

White House Interview Program

DATE: January 27, 2000

INTERVIEWEE: Peter Wallison

INTERVIEWER: Martha Kumar

[Disc 1 of 1]

MK: —on-the-record, except where you want to go on-background, or off-the-record.

The material ultimately goes into the presidential library system. So it will go into the [Ronald] Reagan Library.

PW: You mean what I say goes into the Reagan Library, and what someone else may say will go into the [Jimmy] Carter Library?

MK: It's the library of choice, whatever you choose. We're working with the National Archives and the Office of Presidential Libraries. So, as long as we're building a record, it seems appropriate to give it to the libraries. Nothing goes in, though, until after the new president is inaugurated. Before then, the ways in which we'll use the materials [is] we'll use some cuts from the interviews in what we call "Standards of a Successful Start", which is something we'll come up with in spring that will look at the elements that are common to successful transitions. Then, the pieces on the offices themselves we complete by July, but they don't go to people until their transition operations are in gear. Then the full text of the interviews will be given to the people coming in, but not publicly released, until after 2001.

PW: I see.

MK: We're directing it for the people coming in but, on the other hand, it's useful for scholars and for people reporting on the White House, too.

Can you talk about the time when you came in, and the circumstances when you came in, to the White House?

PW: In a sense, I've been in the White House twice. I was [Nelson] Rockefeller's counsel when he was Vice President. So I was there during a good portion of the [Gerald] Ford administration, and I worked with a lot of people in the Ford White House. And then I came into the Reagan White House in about late March or early April of 1986. The circumstances were simply that Fred Fielding, who had been Reagan's counsel from the outset of the Reagan administration, left. He was ready to go out into the real world. I had worked with Don Regan at the Treasury Department as General Counsel of the Treasury. Then I had left and gone into private practice. Regan felt that he'd like to have me back in the government with him, when he was over in the White House as chief of staff.

So he called me and asked me whether I would be interested? I said I would be. It's not the kind of job, as a lawyer, you want to pass up, no matter what it means to the rest of your career. It will not advance your career, but it's an opportunity that you really don't want to let go by. So I agreed to do it.

MK: Why is it not helpful to the rest of your career?

White House Interview Program, Interview with Peter Wallison, Martha Joynt Kumar, Washington, DC, January 27, 2000. Peter Wallison served as Counsel in 1986 and 1987 in the administration of President Ronald Reagan.

PW: Well, it depends on the kind of lawyer you want to be. I was not interested in being a Washington lawyer, or being a lobbyist, or anything of that kind. I was, before I went to the Treasury, a corporate lawyer. I represented clients in acquisitions and mergers, securities offerings, and things like that. I liked that quite a lot. I also did a lot of bank regulation work, and I liked that. When you go into the White House, you're not dealing with anything that relates to the areas of practice that business law firms are generally interested in. If you don't want to be a lobbyist afterward, and do the kinds of things that lobbyists do in Washington, then being in the White House does not advance your career in any way. It doesn't give you any skills that make you a better lawyer in the areas you'd like to practice. I knew that going in. I didn't expect that I would get anything out of this in terms of my career, and I didn't. I was able to reconstruct a career afterward, fortunately, but it's really tough. I don't think that most people who come into the White House, unless they are interested in living in Washington and working in the lobbying milieu, are going to develop any useful skills for a serious career in business or financial law.

MK: What about networks of relationships? Is that helpful at all?

PW: It is somewhat helpful. But people are very practical. A relationship will get you in the door most of the time. If you've formed a relationship while you were on the White House staff with the CEO [chief executive officer] of a major company, for example—let's take the most crass kind of relationship. You can call that person after you leave the White House and talk about some kind of business relationship. But, unless you have the particular skills that that person wants, he's not going to use your services. So I am very doubtful that, in most cases, anyone who goes into the White House and does not have an intention of using the connections that are made there for a Washington kind of business, either as a public relations person or as a lobbyist or as a Washington-type lawyer, gets much in the way of career enhancement from being White House counsel. I certainly didn't, and I don't know of any one of the people who were counsel who actually did. Fred Fielding, I think, has worked very hard to build a business-type of practice; A. B. Culvahouse, who succeeded me, he has done the same. If you're going to make it in Washington as anything other than a lobbyist-type lawyer, you have to do it by the sweat-of-your-brow. The years that you spend in the White House, I think you allocate that to the portion of your life that will be devoted to interesting and challenging experiences and not to the career-building process.

MK: What did you expect coming in, and to get out of it? What were the things you were looking forward to?

PW: I thought it would be challenging. I thought it would be interesting. I wanted to see how I would function in an environment in which I'm under constant scrutiny. I also wanted to help Don Regan. I liked Don a tremendous amount. He seemed to feel that I could be of help to him. The people who were around him were people who were with me at the Treasury Department; they were my friends. So that was attractive, to work with them again. And then, frankly, it was a kick. The idea of being in the White House sounded like it would be a lot of fun and would probably be in my obituary, if I had one.

MK: That's certainly true. White House years often seem to define a lot of what follows.

PW: That is certainly true in some cases. I don't think it has been true generally in the Reagan administration. If I can make a partisan comment, I think it's much more true in Democratic administrations, because the people in those administrations become icons of the press in a way that people in Republican administrations very seldom do. So you get the [Ted] Sorensens, for example, and the Pierre Salingers. They become major figures and

afterward they are always gone to for commentary and that sort of thing, but it doesn't happen so often in Republican administrations. Those people tend to fade into the woodwork. The Michael Deavers, for example, only get called on occasionally, the Lyn Nofzigers and so forth.

MK: Bill Kristol.

PW: Bill Kristol is a good example of the opposite thing. But, of course, he went into the media, which helps him get that kind of attention. It's a different way, I think, in that people in Republican administrations are treated from people in Democratic administrations.

MK: Different kinds of groups.

PW: That's right.

MK: When you came in, you came in as a team. How many people were there with Regan that basically formed that team?

PW: I didn't go with Regan initially. I had already left the Treasury Department and was back in private practice. I was actually in private practice for about fifteen months before I went back into the White House. The people who were with Reagan from the Treasury - there were four, I guess, at that point who had come over from Treasury directly with Regan and never went out in to the private sector. Do you want their names?

MK: Sure.

PW: Dennis Thomas, Tom Dawson, David Chew, and Al Kingon were, I think, the four people who came over with Regan. Then, in addition to that, Regan had brought in Pat Buchanan and several other people who became part of his team.

MK: How important is it when a chief of staff comes in, particularly as an administration is underway, for him to bring in a group of people that are known to him?

