If a name comes from somebody in the White House, we may call the office and ask them for a name, or they may send it without us asking. If we haven't received a recommendation from a senator that we know is very interested in this particular position, we may call him. For me, it works both ways. We reach out to people who we might think have an interest, and just haven't gotten around to sending us anything. So it goes both ways. Now I'll tell you this, I hardly ever have a lack of applicants, especially for boards and commissions. There are only a few things like the Patents and Trademarks Office that I haven't filled yet. But you've got to know the reason. The Patents and Trademarks Office is a patents and trademarks lawyer. Now, in the last year, you can't find a patent and trademarks lawyer to go to the Patents and Trademarks Office. If you get them done and they're out of a job in a year, they can't go back and practice over there in five years. That's what you do. You practice before the Patents and Trademarks Office, so I can't find anybody to take that job because they don't want to be bothered.

TS: [Inaudible] their livelihood for five years.

BN: My point is that's an isolated—I might give you five other examples. I don't know. I'm telling you, my problem is, I have too many applicants. Now, today as we speak, and as each day, each week, and each month goes by, that's becoming more and more of a problem, that having applicants, because of obvious reasons. It's the end of an Administration. Who wants to come in because, you don't know whether Gore is going to keep you, even if he wins? You know [George W.] Bush is going to fire you. And for term positions—I'm not putting any more people in the vetting for confirmed positions. I just stopped that about two weeks ago. The reason I stopped it is because there is not enough time before October

6—which is my estimate when they go out [inaudible]—there's not enough time to find, vet, nominate and confirm anybody, before they go out.

[Interruption]

BN: So I've stopped putting Senate-confirmed people into vetting, because it's academic. It's stopped. I'm still doing SES's [Senior Executive Service], I'm still doing C's [schedule C appointments]. I'm still doing PA [Presidential Appointment, without Senate confirmation], part-time, non-confirmed boards.

MK: What are the differences in the kinds of information that you'd get for Schedule C's and also for SES?

BN: First of all, on Schedule C's, I personally don't spend any time on Schedule C's. I don't even approve them. Maria does, Maria Haley—have you talked to her?

MK: I have, yes.

BN: I would feel uncomfortable answering that question. I just made a decision on how to spend my time, and I just don't mess with them. I don't even see them. Now, sometimes people may seek me out. Bill Richardson may say, "I've got a great—." I come back and say, "Maria, would you...?" Now I approve SES's. The question is: what kind of information do I require on SES's, as compared to Senate-confirmed positions?

MK: Yes.

BN: Well, obviously we do less work. We don't do a field investigation on an SES unless, maybe, if somebody's going to CIA or somebody's going to parts of Justice. But in terms of just the qualifications, just to be honest with you, I don't spend as much time thinking about those. I don't ever interview SES's. I always interview PAS's [Presidential Appointment with Senate Confirmation]. I will interview every full-time PAS. I will not interview every—one time the President said to me that was a great—he had approved this full-time PAS. He said, "That was a great recommendation you made on whoever. Didn't you like him?" I said, "Mr. President, I didn't meet him." He said, "Don't recommend to me anybody that you don't meet." From that day forward—what he meant was, not like people for a board that meets four times a year—but I interviewed every full-time PAS. It takes a lot of time.

TS: You mean you interviewed everybody who was being considered?

BN: No.

TS: You just mean the last person that was recommended to you.

BN: Right. The person that I am going to accept and recommend to the President, I interview them before I recommend them. I do that.

Going back to your question, I guess the only way—. We don't spend as much time, because their duties are oftentimes [inaudible]. Many PAS's have statutory responsibilities, so you know exactly what you need there. I know C's can be moved every week and SES's could be also. So you don't really spend a lot of time unless there's a specific challenge—for example, over at the USDA [U.S. Department of Agriculture] there was an SES. The position was in the rural utility service. I knew that the Secretary of Agriculture and the person who ran the

Rural Utility Service were looking for somebody who could help implement this water 2000 project, which is a project to try to make sure there's water in every home in America by the year 2000. This person needs to know about water projects and water improvement districts. So you know that you have to have somebody who has worked with local governments and financing. Whereas, if you were going to get an SES for congressional affairs, you've got a hundred people walking around who have worked on the Hill and you don't spend much time. Have you worked in a congressional office or mayor's office? You see what I'm saying?

MK: Yes. In managing the information you have on all of the people who come in, where are the different programs that you use? Do you use Resumex for everything you have, or you use that program only for people that you are seriously considering? What kinds of ways would you have of keeping track of people who have just said they might like to be considered for something? Do you have different ways of dealing with them?

BN: Yes.

MK: You must have a huge bank of people who have said they want to be considered for something.

BN: We do. Now I will tell you that, in terms of a "huge bank of people", that is kept by the individual associate directors who prepare these, I'll call them spreadsheets that they use, but it's not something that's on the main computer drive. I can access it but I'll never do it, because I would talk to the people. So it's really—we don't use Resumex to—. What we do right now is the individual associate directors use their desktops to manipulate a database that will array all of the candidates with just basic information. Then they've got their resumes in a hard file, but they've also been scanned in. So, if for some reason it gets lost in their file, they can call back to Natasha and say, "Could you run me a resume for Bob Nash?" She'll spit it out and send it back to them, just a resume. The people back in the central computer system don't get—they'll get the resume but [inaudible]. They don't have all the other stuff that the associate director has arrayed there in their office. That's the best way I can answer it.

They don't actually get into what I call the formal database until they have been selected by the president. Selected. That's when they get into the formal database. They're in there as a selectee and they're in vetting. I get a printout any minute. I say, "Get me everybody who is in vetting. When did they go in vetting? When did they get their forms back?" Even if they've gotten half of them back and the others are not back, I know that, which helps me generate these letters. The computer program is what helps me generate the blowup letters. I can tell you everybody nominated, what the committee is, when they were nominated, all that stuff. But it only happens in a formal sense after they've been selected. But we don't really have a problem in keeping up with it. We could have some improvements for more of a centralized system of keeping up [with] people before they're selected. There may be some improvements that can be made there.

MK: How many people are in the general database of people, who are just out there as possibilities, who expressed an interest of some sort?

BN: Cumulative?

MK: Yes.

BN: 190,000. [One hundred and ninety thousand.]

MK: 190[,000].

BN: Now I have to tell [you], that's like—everybody.

TS: That's the letters that have come in unsolicited?

BN: Yes. We don't get rid of resumes. We don't say, "That's going in the trashcan." It just goes in there. Now it includes everything. A cold letter that says, "I live in India and I want to work in the White House." It's in there. That letter is in there. It's scanned in, but that will never be pulled up. It will never be used.

MK: What kind of designation do you have of different levels of designation for them, of things that are live wires, that are possibilities, and ones that are sort of pro forma, they've been sent in so you put them in?

BN: Well, I think I understand the question you're asking.

MK: So out of the 190,000, how many fall into that last category of, "Ones that have just been sent in," so you're going to put them in there to let the people know—you can write them a letter saying that their name is in.