PW: It depends on how the chief of staff works with the president. A lot of the answer is very personal to the president and how the president likes to work. If you watch the [Bill] Clinton White House, the chief of staff's position doesn't seem to be all that important. The chief of staff is chosen, and the rest of the staff that stays around and continues in the roles they had, with a few minor changes. When Regan went into the Reagan White House, he brought in his own staff, the Chief of Staff's staff, and many of the people who were there, left.

MK: [Leon] Panetta brought in some of his own people when he came in.

PW: Who did he bring in?

MK: Well, he brought in Jodie Torkelson in Management and Administration; [Mike] McCurry came in as Press Secretary.

PW: Was McCurry a Panetta person?

MK: He came in under Panetta.

PW: That's true. But I'm wondering whether he was a part of Panetta's group, when Panetta came in.

MK: He wasn't in an earlier time period, but he was an example of a chief choosing his own people.

PW: I was thinking more of people that the chief of staff had around him before, and brought in. In the Reagan administration, as everybody knows, Regan was a very powerful figure because of the way that Ronald Reagan ran his White House. He didn't reach out to staff people directly. He went through his Chief of Staff and he delegated a lot to the Chief of Staff. So the Chief of Staff had a staff that did a lot of the things that might in another administration, with a more hands-on kind of president, be doing directly for the president at the request of the president.

MK: What kinds of things?

PW: Well, all of the legislative activities. Most of the legal questions, most of the public relations questions, most of the planning of the President's schedule and most of the policy issues were all within Regan's area of responsibility. The President would give him directions, "Don, this is what I think we ought to be doing. This is my view on this; this is my view on that," and Regan would staff it out and get these things done. Everything then would filter back through Regan, and he would bring it back up to the President. So there was very little direct contact between staff people and the President other than through Regan, at least while I was in the White House, and I suspect it was true even when Howard Baker came in, although you ought to [be] talking to those people to find out whether it was run differently there. But the President seemed much more comfortable delegating these kinds of things to a chief of staff and letting things come to him based on the general policies that he had outlined.

MK: How many times did you meet with the President?

PW: Well, we had regular meetings. I've been amused by some of the things I hear Gary Bauer saying because I was there while when Gary was there. He says, "I met with the President every week, at least once a week." That's true, because we had what was called an "Issues Lunch" every week, and the top White House staff—maybe eight or ten people, including Gary—would meet with the President for lunch. For an hour and a half or so we would go through the things that were happening in our areas, and what issues were coming up and what we were doing about them. The President would give a certain amount of direction or he would just nod and say, "Thank you." I think that's mostly the kind of "meeting" that Gary Bauer had with the President, because of the way Regan ran things, and because the policy initiatives in the Reagan administration were made at the cabinet level to a much greater degree than in either the Clinton or Carter administrations. I don't know very much about how it worked in [the George] Bush [administration]. But the Cabinet department heads were very important in the development and the prosecution of policies in the Reagan administration, so the White House domestic policy staff was correspondingly very weak. Gary, at least in my experience when I was there, was the head of that staff, and it had very little to do. In fact, we talked to Regan a lot about seeing whether we could beef up that staff, and get it to take more initiatives, and focus the Reagan presidency more, because when you have the Cabinet departments coming up with ideas, there's a certain lack of focus. That's an aside.

When I was counsel before Iran-Contra, I met with the President at these issue lunches and then maybe once or twice on special things—for example—the appointment of a new chief justice of the Supreme Court. I handled the selection of Warren Burger’s successor, William Rehnquist, and bringing in Antonin Scalia to replace Rehnquist. Those were my assignments. So I met with the President fairly frequently on things like that, the occasional executive privilege issue, the occasional legal issue, but the rest of the time the meetings took place in the formalistic setting of these issue lunches, or where half a dozen or a dozen people would discuss a special issue of some kind with the President, and a legal question was involved. The meetings would occur in the Oval Office, sitting on the couches and chairs, adding something, or just listening and taking notes. So I did not have a very direct relationship with the President, where I could go in and see him whenever I wanted. I think that was the case in the Reagan White House with almost everybody.

When we got to Iran-Contra things changed quite a lot. Then I had to talk with him a lot, several times a week.

MK: What was the process for the Supreme Court nominations?

PW: Probably in mid-April, 1986, the President and Regan were told by Chief Justice Burger that he was planning to retire I was then called by Regan and told of Burger’s plans, and that the President wanted this to be kept completely confidential; the only people who would know about it were myself, a couple of lawyers on my staff, and a few people at the Justice Department. In fact, it was kept absolutely confidential while we did the search.

MK: How did you do the search?

PW: Well, first of all, the President had already established the idea that we would only look at sitting judges.

MK: Why did he make that choice?

PW: I think the President and most of the people in the administration on the legal side were quite concerned about what people would do who were not judges, had not had the experience of being judges before, and had not written opinions before—when they were appointed to the bench. You hear everyday today George W. Bush saying that he’s going to appoint a strict constructionist. That was a key objective of the Reagan administration also, to appoint people who would “interpret the Constitution and not make law”. The only way you could really tell whether a person had that approach was to look at the decisions he or she had written as a judge. So we recruited a number of lawyers—two people on my staff and several people at the Justice Department—and they began to read the decisions of several well-known Court of Appeals judges. I don’t think we looked at any district judges. We looked at Court of Appeals judges all over the country including some that are now on the Supreme Court. Tony Kennedy was one and, of course, “Nino” Scalia and Judge Robert Bork, Ralph Winter, several others. We read their decisions, and then drafted memos which described what their philosophy seemed to be, based on these decisions.

MK: How many did you winnow it down to?

PW: I think there were four or five at the end, but there was never really a question about whether Scalia would be appointed. Once the President learned that Scalia would be the first person of Italian-American descent to be on the Supreme Court, that’s all he wanted to hear. That was it. He wanted to be the President to appoint the first Italian-American to the

Supreme Court. But there was actually some consideration of whether Scalia would be appointed as Chief Justice or whether Rehnquist, who was much admired for his judicial conservatism, would be made Chief, and Scalia an Associate Justice. Finally it came down that way. But the process was to read all of these things, and then to bring all of this to the attention of the President - what the options were.

MK: The people that were doing the reading, were they in the office of legal counsel at the Justice Department?

PW: Actually, I don't know exactly where they were in the Justice department. There was an organization, or staff, in the Justice department that was headed, while I was there, by a lawyer named Steve Markman. Steve seemed to be the person who was most in touch with the judges' issues. Whenever we decided on judicial nominations of any kind, Steve was the guy at the Justice Department who had most of the information at his fingertips, came to the meetings at the White House, and briefed on the background checks and things like that. It could have been people on his staff, although the desire for confidentiality would have limited the number who were involved. We'd get notebooks made up of decisions and assessments of decisions. Then two lawyers on my staff—

MK: Were they your deputies?