BN: That question will be answered in different ways, depending on when you ask it. You ask it today, but if you had asked that question five years ago, there would have been a lot more of those that will be of more interest to us in terms of filling vacancies. Today I can tell you, we don't go back to that. When they come in today—even a year ago—just because of the limited number of positions that are available, although that's increasing every day now because people aren't coming in as fast and people are leaving—today we wouldn't go to it. If somebody writes [inaudible] Baca Ranch, something out in New Mexico, a supplemental board, when those letters come in, they go to the associate director that's working on them. They go to the system, too, but she has those in her office. She's already developed a database where she's looking at all the names. She has the resume but we put it back in the system because, if for some reason you lose it or whatever, you can go get it. But we don't go back there and punch in, "Give me everybody from New Mexico...."

TS: That's right-handed.

BN: —that's right-handed. We don't do that because we don't need to do it. Now, at the beginning of an administration that's needed, I think, a lot more than today or two years ago or three years ago.

MK: Having been in here and familiar with the operation from way before actually you all came in, what would you say the rhythms are of this office over a course of time, that there are different things that you're doing at different times, and different types of information that you're gathering, that one could expect in four years or eight years of an administration? At the beginning, you're going to be snowed under with a huge number of resumes coming in, which you would not be now. So what are the rhythms of the kinds of activities that you're going to have over that course of time?

BN: Right now, we're spending most of our time trying to get those people who are already in vetting and have been in vetting for a while, out of vetting, so we can nominate them in time

for them to still have time to get confirmed before the Senate goes out. Number two, there are people who are nominated who have not been confirmed; we're trying to figure out ways to either pair them with Republican nominees or encourage Democratic senators to go develop alliances with Republican senators, to try to get somebody done, or other ways to getting people confirmed. That's a lot of our activity right now. As I stated earlier, I am not putting any new PAS's into vetting. We are working on complying with the Vacancies Act, the new Vacancies Act, which is something new for us—which I opposed—but it passed and I'm dealing with it. So I'm spending a lot of time reporting to the GAO [Government Accounting Office] about vacancies. We're having more and more vacancies now, so what we're doing is, we are making decisions about which person is going to serve as Acting when an assistant secretary leaves. So, we're spending a lot of time on that. Now some people say it's automatic, it's whoever the principal deputy is. Well, not necessarily, because we could say no, the principal deputy is not going to be the Acting, because he or she is not the best person to do that—the other deputy is. So we do those kinds of things. That's another major activity, complying with the Vacancies Act. We'd be doing that even if the Vacancies Act was not there, because somebody would have to [be] Acting. We'd be doing that even if the requirement was not there. So that's another activity, rhythm.

Another one is, answering questions, which we can answer when people are saying, "What's going to happen if Gore is elected?" My answer is, "I don't know." The only thing I know is, "If George Bush is elected, you will be fired. I can tell you that. I don't know what will happen otherwise." And that's what we say, "I don't know. Let's see." What else are we doing?

MK: Filling those term boards?

BN: I'm trying my best to fill those term boards.

MK: Not all of them are PAS. I mean some boards—

BN: That are term and not PAS.

MK: Yes.

BN: I'm not spending much time on those. Let me tell you why. I can spend time on those after October 6. If it's a name and a tax check, they can be done within thirty days - if they get the forms back in. So, I'm not working on part-time boards right now. I'm trying to get—the stuff I just described to you, that's what I'm doing. A year ago I was still putting people into vetting, less than that. I am still recruiting.

[Interruption]

BN: A year ago, I wouldn't be spending a lot of time working on acting stuff. I would still be spending a lot of time trying to get people confirmed, but [inaudible] as I do today. We don't have much time. If we don't get it done in September, we don't get it done. I'm also spending some time developing a recess appointment strategy. I don't know what I'm going to do, but I'm thinking a lot about it. So those are the things I'm doing now.

Now at the beginning—I got here November 17, 1992, over on Vermont Avenue, as one of Dick Riley's deputies. Me, Maria Haley, Maria Echaveste, Craig Smith, Michael Hooley, Jan [Piercy]. You had Riley. You had Jan over the recruitment piece, and all the people I just named worked for Jan. Peter Knight [was] over the vetting piece, he had a bunch of lawyers.

And we had like 250 people over on Vermont Avenue. We moved over here January 20. Midnight, Maria Haley and I walked through the front gates of the White House, twelve o'clock midnight, and stayed until six o'clock in the morning from Vermont Avenue. I stayed here until I got confirmed, which was April, 1995, as Undersecretary of Agriculture, and then I left.

But at the beginning, it was horrendous. We couldn't even get all the resumes out of the boxes. We had this pent-up demand of Democrats who had not been in for, some people say, twelve years, actually twenty out of the last twenty-four. We had all these people who wanted to serve, from people fresh out of college to multimillionaires who wanted to give something back. It was tough. And we didn't have anything. I did not know—I know I read this in this. I know it but I didn't know it back then. When we got over here, there was nothing here. And I said, "Those sons of bitches." That's what I said. I didn't know. It's the law. You've got to take everything out of here. What we had over there was we had—I didn't feel like we were lost. We had the Plum Book which theoretically lists all the positions and, for the most part, I think it [still] does. We had that. We didn't work on C's. We didn't work on SES's, because we shouldn't do that. We worked on PAS's. And we just worked feverishly at it.

MK: Were there distinctions among those PAS's, particular kinds of positions like economic positions that you were singling out? Out of all the PAS's, say if it's around 1,000 of them, were there distinctions that you were going to go through and try to find positions that dealt with economic issues, for example?

BN: The way we were organized was that each one of the associate directors—Maria Echaveste and I, that was our title—had blocs of agencies. My background is economic development and finance. So I worked on Commerce, HUD [Housing and Urban Development]—

[Interruption]

BN: Each one of us were assigned blocs of agencies and each one of us had volunteer headhunters. In my case, I had about seven or eight headhunters, who volunteered their time, who worked for me, and who were doing the searches. I managed the process. The woman, one of the top headhunters around, I think, who works right here at Russell Reynolds, her grandfather was governor of Maryland. I forget her name right now. We had a group of great people. So we worked on those. And we came up with a list of about ten names per PAS that were shared after going through a long, arduous process. We worked seven days a week, fourteen and sixteen hours a day. Those lists would go to the President. He'd look at them and say, "All these are good people, share them with the Secretary." The Secretary would look at them and the Secretary would say, "That's the one right there I'd like to have." That's the process.

MK: So they'd have how many people to choose from?

BN: Secretaries? Ten.

MK: You'd give them ten, and they'd choose one.

BN: Yes. That was for one position, ten [people] for one position.

MK: That's a lot.

BN: I thought it was a lot. Does that answer your question?

MK: Yes. And the President, when the Cabinet secretaries came in, talked to them about the fact that personnel was going to be giving them names to choose from?

BN: Yes.

MK: So they signed off on that right off, the Cabinet secretary. Say, for example, in the Carter administration, when [Joseph] Califano came in, he said to Carter that he wanted to choose his own people, and that happened, and there was no way of rolling back on that one.

BN: It's sort of human nature. Some people—. In some cases, I know that some of the names on the list actually came from Cabinet secretaries. Some didn't. Some said, "I kind of had a different idea." I said, "Well, but you need to look at this first." We were the ones who went to meet with the Cabinet secretaries, the associate directors, and sat down with them and said, "Here's the list. Here are the resumes." "Well, I don't see anybody I like." It's a process. You're weak, you're strong. He's weak; they're strong. I think it happens the same way—it depends. I heard that Carter—. Is Carter the president who said, "I don't care who is in the administration, you go pick them?" Is that right?

MK: At the beginning.

TS: He wanted a Cabinet government.

BN: The way we did it was, the secretaries were told by Dick Riley and, I guess the President, that this personnel organization is going to be presenting names to you to pick from for the sub-cabinet level positions.

MK: In those early days, you said you [had] 220 volunteers. Those were the headhunters, mostly headhunters?

BN: Out of the 220 people, I'd say probably forty were professional headhunters. So you had a whole vetting operation, too. So you had lawyers who were volunteering their time to do the Lexis-Nexis work. These ten people had Lexis-Nexis work done on them, so we knew something about them.

MK: Sure. How long do you have that kind of operation, have a lot of volunteer work both from the headhunters, the lawyers? How long do they stay, until you wind up with an operation that's going to be an ongoing kind of thing? What are the rhythms there at the beginning?

BN: There were 220 people, total. That included Dick Riley. We got up to about 220 probably around—at least by December 1, I believe, we had that many. Most of those people stayed until January 20. On January 20, a little over 100 people came here. Most of those were volunteers. The headhunters came here.

TS: So they carried over.

MK: And the lawyers as well?

BN: Not all of them. A lot of them. Then it trailed down. When I left in April, I think there were probably about fifty people. That trailed down after I left. Today I think we have the

smallest personnel office in recent history. I have twenty-six people. I think President Bush had thirty-nine at the high. We've never had more than twenty-eight, twenty-nine.

MK: What's the difference, do you think, of why earlier administrations had more and you all have had fewer?

BN: Because the White House staff was cut.

MK: So it was the 25 per cent cut in the White House staff?

BN: Yes. This is our cut.

MK: What has been the impact of that, do you think, of having a smaller staff? For example, do you still go out and get some volunteer help? Does it require having volunteer help?

BN: I have one full-time volunteer who got the award for the most volunteer hours in the whole White House. He's from Arkansas. He's a retired Mobile Oil executive. He is wonderful. He's like sixty-two years old and works his tail off. I have about three volunteers who work back in the computer section because there is so much paper back there, and these ladies just—they're fine ladies and I go back there all the time and let them know how much I appreciate them. We take them to the mess and all this kind of stuff. They come in about three days a week. They're wonderful. We couldn't operate back there [without them]. We actually only have two people back there, and we couldn't operate with [just] two people. Then we have these interns who come in, like in cycles. I used to get about ten, eleven. Now I only get about six or seven. I don't know why we get less now. So that's how I supplement my staff.

Now, if I didn't have the interns and the volunteers, I would be in trouble. People don't realize, in personnel, everything that goes on here. There's a lot of meticulous work. From the outside you only think the president selected somebody, let's put them to work. It's sort of like the engine of a car, and they just don't understand all the things that go on. When I do a decision memo to the president, it's like two pages, but the amount of work that has gone into that two pages, anybody else outside this office, even in the White House [doesn't] understand what's gone into that. It's had an impact. I think this happens in every office around here, very frankly, but we work an average of twelve hours a day. Saturday, at one time, was a regular workday for my office. And at one time, I had my senior people come in on Sunday, but I stopped that—because they were dead on Monday. So we don't come in on Sunday unless—we might now, because we're getting ready to start back up but—. I will tell you this: this office, I think, needs at least thirty-five people; closer to what Bush had than what we have now. You ought to just get it done.

MK: How does that divide down? Thirty-five people, how do you split them up, and what kinds of divisions?

BN: In terms of additional people, I would have a couple more people dealing with the Data System: keeping up with where people are; when terms are up; looking at the authority sheets that determine whether somebody can carry over when their term is out or not. So I [would] have a couple more people there. I would probably divide the portfolios into four parts rather than three because—and it's not that you would keep it that whole four years. You could move it back and forth depending on the success of filling vacancies. But the portfolios at the very beginning, not now—I don't mean today. Because most positions are filled at the beginning of an administration, I would have about four operating divisions

rather than three. I might have—. On Schedule C's, the associate directors don't do Schedule C's. I made that decision early on. That's done by Maria. The associate directors do the SES's, the PAS full-time and part-time, and the PA part-time boards in sort of generic areas for each one of them. Then I have sort of a legal [office], one person. I have a lawyer. Then, here in this office, I have two assistants. Maria has a couple. This is sort of keeping the trains running, interacting with the chief of staff's office, the president's office. I do that.

Then, dealing with the high-level negotiations—if we're working on a board where you have NSC [National Security Council] involved, where you have National Economic Council involved, you have the Office of Science and Technology involved—a lot of times we sit around the table and argue and debate and try to compromise when—what's an example? There's something called the national infrastructure assurance council. It's a new Board that has to do with making recommendations about how to protect the nation's infrastructure from terrorist attack. That's the kind of thing where we don't go out and just look at resumes. We sit around the table with the NSC, with Defense, and talk about that and what kind of people do we really need, so many executives, and what kind of experience should they have had? And some of those negotiations, like that Maria gets involved in, I get involved in, sometimes resolving differences between maybe two White House offices. My point is, in this sort of [inaudible], you have to have enough folks to take the time to handle those negotiations that couldn't be handled at a lower level.

MK: What kind of offices would come in to that, say on that particular board? Would political affairs, would they come in? Do you have somebody who has—sort of you yourself have a political memory of who has been involved with the president over a course of time, where the priorities are, of who should be rewarded and who shouldn't?

BN: Wait a minute. Give me the question. Don't throw me out there. Give me a question.

MK: When you're having negotiations over a board, it won't just be the NSC talking about the security part of it. Wouldn't you also have somebody in discussions that are going to have a sense of the political needs, too, of what kinds of people you're going to need who may be in that particular area?

BN: The answer is, yes, that kind of input is needed, but what you just said earlier is true. I've been around for a long time. For twenty years I've worked for this man, and I have a pretty good feel. It's important to have someone in this position who has a relationship with the president, who is not intimidated by whoever—except the president. You better be intimidated by the president. But other than that, then, to have some institutional knowledge. And if you don't have a particular piece of knowledge, you ought to have enough sense to know, "I need to answer the question," and you'd know to answer the question. But I can't think of a situation where there's a formal sort of—. There's a political affairs shop. I know the political affairs shop very well. I've done politics. But my background is in economic development and finance, but I've been involved in campaigns since 1969 of one type of another. So, absolutely.