PW: Well, my deputy was Jay Stevens, but the two on my staff who did the work on this—Jay knew about it, of course—were Chris Cox, who is now a congressman, and Alan Raul, who is now a practicing lawyer here in town. They were the two people who I relied on to read the decisions, talk with me about it, bat ideas around, get a sense of who fit most closely with the profile the President wanted. But, ultimately, we winnowed it down to four or five people who were clearly "strict constructionist" or proponents of judicial restraint, another phrase for the same general idea. We whittled it down to four or five people. Tony Kennedy may well have been on the list. But, again, once the President heard about Nino Scalia, that's what he wanted. Certainly Scalia was within the range; he was one of the people we were seriously considering.

MK: So, did the President feel that—for all Supreme Court appointments—you wanted to appoint somebody who was already on the bench?

PW: Yes. I think that was a very important part. He did not want to take, and the people in the administration didn't want to take, the risk that they would appoint somebody whose ideas hadn't been fully formulated and written down, as a judge has to formulate and write down his or her philosophy or her philosophy when writing an opinion.

MK: So, really, the whole process of information-gathering and then the recommendation is really one that is run from the Counsel's Office.

PW: It was then.

MK: I'm just thinking of the contrast in the Bush White House with David Souter's appointment, which George W. has mentioned. I think he's mentioned it.

PW: He hasn't. It came up in the debate last night, but I think Gary Bauer said something about it. There is a lot of disappointment with Souter.

MK: I've talked to a lot of people who mentioned that. It seemed to me that process was driven very differently, because the Chief of Staff in a sense made that decision and testified in a sense on behalf of Souter and his suitability, and he turned out to be somewhat different than they anticipated.

PW: I probably could have told them that. Souter was a classmate of mine.

MK: What about the process for district and circuit court judges? What was the process you used there?

PW: Well, there we had a group consisting of people from the Justice Department and the White House Counsel's Office. Sometimes the Attorney General attended and, other times, Markman would simply be there. The process was to take the nominations, which usually came from the senators from the state, and vet them through the FBI [Federal Bureau of Investigation] and then with interviews at the Justice Department. We wouldn't do any of that at the White House counsel level. Then they would bring the results of these vetting processes to a meeting at the White House. At that point they had come to a point where a decision could be made, and they wanted to make sure a particular nomination would be in accordance with the President's views. We'd talk about the individuals, and I'd indicate whether I thought this person would or would not be a suitable nominee. Once it passed through that sieve, the nomination went to the President. There would be a memo telling him why this person was being nominated, what's good about the nominee, and what his or her philosophy was.

When you get to district judges, of course, you are not then talking about people about whom you can have very much information. In almost all cases, the people who were nominated for appeals court positions had been district judges because, again, we had an opportunity to read opinions and make a judgment on judicial philosophies. That made it much easier to get a sense of where they would be. When you were talking about district judges you were simply talking about lawyers in their respective areas and there we had to rely on a whole lot of other things that generally didn't give you a very good idea of how people would behave on the bench.

MK: Plus the senators were involved in it—

PW: Yes.

MK: —so you had less control over it.

PW: There was a big controversy about a guy, if I call recall correctly, named Dwyer, who was a nominee of the senior senator from Washington state—his name is slipping my mind right now.

MK: Slade Gorton?

PW: Slade Gorton. Slade Gorton had a nominee that the Justice Department just hated. They were as negative as they could possibly be, but Gorton kept pressing. This guy looked nothing like what a Reagan judge would be, but there were certain points of leverage that Gorton could exercise and, for some reason, he really wanted this guy to be appointed. Ultimately, he was appointed, and he's turned out to be exactly the worst kind of judge from the standpoint of the Reagan administration. The Justice department was completely right. Now he may be a good judge from the standpoint of everybody else in the world, but he was

not what the Reagan administration would have appointed. The Justice Department knew that, but politics intervened.

MK: What leverage points did he have?

PW: I don't remember.

MK: A chairmanship of something.

PW: Sure.

MK: In making that decision, that Supreme Court judges and circuit court judges should come from the court and have a record, do you know when Reagan came to that view, and how?

PW: No. It was in place when I arrived.

MK: Was the process for nominees in place for courts?

PW: Yes.

MK: What kinds of things did they look at for district court judges?

PW: Well, writings, if there were any.

MK: For example, did you do a [Lexis-]Nexis search on people?

PW: I don't know that Nexis existed at the time. This was the mid-eighties. Actually there were primitive forms of Nexis at that time, but the things that were being added were at that point, 1985, 1986; they didn't go back so you could look at newspaper articles about a person over the last ten years. So they relied on people in the community and political people who knew this person; testimonies of that kind, reading a person's articles, if he'd written articles for journals that reflected his philosophy, and then there was an interview at the Justice department.

I should add that I never got any indication in any of the things that I did, that they ever asked a person about the abortion issue, about the right-to-life question and his position on that. They may have, but it never came up in our meetings. That issue was never on the table, maybe they were talking in some kind of code. I never asked, because I did not want that to be an issue. I did not want that to be a litmus test, so to speak. So I never asked the question and I was never told in all these meetings, when we would go through the positions of the potential nominee, whether he or she was pro or con on the *Roe v Wade* right-to-life issue. But, always, the focus was on judicial conservatism, strict construction, judicial restraint, that sort of thing. That's the way I wanted it, and that's the way judicial nominations went through in the Reagan administration. All the talk about litmus tests and all the rest -- it could conceivably have been true, but if anyone ever asked me whether I saw any of it, the answer is no, I never did.

MK: For example, there was no effort to make sure that you looked at every decision that might relate to abortion and discuss it—

PW: No.

MK: —any differently. It was just a judicial conservatism as a general—.

PW: As you can imagine, there weren't a lot of decisions on the abortion question. You hardly would ever come across a judge who had ever dealt with the issue at that point. The only way it would really come up is if, in the interviews, someone at the Justice Department said, "Well, if you had an abortion question, how would you handle it?" And if that question was ever asked, no judicial candidate ever told me that it was—I talked to a number of them before and after they'd been nominated—and it never came up at the meetings.

MK: What was the process, when you nominated somebody, to help them through the Senate confirmation process?

PW: I don't know. Once I got through that process, and the nomination was made, all of these things were turned over to the White House legislative staff. There was a woman on the staff, Nancy Kennedy, who it seemed, if I remember correctly, was in charge of the judicial nominations. She would work with the Justice Department people and they would work with the Judiciary committee in the Senate, take the nominee around to meet the senators, and that sort of thing. But I have only the foggiest notion of what they did.

MK: What about the vetting process on other kinds of nominees, specifically their FBI information, because you all had that, right?

PW: Yes. That's right.

MK: How was that handled?

PW: When the candidate had been selected, the name would go over to the Justice Department. It would then take six to eight weeks, as I recall, for the FBI to do a background investigation. We would then get a memo from the FBI, and a background file, which consisted of all the raw material. That would all come over to the White House and it would be stored in the now-famous safe over in the Old Executive Office Building. The woman who was in charge of it was a long-time staffer. She was, I gather, fired by the Clinton people. She had been there through several administrations, Democrat and Republican. She would go through the background material, which was all raw data, and she would tag all the things that looked like they could be problems. Then one of the lawyers in the Counsel's Office would go through and look at what she had tagged. If these reflected serious problems of some kind, the lawyer would come to me and show me what it was in this information. Then I'd have to decide whether this information, if true, was something that was disabling for the nominee or was something we could survive, whether it could be sold on the Hill, so to speak, or what kind of political problems it would cause if it became known?

If we decided then to go forward with the nomination, and there were many we didn't pursue—. There were many where I had to call the nominee in and say, "I'm sorry, here are the facts; do you deny these facts; tell me a little bit more about them." Most of the time, the facts were about right and I would say, "We can't make this nomination. Now I'm sure you'd like to work out something so that it's—."

MK: How do you do that?

PW: You work up a spin, so to speak, on why the nomination was not being made. He's withdrawing or she's withdrawing because the process was taking too much time—

MK: They want to spend more time with their family.

PW: —and his or her business was suffering, any number of things like that. But as far as we could, we made sure these things were graceful and not injurious to them in other respects. Simply because we couldn't nominate them, from a political point of view, didn't mean they should be disgraced in their communities.

But if we decided to go forward, then one of the lawyers would go up to the Hill to the chairman and ranking Democrat of the appropriate committee. He would have the raw file with him and he would have the tagged portions. He would not leave the file. He resisted very strongly leaving the file.

MK: Is that true with every committee?

PW: I can't say.

MK: I know committees have been somewhat different.

PW: Many demands were made – for example, that every member of the committee has to see the file. We resisted that as much as possible, but in some cases, if we really wanted someone, we would arrange for every member of the committee to see it. Maybe we would have a lawyer in the room to make sure copies weren't made or taken out. Mostly we were concerned that, in these files, there was a lot of material that is simply reported by the FBI investigators and not evaluated. You don't want this material to be put about. So we would take up the stuff that was really tough to get over, we'd show it to the Senators and we'd say, "We're willing to go forward with this; the President will nominate this person; how do you feel about this?" Most of the time they'd say, "I can stand for that; I'm going to be all right with that."

MK: What kinds of things would be flagged?

PW: Allegations of dishonesty or fraud, by people that looked as though they might actually have some substance to them; business dealings that were not above board. Sexual infidelity came up from time to time. Drug use, alleged drug use, especially after college; drug use in college, that was something we could live with. Any time after you left college, allegations of drug use were completely out of the question. That would be an absolute no-no. In the Reagan administration, you just said no. So those are the kinds of things that would come up.

MK: Are there some things, like infidelity, that for a Cabinet member there's one threshold but for somebody who is at a lower level—it's a deputy undersecretary—the threshold is somewhat different.

PW: Yes.

MK: Obviously the media glare is going to be different.

PW: And there was that. Drug use, however: there was no judgment made on that basis. If a person was alleged to have used drugs after college, no matter what the job—in fact, I had one case where it was a White House gardener and I think we turned him down because there were allegations of drug use. That was a tone that the Reagan administration wanted

to set, and if you used drugs, you were not going to get a job that the Reagan White House had anything to say about.

MK: Did you have a Personal Data Statement that people filled out, the White House Personal Data Statement?

PW: Sure. We'd go through that. The lawyers would go through with these people in quite a lot of detail.

MK: Was that something that would be sort of a preparation for the interview with the person?

PW: Whose interview with the person?

MK: Say there's going to be an interview with a person—.

PW: A White House lawyer's interview?

MK: Either a lawyer's interview or somebody in the Personnel Office interviewing somebody?

PW: Sure. That would be used.

MK: Then I guess, of course, the contrast with the FBI report. If somebody had something that maybe was pretty iffy and might be a tough sell, if they had been honest about it in their Personal Data Statement that they would be more likely to get over that.

PW: The Personal Data Statement, at least while I was there, was still pretty general. We didn't get into personal things very much. There may have been—I think toward the end we had a question, we might have introduced a question about drug use, for example.

MK: How many questions did you have?

PW: I just don't remember. I filled out one myself, and I didn't find it particularly onerous. The financial material was more difficult to do, because they asked for the names of every client you've ever had, things like that. But I didn't remember the Personal Data Statement, as particularly tough.

MK: I think now it's forty-two questions.

PW: It probably is, because every time a new issue arises — such as whether you've paid Social Security taxes for your nanny, that goes into the Personal Data Statement as a question. So every time there's an issue, there's another question added to the Personal Data Statement.

MK: You can almost name the questions after particular people.

PW: Right.

MK: How was the office divided up? How many people did you have, and what were the areas of responsibility, the divisions within it?

PW: The Office of Counsel in the White House?

MK: Yes.

PW: We only had nine lawyers. This was pre-scandal days.

MK: There are a larger number today.

PW: The number is like forty-five or something. I think it went up to twelve in the Bush administration, and now in the Clinton administration it's something like forty-five. So we didn't have a real organizational chart because we only had nine people to work with. They each had different areas of responsibility that were generally theirs. For example, Chris Cox was in charge of international matters.

MK: What would that involve?

PW: That's a very good question.

MK: Treaties and executive agreements?

PW: No. That would mostly go through the National Security Council; the treaties would go through the National Security Council staff, which we had nothing to do with.

MK: What about war powers?

PW: War powers would fall into that category. But I actually had someone else who handled all defense and war powers-related issues and that was Dean McGrath. What was I thinking about international? There were a number of things that could come up.

MK: Trade?

PW: Yes. Trade issues would have been an example of that. There might also be questions relating to airplane travel, disputes between the United States and other countries about commerce of various kinds. Maybe those are trade issues. But Chris handled that and Dean McGrath handled all of the defense issues. That would include the defense appropriations legislation, the defense authorization legislation. Chris would also handle, I guess, the State Department authorizations and appropriations. So on down the line. I had a lawyer who handled all the ethics questions, and someone who worked on civil liberties issues. There was even someone who handled the disease-of-the-week. Congress passes all of these little bills all the time, establishing that a certain week, for example, will be cystic fibrosis week, and a Presidential Proclamation is required. So somebody has to read what Congress said and then prepare the proclamation. When there was all this talk about testing urine and blood for drugs, I had someone handle that, and he was our fluids man. It was pretty informal, yet I knew what each of the people in the office would be handling. So I could always bring that person in—.

MK: What about executive privilege issues?

PW: I had someone who handled that. Mike Shepherd, who had come over from the Justice Department, was the specialist in executive privilege. So that's mostly the way it went.