I saw some questions in this thing about campaign versus governing and all this stuff. I have some strong feelings about this, and I'll tell you what they are. There is an assumption on the part of a lot of people that if somebody helps in the campaign, that they're automatically a political hack and not qualified to help govern. There are some people like that, but there are some that are not. But people tend to throw that blanket over all people. It's wrong. Two, I think when you run a campaign and you tell the American people you're going to do something, they vote for you largely based upon the future—not the past—that you said

you're going to do this. And people who help you do that are people working the campaign, which means they're probably committed to it. A lot of them are not paid. They do it because they believe in you. Some of them are capable and competent and can manage, and some are not. Part of the job of personnel is to decide which one is what. So I'm one that says I would not cast a jaundiced eye on people that work in the campaign, but I also would not take everybody that worked in it just because they worked in it, as a reward for working in the campaign. That's good. If I've got somebody who worked in the campaign and is capable and competent and somebody who didn't work in the campaign and is capable and competent, I'm going for the person who worked in the campaign. No question. Am I going to find somebody and put them in an important position who is not capable of doing it, because they worked in the campaign? No. That's dumb. If you put them in an important position and they don't perform, that reflects upon the president. That's a bad political decision to do that.

Now, I'm not talking about—I'm talking about important jobs. If there's a board or commission that doesn't have any—you just sort of serve. I'm not trying to say that any particular board is not important, but some are more important than others. There's a difference between the Securities and Exchange Commission and the—

MK: White House Fellowship.

BN: —White House Fellows. Can I tell you something? It's really weird. I was going to say that. It was on my mind. I said, "Should I say this one?" because that means—I think the White House Fellows is important, but it's not the SEC.

TS: Even academics can figure that out, even though we think the White House Fellows is pretty darned important.

BN: I like the program. I like it a lot. I really do. My point is that, going back to what you originally said, it doesn't matter, Democrat or Republican, politics come into play in appointments. You can do it right or you can do it wrong. I don't look at contributions reports. I make it my business not to. I think it's important for me not to look at them specifically. But I go to meetings. I see people. Anybody tries to tell me what they contributed, I don't listen. I don't listen. I intentionally don't do it. I think it's a good thing.

TS: I think that's a good thing for your successors.

BN: I absolutely do. But the fact that someone supported a candidate in one way or another should not exclude them from service. What excludes them from service is a lack of qualifications to do what they're trying to do.

TS: Can you talk briefly about two guys equally qualified, one works in the campaign, one doesn't? You were saying you would favor the one who had worked in the campaign. Would you just talk briefly about why exactly favor that person? They're both competent. What does working in the campaign bring?

BN: Sure. When a candidate runs for office, they talk about positions and policies and their vision. If you worked in the campaign, nine times out of ten, you didn't work in the campaign for a salary, because they don't pay money. The ones who got paid didn't get paid much, and a lot of them volunteer. So you have some passion for what this candidate is saying. If you have that passion in a campaign, if you go to work in a particular position, you're hopefully going to carry that same passion in trying to carry out this president's vision

and mission. That's what political appointees do. As opposed to the person who did not work in the campaign, maybe—they could have, but just said, "I'm just an academic or I'm just a business guy." What do they want me to say? Let me just say, I'd rather not have that person. I'd rather have the other person. There's nothing wrong with the person, but that's what I want to have.

TS: It's the level of commitment.

BN: That exactly it. It's the level of commitment and belief in this particular candidate's program. That's the reason.

MK: What do you do with the people who don't get the jobs? One of the aspects of your job is having to deal with the nine people that are on that list that didn't get selected, who know they're being considered and are on a list. How do you deal with them?

BN: One of the things that I think you have to do is this: the worst thing in the world is for someone to apply for a position and then, the next thing they read about or hear about is, someone being announced for the position before they even got an acknowledgment of their letter, of their resume or anything. I make a big deal here out of corresponding with people. What we try to do—we tell people early on as they drop off the list, the large list, we write them back and say, "You're not going to make it." We tell them that. When you get down to the short list, you're talking to people. You're calling their references. They know you're checking on them, because people call them and say, "So and so called." What we try to do—and, very frankly, we're not always good about getting everybody. We try to call the finalist list and say, "You're not getting it", before we do the public announcement. While they might get mad, they feel worse if they read it in the paper. We try to call their sponsors and tell them. Again, we can't get everybody but I can tell you this, we do a pretty good job at it. So that's what you do with the people who don't get it.

Now, if they are people we've spent some time on and there's something else they might be interested in, those are usually some of the first people we go back to, because they're fresh in our minds, we've got their stuff, we've talked to them but they just didn't make it. A lot of times you select somebody—there are people that you could have selected who would do a good job, but you can only do one person for one position. It doesn't mean anything's wrong with them, necessarily. What you do is, you let them know. You try to let them know what happened before it's publicly announced. You miss some. We catch most of them.

MK: In going back to the rhythms of the work during the course of the administration, coming into election year, are the rhythms different there? Say, during the beginning in the transition, you had all the volunteer help of the headhunters and the lawyers, and then that works down to a staff of a normal size, say, within the first year. What then happens at that point, and then later? What happens during the election season, before the election season, as far as nominations are concerned? For example—

BN: You mean right now?

TS: When you were running for re-election.

BN: 1996.

MK: Let's say 1996. In 1996, did you find that maybe you tailed off a little bit, because people were less interested in going forward at that time? They're not sure what's going to happen and they're going to wait. What is the nature of the work during the course of time? We've got the beginning and the end.

BN: I understand.

MK: What's in the middle there?

BN: As I remember it—I came back here in April 1995. I think the volume trailed off some. Confirmations for us average about 75 to 78 per cent each year. In 1996, 41 per cent were confirmed. That's typical for an election year. You go back and look at any administration. In an election year, fewer people are confirmed. I also remember that fewer people were nominated because, part of the reason is, as you said, people say, "I don't know whether this team is going to win or not and if they don't win, I know I won't be around." I remember there being some decrease in the volume of applicants in the Spring and Summer and Fall of 1996. That's one thing. Obviously, confirmations were tougher. It's a more contentious period, I think. What else? Those are the only things I can remember right now about coming up to 1996. Most everything else worked the same. Fewer applicants, tougher confirmations. That's all I can remember right now.

MK: If you start on PAS at the beginning, PAS full-time, when do you then go within the administration to look at the others, like Schedule C's, SES or even PA?

BN: Well, at the beginning, what you would do is: the SES's and C's that had worked in the immediate Secretary's offices came on pretty quickly, right behind the secretaries but because the sub-cabinet members took—they start working on the Secretaries in November, or maybe even before that. Nobody would say they did. But they were working on them before January 20, and most of them got done shortly after January 20. So, then, you really wouldn't start working hard on Schedule C's and SES's outside the secretary's office until the sub-cabinet member was confirmed. So, that would be, like, April, May, June. If an assistant secretary's office had five Schedule C decisions, there may be one that might come on, but you wouldn't want to fill it up with SES's and Schedule C's and have an assistant secretary walk in.

When I went to my office as undersecretary, I think that was—and in my office I had about ten SES's and probably twenty Schedule C's. Most of them had come—there had been a few there before I got there, but the rest of them came on after I got there. That's the way it should be.

TS: [Inaudible] career plan?

BN: I'm talking about all political. We don't have anything to do with careers. No. Well, the Personnel operation didn't. I did when I was Under Secretary. There's a whole system over there, separate from all this stuff, that I looked at.

MK: Did you have a procedure that you brought on for evaluating how the appointments were going? For example, you would go and talk to Cabinet secretaries to ask them were they satisfied with the appointees they had, with the way things were going? Would you go out?

BN: When?