When I was there the Counsel's Office was involved in everything that went on. Nothing went to the President, including speeches, that didn't go through the Counsel's Office.

MK: What did you look for?

PW: We would look for consistency, mostly, and we would look for—well, the first thing you would look for, of course, is compliance with legal requirements. That is, the president is not going to say something in a speech that could conceivably be illegal or subject to legal challenge.

MK: Did you ever find anything in a speech?

PW: I don't think we ever found anything at that level. We did find a lot of things in speeches that were inconsistent with things that the President had said at other times. That's one of the things that the lawyers were particularly good at. They're very good at understanding principles and concepts. So the President says something about A which reflects a difference in principle from what he was saying when he talked about B; the lawyers were good at picking that up. They would come by and say, "Here's the President's speech on such-and-such-a-subject and he's talking about doing something in the personnel area here. But if you do that, the reason you would do that is this, and just three weeks ago he said he wasn't going to do that." So we would try to make sure that the two were consistent, that the President said something that was consistent with what he had said before.

MK: Was there a particular person who read the speeches, or everybody did?

PW: No. It mostly went according to the areas of responsibility that I knew they had. If the President was doing an international speech, Chris would look at that. If he were doing a defense speech, Dean McGrath would do that, and so on down the line, depending on what their areas of responsibility were.

MK: Let's say, in executive privilege, what kinds of issues came up, and how would you deal with them?

PW: Well, the most prominent one I think about now, was my conflict with Edmund Morris. They now seem to be less significant because he apparently was unable to make use of what access he had. But I was quite—

MK: Whatever that access was.

PW: He had a lot of access and he had a lot of potential access. He was in the White House all the time.

MK: But where was he?

PW: He came to the morning staff meetings, the senior staff meeting—

MK: Was he?

PW: —I won't say every day but he was there a lot. He came to the President's speech preparations when the President was taking questions before press conferences or before major speeches, where the staff would brief the President about various things in the speeches. Edmund was there frequently, or as frequently as he could get in over my objections, and that was one—

MK: What was your objection?

PW: Well, any time someone who is not an employee of the Federal government is in a meeting with the president, you have essentially waived executive privilege. There is no basis for asserting it. The whole basis for executive privilege is that the president is being advised; he is seeking candid advice from his advisers. If there's a person in the meeting who is not an adviser, then he might as well be a member of the staff of the *Washington Post*. So I objected to Edmund's being in any meeting, and I lost a lot of those fights.

MK: Whom did you fight with?

PW: Regan, mostly. Mostly, he got into meetings because I didn't hear about it, I didn't hear that he was going to be there. I would walk into the meeting and he was there. After the meeting I would say, "Can you keep him from coming to these meetings?" And Regan would say, "Nancy wants him there. He's writing a book about the President." I have to admit that my position was a lawyer's position; it was not what you might call a realistic position. It was not a position that reflected what the chances were that anything that was going to be said in that meeting would ever be questioned in a way that would raise the question of executive privilege. It's only very rarely that a meeting with the president raises executive privilege questions. That is to say, other people want to know what people in the meeting said, and they want to know it so badly that they actually press it to the point of forcing the president to claim executive privilege. So it's very, very rare that that actually happens, but I took it as my responsibility to make sure that people understood that there was an issue here—and Edmund Morris knows all about this, because I was very plain with him about why I didn't want him in those meetings. In his book he calls me affable but inflexible which is basically what I was. That was one area.

Another area where things would come up—well, Iran-Contra was another major issue. At the very outset of Iran-Contra, I recommended to the President and Regan that the President waive executive privilege for all communications of any kind that he might have had about this issue, because I had certainly taken to heart a lot of what we saw in the Watergate period. That was a sort of formative period for me in terms of my political awareness, and I was quite sensitive to the charges of cover-up. I felt that allegations of cover-up were more dangerous politically than the actual thing that was done. And certainly, in this case, Reagan had done absolutely nothing wrong on the Iran-Contra matter, and would be foolish to claim executive privilege about anything, I thought, in an area that's so fraught with trouble as this one. So I recommended that we waive executive privilege. That's what the President did, and he never claimed that or any other kind of privilege throughout the entire controversy.

MK: When did you first find out about it?

PW: Iran-Contra?

MK: Yes. Was it from the newspaper?

PW: It wasn't quite from the newspaper. I think it was the day of or the day after the election of 1986. It was early in November 1986 and I was coming into the White House in the morning for the eight o'clock staff meeting. I ran into Larry Speakes, who was the President's Press Secretary, and he said to me, "Can the President violate his own executive order?" I asked him what he was talking about, and he started telling me about allegations that the President had authorized the sale of arms to Iran, which would have been inconsistent with his executive order that did not permit the sale of arms to a terrorist nation. So I said, "Yes, I think the President can violate his own executive order because,

essentially, he is simply modifying something that was his discretion to make in any event, but I'll check on that." I wasn't entirely sure of my ground on that. I went back and talked to Dean McGrath. We started to look into this issue, and then, of course, it just blew up. It got bigger and bigger and bigger, and the issues got bigger and bigger. It became the major scandal of the Reagan administration and, unfortunately, hobbled him for much of his second term. It resulted in Regan's departure and, ultimately, mine, because when Howard Baker came in, he brought in his own counsel, A. B. Culvahouse, a good friend and lawyer for Baker over many years. But if Regan hadn't gotten so embroiled in the Iran-Contra matter, and people hadn't asked for his head and so forth, he probably wouldn't have had to leave when he did.

MK: Is there just generally a principle that one thing that happens is: nobody wants to blame a president, that somebody else has to fall on the blade?

PW: I think that's true, until we got to the Clinton administration. There was only one person you could blame for some of the things he was doing.

MK: That's right. It was a different kind of thing.

PW: I think there was a lot to that. People didn't want to attack the President, generally. Politically, especially with a popular president, it's a dangerous thing to do. So they attack the Chief of Staff, or others around him, or Cabinet secretaries, but what they mean is the president. But that's how executive privilege came up in the Reagan administration.

And it came up in other cases, too. Congressional committees, for example, wanted privileged material. But we never actually, that I can recall, successfully claimed executive privilege in anything. Sometimes we waived it, as in Iran-Contra; in other cases, we never asserted it when we could have, and the issue sort of went away. And, in some cases, the president simply decided that the principle wasn't worth what the consequences would be.

MK: Who would be in a discussion with the president for that sort of thing?

PW: When I was there, Edwin Meese and I. In fact, we had at least one debate in front of the President on this issue. I was for claiming executive privilege, and Meese was against it.

MK: What was the issue?

PW: It had to do with a request by the Senate Judiciary Committee for all of William Rehnquist's files, when he was head of the Office of Legal Counsel at the Justice Department. I thought that was simply harassment and I thought they were trying to create the kind of issue they could use to stop the nomination. I and the person who was then head of the Office of Legal Counsel in the Justice Department both felt this was a good executive privilege claim, because the Office of Legal Counsel is the lawyer for the entire government, and in effect for the president, and everyone discloses everything to them to get rulings about legal issues. The whole underpinning of the attorney/client privilege, which is part of the executive privilege, is to get people to disclose all relevant information, so you can give them the right advice. I thought: if there was ever a case for executive privilege, this was it. So I sent a memo to the President saying, I thought he ought to claim executive privilege in this case, but Meese did not like at all that idea. We debated it in front of the President, and the President decided he wouldn't claim it.

MK: Were the files turned over?

PW: Yes. And it turned out not to be as serious a problem as I thought, except that it creates a precedent. In the future, if someone wants the files of the Office of Legal Counsel, they are more likely to get them because this precedent exists. The result of that is that some people aren't going to go to the Office of Legal Counsel for advice if they have to disclose things that they don't want turned over to a Senate committee. It has these ramifications. I argued all those things, but the moment is very important in politics. The moment was that Rehnquist was either going to get confirmed by the Judiciary Committee, or he was not. From the President's and Meese's point of view, that was much more important than the principle I was talking about.

MK: Are there other cases you can think of, of ways in which the moment dominates?

PW: Not right at the moment, no. There were many, many such events—.

MK: I'm sure there are.

PW: —but I can't think of one.

MK: What about war powers? What kinds of issues came up, and how did you deal with them, on war powers?

PW: Well, of course, the first principle of war powers in the Reagan administration—and I think I hear Clinton doing the same thing—is it's a resolution. It was unconstitutional. But the president, to make sure it's understood that the congressional resolution was not a law, as a matter of accommodating the Congress, was complying with the terms of the resolution. As you remember, the so-called War Powers Act was passed over the veto of Richard Nixon, and Nixon's position was that the Congress had no authority to legislate in this area; the President alone can make the kinds of decisions the war powers resolution touched. So we were very careful to talk about it as "the War Powers Resolution." Then we tried, to the extent possible, in order to accommodate Congress, to comply with its terms.

So, at the time, an example—this is probably the only major example during my time there—was when the President was planning to bomb Libya. Obviously, a highly secret move, but one that would put the American forces in harm's way and thus require compliance with the war powers resolution. So, we invited a lot of the major congressional figures involved in defense policy to the White House, and Caspar Weinberger briefed them. I was there and gave a rundown of the requirements of the war powers resolution, how we interpreted it, and why this meeting was going on. The meeting was a consultative meeting with senators and congressmen whom the war powers resolution contemplated would be informed and consulted. The meeting went on and on and on and by the time it concluded, the attack had actually occurred. Accordingly, when the lawmakers spoke to the press, and confirmed the attack, the adverse consequences of the consultation—probably the thing that a president would fear most, a leak of some kind that will cause the attack to fail and cause loss of life—did not occur.

MK: Were there any formal statements that you had to make, relating to war powers? I know there are a group of precedents, aren't there, that pass in the Counsel's Office from one counsel to another, that relate to war powers and how war powers has been used.

PW: There probably are precedents, but I was not aware of what they were as precedents. I came in March, or maybe early April, and the attack on Libya was in mid-April. So I had to become pretty familiar with it, very fast. Dean McGrath, who was in charge of that area for

me, had to get up-to-speed himself very quickly, because he had not been there before. Now, whether he consulted precedents in the White House library—there is a White House library which is a very good law library—I don't know. There also may be other non-legal documents in the White House library—

MK: In the Old Executive Office Building.

PW: —in the Old Executive Office Building, and those things do not go with the files of the president to the presidential library. It consists, if I recall correctly, of letters, rulings, memoranda, and similar things that counsels over the years have prepared. So there is, in that sense, a precedent file. But my job did not involve my going there and seeing what they actually were. I would hear from my staff about what precedents they had found, but this was not frequent.

MK: When people in the White House wanted to go to the OLC [Office of Legal Counsel] for something, did they go through your office?

PW: Mostly, yes.

MK: What kinds of things did they go for?

PW: Principally it would be constitutional questions: that is, "Does the President have the power to do X or Y"? Those questions would come through my office. I doubt there was very much communication directly with the Office of Legal Counsel that didn't go through the White House Counsel's Office. In fact, as I've said many times in forums that have talked about this issue, the real conflict between offices, the inherent conflict, is between the White House Counsel's Office and the Office of Legal Counsel at the Justice Department, because the White House Counsel's Office is growing and growing and is acquiring more and more capabilities to do the kind of research and analysis that the Office of Legal Counsel does. At the same time, there is a real tendency on the part of Cabinet officers also to come to the White House Counsel's Office, and ask for advice about legal issues. So the General Counsel at the Department of Housing and Urban Development, instead of going to the Office of Legal Counsel, might come over to the White House Counsel's Office and say, "Here's something we're planning within HUD. If we came forward with this to the White House, how would you guys react to it?" Well, that puts the White House Counsel's Office in a position to make an important legal judgment at that point. If there is the staff to do it, White House counsel will provide the advice. They will do the research and write the memo, and they'll advise HUD about how they will react to a particular move by HUD, and that amounts to the same thing as what the Office of Legal Counsel at the Justice Department would do.

MK: So, what happens then?

PW: Well, most of the time, the Office of Legal Counsel at the Justice Department never hears about it. It just goes on. But when the White House has a constitutional question, that's really the point at which this becomes quite sensitive. Questions of constitutionality are an area that the Office of Legal Counsel has traditionally handled for the White House. But if the White House staff is large enough, and they consider themselves strong enough, and smart enough, they can handle those things, too, and advise the president and his Cabinet on constitutional issues. The White House staff always wins over the agencies and his Cabinet, always, because they're closer to the president. So they have the first cut, if you will, on any issue that comes up to the presidential level. If there's a constitutional question about the

president's power, if they want, they can make that decision on their own without consulting the OLC. Whenever you get a situation like that, where some group has the first opportunity and doesn't even have to inform the other group, over time, that first group is going to grow larger and larger and more competent, and eventually freeze the second group out completely. For this reason, eventually, the White House Counsel's Office will freeze out the Office of Legal Counsel. I think that's the long-time trend.

MK: What are some of the areas you see that happening in?

PW: Anything that the government is doing. I don't think there is a specific area. Any issue of policy which has legal components to it, such as whether the government has the power to take some act[ion], or whether the president has the constitutional or statutory authority to act. Any lawyer can draw conclusions on these issues, and the only question is: whether you want to make these judgments in the White House? So you could take on any issue in the administration, at any time, and make it yours, and make the decision. Then what happens? The President makes a decision. He goes ahead. The Attorney General calls the president and says, "Why did you do that? Who told you you could do that?" The president says he was advised by White House counsel, and then a big dispute arises. At this point, the White House counsel's competence to make these judgments will be called into question.