MK: At any point as director, would you go out and talk to Cabinet secretaries? Is there a systematic way of evaluating the performance of people, whether it's in groups like within a department, or do you figure they're just going to let you know if they're not satisfied?

BN: There's no systematic, formal way of doing it, no. And I certainly know when they're not satisfied. They'll call me and they'll tell me and then we'll work it out. Either we'll move them or we'll remove them, or try to resolve the problem or situation. But, no, we don't have a formal system. Maybe we should. But it happens informally.

MK: Did you find you had calls from senators who wanted to talk to you about not putting people forward, that they just were unhappy? Would you go up to talk to them? Did you go up to talk to people on the Hill, or did they come here and vent?

BN: Very rarely would a U.S. senator come here. They have before.

MK: Well, maybe they just happened to be in the building or something.

BN: They have. And some of them have specifically come. But for the most part, my style is I would rather go up there because.... Well, let me say this, the answer is yes, they would let me know when they like[d] somebody; they would let me know when they [didn't] like somebody. But most of the time they let me know when you like people and they were advocating someone. I would go up and talk to them, especially about people that they had a problem with, that we liked to try to explain why we thought this was a good person. I would do a lot of that and I'd do that in conjunction with the office of Congressional Affairs here, which is now run by Chuck [Inaudible]. I always worked hand-in-glove with them any time I am doing something on the Hill.

MK: What about people on the Hill itself, like in [Senate Minority Leader Tom] Daschle's Office? Would you work with people there as well?

BN: Yes. More there on an overall basis, as opposed to an individual candidate. That was more related to overall strategy for confirmation and strategy, or just assessing overall numbers, but not on an ongoing basis on individual positions. Now, sometimes the Leader's Office or the Minority Leader's Office, would have a particular interest in a particular candidate or program, but not on a regular basis.

MK: The President seems to have come out in the last year strongly on the issue of appointments. Presidents just don't talk often about appointments when they're being held back, or that sort of thing, and he's come out very strongly about the process. Did you make recommendations to him about getting involved in the process himself, of making public speeches, whether it's on particular nominee that was turned down, or has just been held in limbo? And how did he get to the point where he started getting involved and making a lot of public statements about it?

BN: One of the reasons that you get a chance to talk to the president is: you don't talk about what you say to him. So I'm going to be real reluctant to say specifically—. I am always very careful about what I say I said to him or what he said to me. That's the way I want to answer that question. I will make a comment. I will comment on what you just said. I think the President feels like his nominees deserve a vote up or down. And there were so [m]any people who never got an opportunity for a vote up or down I think that's what concerned him as much as them getting out, as them getting a vote. It's because it's frustrating,

especially for people where the holdup had nothing to do with them; it had to do with something totally different.

MK: Like the UN [United Nations].

BN: Like the UN. It doesn't have anything to do with you. We just don't like something else. That should not be—I'm a strong support[er] of "advise and consent." I strongly believe it, like Senator [Robert] Byrd does, and the historians up there, but I think people deserve a vote. Part of the process should not be, "We're not going to vote on you." Vote them down. I think that's what frustrated him more than anything else and he felt strongly. The Supreme Court justice spoke out. He's saying, give them a vote. He said vote them up, vote them down. I think that's what frustrated him.

Although our record, if you look back, people say Clinton's record on confirmations. [Unclear as stated.] Go back and look at the record. These confirmation averages are about the same. What happens is: you get this high-profile thing about Zoe Baird or Dr. Foster when, in fact, the majority of the people get confirmed. Now there are some who don't. It takes too long. No one should be nominated for two years. We've had people nominated for over two years. Now many of those are part-time boards, but they're still nominations, and need to be acted on.

TS: There are ambassadors who have quit.

BN: Peter Bailey, career ambassador, nonpolitical, didn't work in the campaign. This guy said, "I'm giving up." We tried to convince him—

TS: This is for the Philippines?

BN: The Philippines. He's quitting. He's retiring. Premier public servant. That shouldn't happen. So I think that's why he [the President] got concerned. Then, on recess appointments, President Clinton has been more conservative than President Reagan, who did 239; Bush and Carter, who did more than he did, than President Clinton has done. We may have just surpassed them in eight years. We've done like, maybe, seventy. We've done like—. We wanted people confirmed. We didn't want to recess them. So he just got frustrated at that and felt he had to speak out about it.

MK: In trying to get appointments through, do you get in situations where people on the Hill want to horse-trade with things other than appointments, whether they talk about a particular project, that they want to get something through, and if your appointment gets through, they're going to support or not support something that's a piece of substantive legislation. Or is horse-trading on appointments just on appointments themselves?

BN: Let me say this. Obviously there is trading that goes on, and I get involved in that between Republicans and Democrats. Some of the boards are bipartisan and you have to have Republicans. We have an arrangement with Senator [Trent] Lott as we did with Senator [Robert] Dole where he gets to make recommendations. We don't go look for Republicans for nonpartisan boards and commissions. We take their recommendation if they get through vetting. We can't guarantee they get through vetting and we don't play games with vetting, either. If they get through vetting, we take them. When I say "take them" that means we nominate them, but if a Democratic senator wants to put a hold on them because another Democratic nominee didn't get done, that's just part of the process. We get that sometimes,

and try to work on that. I do a lot of work on that. I do that work, and Maria, working with leg[islative] affairs.

I don't get involved in confirmations having to do with some project or program. I don't do that. Now if leg[islative] affairs gets involved in that, they might. I don't. I don't do that.

MK: But does it happen?

BN: It could. I don't know to what extent. I'm not familiar with programs. I have to know something about programs, but I just don't get involved in—it's an area that I don't know much about. I don't get involved in it. I don't really know how it happens. It might happen sometimes.

MK: How often do you go up on the Hill, not right now, but typically during most of the course of the administration? I'm assuming that's when they're in session.

BN: Yes. When they're in session, I'd say once a week on average. Sometimes more. It just depends. On average once or twice a week.

MK: Who would you meet with?

BN: It's a combination of staff directors and senators. It's not always with a senator. Sometimes it's in Daschle's office. Sometimes it's in Senator Lott's office. Most of the time, individual senator's offices. Maybe half the time with senators, half the time with staff.

MK: What are the typical kinds of meetings that you have during a week, say the rhythms of your week?

BN: Here?

MK: Yes. When do you come in, in the morning, and what kinds of meetings do you have here within the office or, also, outside of the building?

TS: Just trying to plot out what your day looks like or what your successors days might look like.

BN: Seven-thirty in the morning. A senior staff meeting is at eight o'clock with the Chief of Staff and mostly the assistants to the President and press. That's half an hour. Then you come back here. What I would do is spend about an hour looking at decision memos. The first thing I do in the morning is look at decision memos that have been prepared by the associate directors. These are not new to me. I've had meetings on them and all that, but I'll read them, make sure I'm satisfied with them. I might mark them up and send them back. Then I look at telephone calls: who has called this morning; the calls that I left from yesterday; decide which ones I'm going to call back, and I'll make those. Get the decision memos signed and sent to the President, or sent back to redo; make the calls that I need to make right then—. Priorities are U.S. senators, number one. Outside calls. Not chief of staff, but outside calls, U.S. Senators.

MK: How often do you get calls from them? In a typical day, how many calls would you have had from senators?

BN: In a typical day? Two or three. Then I'd do my calls, and then I will have a staff meeting. Every day I'm meeting with one of the offices. That's usually in the morning and we'll meet

for a couple of hours where they're saying, "Here's where we are on this search, here's where we are on this search," and I'd give some direction. Then, after that, I will look at telephone calls again: who do I need to call? By this time we're getting up to lunch. I usually have lunch in the office. There are peanut butter and crackers in my desk drawer.

TS: Do you bring them in in your briefcase?

BN: Yes.

TS: You're George Wallace's nightmare.

BN: Why?

TS: The bureaucrat who brings peanut butter and jelly sandwiches in his briefcase into work.

BN: Is that right? I don't know this story.

TS: That was one of his great campaign slogans, was he didn't want people's futures being decided by pointy-headed bureaucrats with their peanut butter-and-jelly sandwiches in their briefcases.

BN: He was talking about me.

TS: He was talking about you.

BN: I bring them in my big old briefcase, that big old briefcase. That's what I do. I rarely go to—I've been here five years. I probably haven't been to the Mess twenty times in five years.

And then, sometimes the Counsel's Office will have an issue they want to discuss. Somebody's in vetting—most of them are pretty easy. You're going to do them or you're going to do them. Sometimes you have a little discussion. So I might spend a half hour with them, or Maria might be trying to decide what we'll do on a particular background.

Then, in the afternoon, if I've got some more decision memos, I'll look at those and read those. Then I'll return some more calls. Then, sometimes if there's something hot going on [on] the Hill, I'll go up there. I'll grab a car—we have a car that takes us up—do a meeting, which usually takes you about an hour, if everybody's on time. If you go up there and the senator is on time—the staff is always on time, usually. The senators, if they're not on time, that's my problem, not theirs. But usually you can get up there and back in an hour. I talk fast, I listen fast. Then you're back and usually there is an emergency or two you have to deal with. Somebody's called in saying, "I have to get rid of this assistant secretary; he doesn't know what he's doing." This is a Cabinet secretary calling. Or you have a Cabinet secretary who wants to meet with you here or at their office, about a vacancy or a problem. Then you return some more telephone calls. Then in the evening, like five-thirty, six-thirty, sometimes I actually—and there are letters that are sent.

If a senator or a congressman writes a letter [to] here, I started something that, I never let a senator's letter be signed by the signature machine. Now, most things that come in [for signature], I don't sign them. We have standard letters. They're not all the same. They're tailored, depending on what you're asking for. But I personally sign every letter from [to] a senator or congressman. I read the letter they send in. This takes a lot of time, but it's just

my style. I don't want a senator getting—now I know, very frankly, sometimes they never see the letter that goes back. Sometimes. Actually I did it one time—this is where it started. There was a senator—I won't tell you who it is—who didn't like the idea of—this is early on—a secretary machine letter. Since that time I've signed every one of them. And it could be a lot of them. I mean a lot of them. I get a little—let me grab something.

[Interruption]

BN: —sign those letters and I'll put little notes on it. I know a lot of times what they're writing because I just talked about it. So I put a little note and say this is not going to make it. I'm a big person for letting people know, don't drag them out. Looks good. If I know them personally, I might cross out the "Mr." or "Senator" and write the name in. I'll take some home if I haven't signed them all. I do that until about seven. Anytime somebody calls from the West Wing, the Chief of Staff's office at least, I take the call. Obviously, if the President calls, you take his call.

MK: How often does he call during the week?

BN: Not much. Here's an example. I get all these letters from all these people. They tell me who they're recommending, what the position is—this is my staff member right here. I just did this today. The letters are all attached to this. So I sign all the letters. I read them. Look at this. This is me. When I read this letter, there was a mistake in the letter and I crossed it out and sent it back. Not only for senators, but for other important ones—if they're really important people like governors, I sign those. I sign ambassadors. You don't have to do this. I do it. I'll tell you this, it has served me well. I have some tell me, "Bob, thanks for that letter and thanks for your personal note." It has served me very well, even when it's bad news.

MK: Are there other meetings that you have? On Fridays, are there any meetings that you have?

BN: I have my senior staff meeting where I bring like Maria, Marsha, and my associate directors and on Fridays—like today, we had a senior staff meeting. We just talk about process things. We don't really do much individual unless it's a hot deal. Like today, we talked about making sure we were complying with the Vacancy Act. We have a new system where we are keeping up with that. We talked about potential recess appointments, strategy; in some cases individuals, but mostly strategy. We talked about the number of PAS's. I reinforced my policy about: no new PAS's; we're not going to do them. I talked about the fact that we're not going to work on PA part-time boards until after the Senate goes home. I talked about how I wanted the Counsel's Office to know, out of all the people in vetting, which ones are our priorities. They're not going to get everybody out, so I'm saying: I want these out first. So you communicate back to them. I told the lawyer on my staff, "You tell them these are our priorities." They already knew that, and I want to re-emphasize that. We added a couple, took a couple off the list. So Friday is devoted to management, operations, [et cetera].

Then I usually get out of here about eight or nine. Usually. Then we come in on Saturday, which is more relaxed. You don't get a chance to do much thinking. On Saturday you can do more strategy. Usually it's, like, me and Maria and four or five other people. We don't have everybody come in. Sometimes we do if it's a heavy—

MK: What kind of strategy, like, say, "What will happen when Congress comes back in?" - that kind of thing?

BN: Yes.

MK: Is it also looking backwards? Do you look back and say, "This didn't work so well" or, "This did work well?"

BN: We don't do a good job of that, no.

MK: That seems to be one of the aspects of a White House: that there's so much coming at you all the time that's it's very difficult to look backwards.

BN: You should do that and very frankly, I'll tell you, I had intentions of doing more of that. I think I've done, to be honest with you, only two times in my five years here—I went right over here to the White House conference center—one time was a Saturday morning for four hours, and one time it was during the day for a couple of hours, to look back. That was not enough. We should have done it four times a year, three or four times a year, just take a few hours.

MK: What did it help you do the two times you did it? How did it help?

BN: Let me think. Where you have term positions for boards and commissions and their term comes up—say it comes up in November 2000. What happened is it sort of hit me that we were starting to work on that vacancy too close to November. You could decide to re-do that person, or find someone else. Regardless, you're obviously thinking about that. What you have to do is figure how long it will take to vet somebody for this position and you back up and you know that in August for a PAS position you start back then, even for the person who's already [there]. They have to be re-vetted, too, especially the person who has been there more than a year—and most of them are. One of the things it resulted in was us not waiting until October to start trying—so that's one thing.

We put together a system that—I get a report now that says for PAS's because it takes an average of—. If you count the selection and all of that, I forget what it is now. It spits out where I know. When I have my individual meetings, I say, "You're got seven positions that are going to expire in three months. Are you working on those yet?" So that's one of the things that happened. That's an example. I might have stumbled upon it.

MK: Are there things—looking back now—that you wish you had known when you came in, and things that were surprises to you?

BN: When I came in, in 1995? Everything was surprising in 1992. Everything!

TS: Size? Scale?