Actually this did happen in the Clinton administration a couple of times, where White House counsel's advice was called into question.

MK: When in particular?

PW: This was mostly political advice. Let me step back to say this: the unique thing about the White House counsel's job is that it is a mixture of law and politics. What you are essentially saying to the president, or to anyone else, is this: here's what the law permits you to do, but here's what I think is going to be politically acceptable for you to do. A lot of the judgments are that kind of thing. You have to have a political gut when you make a decision. You have to think about what reaction the public will have, and how this is consistent with what the president has done before, and that sort of thing.

Now, returning to this question of the Clinton administration. At the time of Vincent Foster's suicide, there was this whole question of whether the White House counsel at the time, Bernard Nussbaum, would permit Justice Department lawyers to come into Vincent Foster's office and look at the documents on his desk. Bernie decided he would make the decision about what documents are relevant. I don't mean to criticize a person, having not been in the office with him at the time, and knowing everything he knew, but that was bound to cause trouble. If you presume to make this relevance decision as against the Justice Department, as though they are not equally capable of doing that, you're going to run into big problems. And he did.

MK: Do you think that's a case where Nussbaum was acting as the president's lawyer? That the way he was seeing the counsel's job was as the President's lawyer?

PW: Sure.

MK: That this was the best advice that he could give to his client?

PW: Right.

MK: He didn't do the politics thing clearly and he didn't think through what could actually be done and sort of the institutional response.

PW: That's exactly right. I would think about this in much the same terms as what I said on executive privilege, that there I was acting as the president's lawyer. I was not really thinking through the politics, and I think the President was looking much more at the politics of whether he should waive the privilege with respect to Rehnquist's bills. That was acceptable, I think, because I conceived of myself as making an argument to the President like an argument to a court. I made the strongest argument for my point of view, and Meese made his argument; the President's job was to make the judgment on all of the factors together.

In Nussbaum's case he was making all of those judgments. He was actually doing the act. At that point, he should have had in mind the politics, because, from the President's point of view, the overall outcome would have been better if Bernie hadn't left the impression that he was hiding something by refusing to allow his own Justice Department to look at these documents. He might have been acting as someone would act as a lawyer for a particular individual. That's what you do in the private sector; you make them fight for every document. But when you're the lawyer for the president, your actions might cause the Justice Department to report that the White House is trying to hide something. Are you really helping your client? I don't think so. In fact, I think that one episode created virtually the entire Whitewater issue, because people thought something had been hidden, that there were documents on Whitewater that were in Vincent Foster's office and were spirited away, so that no one ever got a chance to look at them. It was needless.

So if I had any advice for a president choosing a counsel, I would not choose an ordinary lawyer, no matter how smart or learned. I would choose a lawyer with some political savvy who has demonstrated that he has political sensitivity, because he can really foul things up if he doesn't.

MK: It seems, in a way, he was responding just as sort of his corporate lawyer, although he had spent time in Washington with the House Judiciary Committee on impeachment. So you'd think he'd have more of a political sense.

The difference it seems to me, of what you were doing and what he was doing, is that in your action with your recommendation to Reagan, it was dealing with the institution of the presidency because it was: What kind of impact would not claiming executive privilege have? In Nussbaum's case, it was more the president-as-an-individual as his client: what was good for him?

PW: The important point to remember here—and this is something you may or may not want to cover—is that White House counsel is, in my view, not entitled to represent the president as an individual. The real problem for Nussbaum was determining whether he was representing the president as an individual? As soon as it entered his mind that he was representing the president as an individual, he should have said: "I'm out of here; the President has to have his own counsel on this, and I'm not paid to do this." Not that he should resign. He should just say, "I'm not authorized to handle this."

Now I will say this: it is very hard to make this judgment. In fact, when I was first introduced to this job by Fred Fielding, he said to me, "You are Counsel to the Office of the Presidency. You are not Counsel to the President." I absorbed that and thought I understood what it all meant. However, in practice, it's not a very useful guide, because you really don't know—when issues like Whitewater come up—whether you're representing the

president or the presidency. For example, counsel can certainly deal with a lot of noise created by the president's political opponents, even if they are allegations concerning the president's own personal conduct. But as soon as it becomes clear—and there's no bright line here—that this isn't just noise by political opponents, but in fact relates to the president's personal conduct, then the president should have his own lawyer. You should not be involved. And, if White House counsel is involved, I think, there is no privilege. The Iran-Contra matter was completely different, since there is no question that the President was acting in his official capacity, even if he was charged with wrongdoing.

I have some sympathy for Bernie in one sense, and that is at that moment he wouldn't know whether he was dealing with just political noise, or whether he was dealing with something the President may have actually done wrong. But still, the correct political judgment was not to allow this to be called a cover-up, don't make it seem as though the White House is hiding anything, because that is going to be much worse than whatever the president might have done, especially when you're turning it over to your own Justice Department. That was one of the things that made people most suspicious. It's one thing not to give it to the Republican-controlled Senate judiciary committee. You might argue this is just politics, as they did, but this is your own Justice Department. So people can't understand that, unless there is something really strange going on.

MK: What about other kinds of actions within the White House, where legal issues come up? Say in Iran-Contra, what did you do in relation to Oliver North and [John] Poindexter, and trying to figure out what they'd been doing? Does the Counsel's Office operate as a group inquiry into the facts, assembling facts?

PW: We tried to do whatever we could. It became impossible, because John Poindexter refused to provide the information. Regan went to the President, and Poindexter apparently argued to the President that, "...there was nothing wrong here, that this was just a big political issue and will blow over." And most importantly, "If any of this stuff gets out, all of these moderates in Iran are going to be slaughtered." At this point, the President certainly believed that there were moderates in Iran that we were dealing with. That was the whole basis of his policy. We can argue whether that was a failure of CIA intelligence. But Poindexter succeeded in keeping Regan and me and the rest of the Counsel's Office out of this thing entirely, by telling the President that any investigation would eventually be leaked to the press and all these moderates in Iran would be slaughtered. The President appeared to have accepted that—for a while—until Poindexter was fired, when it was learned that there had been diversion of funds to the Contras. Poindexter was fired; North was fired. At that point we began to get access to the files, but we didn't have access to North and Poindexter, who were then represented by counsel and were advised not to speak to anyone in government. So, whatever information we could get, we could only get by looking at a lot of documents, and trying to piece it all together.