BN: Everything. Time. Scale. Complexity. Everything was a surprise to me. I'd never done personnel work. I've actually had personnel directors. I was a Cabinet head, not a personnel director. So I'd never really done personnel work. But I was selected, I think, because the President trusted me, and I was a good manager, and I've been with him for a long time. I think that's why he selected me to be one of Riley's deputies. I guess in 1995—my personnel experience was very short, November to April. I was an associate director.

MK: The hours piled up. So it might as well have been a year. It was a few months, but it might as well have been a year.

BN: We literally—we were there seven days a week. Anyway, surprises. In 1995—because I went to ag [USDA]. I didn't have anything to do with personnel other than recommending people over to hire under me, which is why your work is so important, the lack of knowledge that people have about what it meant to go through the process. I shouldn't have been surprised, because I was surprised. I hadn't thought about it a lot. So that was one thing.

I guess the other thing was, sometimes, how hard it was to come up with a specific recommendation. All the things you have to consider—geography, race, sex, senatorial, congressional, outside groups, White House offices. All these things. You just have to sort of make sense out of it and you've got to make what you think is the best recommendation for the president and the country and the department. That's what you've got to do. And it's tough. It's really, really, really tough.

TS: Is it because one person is good on four criteria and not as good on three separate ones and the other guy is good on four criteria but they aren't exactly the opposite of the other guy? So you're balancing out apples and oranges?

BN: Yes. A lot of times you're balancing out apples and oranges. There's really no way—I don't think there's anything that you all can do, in that process, of how you come to that recommendation. You can do things like shorten the vetting process, reduce the number of forms, do something about the senatorial hold process, make sure people know more about what the process is. All those are good things that need to be done. But when you get down to actually having a director make a recommendation—all those things actually help, though, to tell you the truth. They actually all help this process. When it gets down to it, it's just a—there's no cookie cutter. It depends on whether it's the beginning, the middle, the end, what the political situation is like, all that. In spite of all that I believe that this system that we have is the best system in the world, this transition that we have today with all its flaws it still works in spite of the fact that from time to time the press will take an incident of Zoe Baird and just blow it up. Everybody says none of your people ever get confirmed. Why do you say that? Well, Zoe Baird. Okay. What else? Zoe Baird.

TS: Name another.

BN: And they can't name another. Later on, they said Dr. Foster. Most of the people get through. It works. It can work a hell of a lot better. I think what's going on here and in other places will help the process.

TS: When you came on in 1995, you'd gone over there and come back; did you have any transfer memo from your predecessor that said: "Don't do these five things, do these five things", or anything like that?

BN: No, it was dinner about three nights, long dinners. Veronica Biggins. We sat down and talked over about two or three dinners, where she just said: "This is where things are, this is where I am, this is what you ought to do." There was no memo.

MK: What were things that were particularly helpful, that she told you?

BN: Well, very frankly, the most important thing was to explain to me the sensitivity of some very important searches that were going on. She was in the middle of trying to make a recommendation, and trying to resolve things, and she had a lot of things in her head. So she downloaded to me a lot of those very sensitive searches. Otherwise, I would have

stumbled upon all this stuff and a lot of this stuff wasn't written down. Some of it, but not a lot of it. So she was helpful.

Now, the procedure in the office—because I was over here for four months, I knew the basic procedure. I was in the transition, that whole period from November to April. I knew that. What else did she do? She did an evaluation of the staff for me, verbal not written, just verbal. "Here's who you ought to keep; here's who you ought to let go", that kind of thing.

TS: How much time did you have between when you knew you were going to take over and when you actually did? A month? Two days?

BN: It wasn't two days. I'm trying to think. He called me late one night. I really wanted to stay at Agriculture. I loved my job. I had a great job. My job was to provide water, sewer, housing, electric, telephone, manufacturing services to poor people in poor places all over the country. [Inaudible] I loved it. But, when you're called, you come. I came about three weeks after that. Now I did come over here and sit in her staff meetings for about a week. I probably came over here about three times in a week and sat in her staff meetings. Then we went to dinner three times off campus. So it was three weeks.

MK: Is a lot of the information here information that you need to keep in your head, and it's not written down?

BN: Not a lot. Some of it is, that you keep in your head. Most of it is written down and should be written down. Most of it being like at least 90, probably closer to 95 per cent. There are only a few things that shouldn't be written down.

MK: In your dealings with the President, when he asked you to come, what did he say? What did he tell you he wanted you to do? Did he give you a particular mission?

BN: Yes. I think I can answer that. He said, "I want you to find capable, competent people who believe in what I'm trying to do for this country, and I want it to look like America." That's what he said, just about that short. I got that. I understand what that means. That's what he said.

Mk: How often do you talk to him and what kinds of things has he told you beyond that, about recruiting and about appointments?

BN: I don't talk to him that much. I know what to do. He knows I know what to do. Beyond that, he really hasn't said a lot. He may have expounded on it a few times, like the comment about interviewing people I recommend to him. He just wants me to—from time to time, "We need to get these done faster. Why is that person in vetting so long? We need to get more of these folks confirmed." That kind of stuff from time to time, sort of taking off. Like the diversity thing. I sent him a memo on diversity, good job. He said, "Good job," told me I did a good job. Nobody believes as much in having an administration that looks like America as Bill Clinton. Nobody.

MK: What about the chief of staff? What kinds of dealings do you have with them and has it varied among the various chiefs you've dealt with?

BN: It varies with the chief of staff.

Mk: You had three.

BN: Yes.

MK: Well, you had [Thomas "Mack"] McLarty starting out.

BN: I guess he was. But I didn't deal that much [with him]. I was an associate director. I knew Mack. We grew up thirty miles apart. I've known him all my life. But that was not my job. That was Bruce Lindsey's job. I had [Leon] Panetta, [Erskine] Bowles, and [John] Podesta. Basically, in my office on a day-to-day basis I relate to the Chief of Staff's [office]. My decision memos go to the Chief of Staff's office. They go from here to the Chief of Staff's office and then from the Chief of Staff's office to the President. That's the way they go. chiefs of staff, all of them are very good. They know that we do a good [job] and that my interest is the President's interest. Sometimes, if some senator grabs them and says, "What about this?" they say, "Bob, I see you recommended this but so-and-so told me that they were recommending someone else." I say, "Here's why we need to do it this way." Sometimes they give me information I didn't have, and that may or may not affect what I want to recommend. It's very important for this office to work very closely with the Chief of Staff, not that the Chief of Staff's office makes recommendations on personnel, but you always want to have them with you. Some of this stuff is pretty tough sometimes. You don't want them to be surprised. If there is a potential problem with a nomination—sometimes there is—you want to make sure they're aware of that potential problem. But they've all been very great and very good with me. Again, I didn't work with Mack on personnel, just because I didn't have any relationship with him.

MK: Do you meet with them to discuss them? Do they have any input in the choices or they get the memo and they send the memo on?

BN: For the most part, they get the memo. But if there is something that I think is important—sometimes at a senior staff meeting I might say something about a particular search. Not my staff, but the senior staff that goes on over there. Or I might do a separate memo, not the decision memo but something else, that says, "I've got a situation where Senator X wants a person for this position and Senator Y wants a person for this position. I know you may be up on the Hill from time to time and you may hear about this, so I want you to know what the situation is." I may say, I know who I'm going to recommend, or I might say I don't, "but I want you to be aware." But we don't meet on a regular basis. If I know that the chief of staff needs to know something, I have to be smart enough to make sure that he knows about it. But I just send the memos in; I don't meet with them all that much.

MK: Besides the chief's office and leg[islative] affairs, what are some of the other offices that you deal with on a regular basis?

BN: White House Counsel's Office, every day. Every day. Whether it be like, "Why don't you have somebody?"—it's really interesting. On the outside, people look at personnel, they say, "You haven't finished vetting that person." I don't vet. Well, I do vet. My vet is different than their vet. My vet is a reference vet: what are the chances of confirmation, Lexis-Nexis in some cases. They do stuff. Do you beat your husband? Have you paid your taxes? Although I ask them some of those things at the front end. It helps them get down the road. The Clerk's Office, the ones who prepare the actual nomination with the wax on it and drive it up there. I've got to make sure if I tell a senator that a nomination is going up today, I can't send it to the Clerk's Office and have it sit down there. It doesn't. We work very well. They're very good. So it's leg[islative] affairs, counsel, clerk, chief of staff. On a daily basis it's the counsel, the clerk, and leg[islative] affairs. The Chief of Staff's office, it's as needed. I send them decision memos every day and they send them to the President

every day and I get them back every day. Other than that, the rest of them are as needed. NSC as needed; public liaison as needed; intergovernmental as needed.

If I have a board and the board says, "On this board we want three governors," I'm going to talk to [inaudible] "...this thing calls for three governors, got any ideas? Here are our ideas." They do that.

TS: And then the Press Office, because you have to make announcements.

BN: The Press Office, I'm sorry. That's another one every day. We draft the press release in my office and we send it to the Press Office. They look at it and they might mark it up. We send them a disk and the hard [copy]. They might change it if they don't like the way we do it sometimes. So that's every day too. Political Affairs. We talk to Political Affairs sometimes. I don't get a political check-off. I don't do that.

MK: You're carrying it around.

BN: Sometimes I say, "What do you think?" I do that sometimes. Absolutely.

MK: Thank you very much.

BN: You're very welcome. I'm not going to give you this stuff. I can't give you this.

TS: I've been sitting here reading.

BN: Have you got it memorized? I don't want to give you this. I don't want to publish this, but I want you to see it. Here's the deal. This is sort of my way of—it's really informal. It's my way of saying [inaudible] the president saying, I don't know whether I want to do this or not. In fact, I'm not even satisfied with this. I'm going to change this up again on my way out of here. I'm going to have something that I think—this ought to be something real simple. When you get a big package of things in the mail like this, you spread it out, somebody's got to have something real simple that gives you a bird's eye view—I don't know what you think about this. But you definitely will—.

TS: I think the only thing that would benefit on that is there are some critical linchpin points in the process. For example, if you go to the Senate for confirmation, under some circumstances you're going to have to reveal your net worth, and there are some people who might say, "That's it!" They've got partners, and if they've got to tell people their net worth, then, "That's it." They want to serve, but they can't put their partners at risk, or they can't involve their partners. I think there are those kinds of pieces of information that a potential nominee—it would be useful for them to know before they even get involved in all this other stuff.

BN: I agree with you 100 per cent. You are absolutely correct.

TS: And if you could identify those. I think those might sort of smooth out the bumps in the road. It won't change the steepness of the road, but it will make it a little smoother for them to traverse. That's one of the things that we're trying to figure out in all of this: what are those little bumps that we can as private philanthropy—not bound up in the process and doesn't carry responsibility for the process—what are those things that we can do to help people feel like government service is - or isn't - for them, and make it a little bit easier for them?

BN: Government service is not for everybody. I'll say that. Number two, I think that the process is too—that we could streamline the process a lot. I don't think we can view service in the government the same as service in the private sector, because it involves public trust. It doesn't mean we can't improve the process, and we should. Thirdly, I think that what happens on the kind of process that you're going through—this is not meant to be defensive—because it's easy to do, we spend—. Let me rephrase it. I think a lot more time, based on what I've seen, ought to be spent on the other end of the process, the confirmation end.

TS: Sure.

BN: It's easier on this end because it's easy to get a handle. I just think it's harder up there. I think more time needs to be spent than I'm looking at being spent on this whole process, which I absolutely support, on that end of it. Half of the time of a person getting confirmed is after they've been nominated, in our experience. Half the time. It's hard to get a handle on. I don't care who's—I support what you're doing. I don't care if George Bush is elected or Al Gore, it needs to be improved. And I think both of them would agree with that. They ought to buy into this process, but I don't think anybody is going to say much about it until after the election.

TS: Do you have a way of tracking from first contact out the door? In political science—

BN: Tracking what?

TS: You're saying half the time is spent in confirmation, but the fact is, out there in the private world, our ability to understand that process is really only from the moment the nomination is announced to the confirmation. So we only can see that half of the process. We can study that half of the process because it's part of the public record, but we don't see where that process actually begins. So we don't know, for example, that—of the amount of time it takes to go from beginning to end, that half of it is from nomination to the end. Do you have that record?

BN: Absolutely, we do.

TS: So it could be cleaned of who the people are, just like IRS data is cleaned of identities but—that would be a public service to clean that data of the identities but still talk about the character of that process—

MK: Of how long it takes.

TS: —for you as a study that would be released, and it would have an effect on the whole process. You're talking about putting more attention to this confirmation element here to know that 70 per cent of the time is spent on confirmation, is the kind of information that the private world doesn't know. What it knows is from the point of nomination, to the point of confirmation, what that's like. And we've got all kinds of characteristics of that, how many of them end up in holds, how long they stay in holds.

BN: Let me think about this for a while. Let me ask you a question. How would you define the start of the process? How would you define it? Where would you define the start of the process?

TS: I would say, off the top of my head, it would be the first point of contact with people you—that would be coming up with this list.

MK: It wouldn't be information coming in, because most of them are not people you're going to use, so it would be when you initiate something.

BN: That's right. That's when we count it, when we initiate something. I'll tell you. I'm going to think about what you said, and see whether or not there's a way I think that would be helpful to the process, and whether or not I could provide something like that. But the answer is yes, we keep up with it. We absolutely do.

TS: I don't even think it necessarily has to be a public thing, but if it's the kind of thing that you could turn over to successors, here's a picture of what that process really looks like start to finish.

BN: I actually can do something that wouldn't necessarily do all umpteen thousand positions, although I have that—well, maybe not from the very beginning, I don't have it, but I've got it since I've been here. I could tell you for a PA part-time board, for a senator confirmed full-time position. I can tell you how long recruitment, vetting—vetting being counsel vetting. My recruitment, which is reference checks, the Lexis-Nexis work we do, the recommendation to the President, that's a period of time. Then there's a period of time for the vet when the Counsel's office gets the FBI back and it's in their office. From the time they read the file and tell me it's approved, however much time that is, and then from the time they tell me it's approved, that the clerk drives it up to the Senate, I know how much time that is. We have this Information.

[End of Disc 1 of 1 and Interview I]