So, yes, the White House Counsel's Office was the key organization in charge of developing what the facts were, and that's going to be true in just about every case where there is some kind of scandal associated with the administration, a policy scandal or otherwise. I think there are a number of things operating here. One is that people believe that lawyers are better at investigating than most other people, and that's true. Lawyers have been trained to read documents, to assess truthfulness, that kind of thing. So the first instinct is to turn things over to the lawyers. I think another factor is: people think lawyers are more discreet, that they have less access to or are less contacted by the press, so the facts that they know are less likely to be divulged. And, third, I think people may have in their heads the idea that

there's some kind of attorney-client privilege here, so the lawyers will be able to assert that. To an extent, that is actually true. Accordingly, I think all of those factors work together so as soon as a problem arises that is a potential scandal, people in the White House go immediately to the lawyers. They tend, at least in my experience, to back away completely and just rely entirely on what they're told by the lawyers, so as not to get their own credibility, their own future credibility, involved in vouching for facts that might only be partially known at any given time.

MK: So you could say McCurry—

PW: McCurry was a classic case.

MK: —was an example of that.

PW: Yes. He actually said to the press, “I don’t know the facts and I don’t want to know the facts; so you can ask me anything you want, but I don’t know the facts. All I know is what I’m told by the lawyers and they don’t tell me much.”

MK: Is there a tendency of all the units in the White House for the NSC [National Security Council] to be the most difficult to get a handle on, on what it’s doing?

PW: It was, certainly when I was there. I don’t know whether that’s still true, and I don’t know whether it was ever true, before or after. But, when I was there, it was impossible, because of the nature of Poindexter—who was very, very secretive.

MK: I guess if somebody wants to be secretive, there’s such an apparatus for it—plus there are so many people there that are on detail that are going to be responsive more toward just that particular unit—or where they came from.

PW: Yes. The NSC was a little fiefdom all its own.

MK: Are there other units in a White House that tend toward that?

PW: No. It’s really a unique body. Now it may not be the same now as it was then, but there was no nexus with the regular White House staff. Regan took an unbelievable beating, including from the [John] Tower Commission, about his failure to manage this problem when, in fact, he had absolutely no control over Poindexter - the person who really was in control of all the facts and the problem. Poindexter met with the President. Sometimes Regan was there; sometimes Poindexter would get things to the President without Regan knowing about it. Regan had no way of getting Poindexter to do anything; they were co-equals in that sense. Regan ran the part of the White House that was domestic and economic and so forth, and Poindexter ran the foreign policy aspects.

The other area that might be seen as independent would be the Office of Management and Budget. But, at least in the Reagan administration while I was there, the director was only able to meet with the President after he had discussed the subject of the meeting with Regan, so that Regan was sure that what he had to say to the President was relevant and on a subject with which the President was familiar.

MK: What about ethics regulations? Did you all lay out any specific things that you gave to the staff about ethics, ways in which they should behave? For example, you can't take gifts over \$50.00.

PW: At the beginning of my tenure, we circulated a memo that had all the details. Everyone who was going to be appointed by the President would get this memo, everyone on the White House staff got this memo. It was a memo from me and it laid out in detail what all the rules were. But then, I also would meet with groups of people who were about to begin their jobs, in some cases they already had started their jobs, maybe thirty at a time.

MK: What jobs would these be? Would these be presidential appointees?

PW: Throughout the administration. Cabinet positions. In the regulatory agencies. All through the administration, anyone who was going to be appointed to a job. And I would go through what the rules were and then I would give them a little lecture about how important it was to abide by these rules, and how the President was trusting them to abide by these rules; that every time something happens, at no matter what level of an agency, it is always the president's responsibility that it happened. "You've been appointed by Ronald Reagan. I will vouch for his honesty and his integrity and his desire to do things the right way. So you owe him a responsibility to act in the most ethical possible way. If there's ever a question you should check with your counsel, or you can check with me, and I'll be happy to provide you with any advice that you need on these questions."

MK: What were some of the rules?

PW: They had to do with making decisions. I can't even remember what all the detailed rules were but, of course, they were all the rules about what kinds of gifts you could accept and things like that, and what use you could make of the agency's transportation facilities. But there were also things about not making a decision on things in which you have any kind of personal interest -- you or any one associated with you [who] has any personal interest. Those kinds of things tend to be difficult to interpret. "Well, do I have a personal interest in this if my daughter is working for a company that is in an industry that will be aided by a particular decision? Is it something that I can do?"

Those are the kinds of questions that would come up. What I would tell them is, "If you have any doubt about this, you ask your lawyer and, if your lawyer can't give you an answer, tell the lawyer he can talk to me, or she can talk to me, or you can talk to me, or someone on my staff, because it's very, very important that there be no one in the Reagan administration who casts any doubt on the President's own program." And maybe that worked. Some people have come up to me afterward who remembered these little lectures and said that it was very helpful to them and made them feel as though they were part of something that was good.

MK: What about the agency ethics officers for the departments, did you deal with them?

PW: Many times. Sometimes with questions that they had; other times where an allegation had been made against a person in the department, and we would be talking to the ethics officer about that. That is a major part of a counsel's job and, again, that comes from the way people see lawyers in private life, so to speak. They do see lawyers as people who are sensitive to ethical questions and rules. So, naturally, as soon as an issue comes up, ask for the lawyers; see what the lawyers say. And I think lawyers are the right place for this sort of thing.

MK: What was a typical day and week for you? What kind of meetings did you have? When did you come into the White House? When had you read before you came into the White House?

PW: I would usually arrive at the White House about seven in the morning. The staff meeting was at eight; that is, the senior staff meeting was at eight. So I would come in; I'd read the newspapers.

MK: What would you read?

PW: *Wall Street Journal, New York Times, Washington Post* and *Washington Times*. They were all in my office all ready. I would go through them to see if there was anything in the newspapers, anything I hadn't already heard on the radio coming in in the morning or before I went to bed the night before. So I'd look through the papers to see what the issues were in that morning's papers. In most cases, I would then go to the staff meeting at eight o'clock. Sometimes I would go down to Regan's office in advance of the staff meeting and I would raise a subject that I saw in the papers or heard about, something like that, that I thought he might want to talk about at the staff meeting, or that he might not want to talk about at the staff meeting, or he might have to answer if the question comes up at the staff meeting. I would get ten, fifteen minutes with him—about something in the morning—before the staff meeting started. That was fairly rare. Then we'd go in the staff meeting.

Then, after the staff meeting, I think every morning—it may have been every other morning; I don't really have a clear recollection now—I would have my own staff meeting. It was probably every morning. And I would review with the lawyers the things that came up at the senior staff meeting. So they would each get directions about what were the issues the White House was dealing with that day and what they were going to hear from their "clients." That's another thing I should have mentioned to you. Not only did the lawyers cover particular areas, but the natural effect of this structure was that they would have extensive and direct contact with officials in those areas, whom they thought of as their "clients."

MK: The particular parts of the White House?

PW: Yes. And I encouraged that. I encouraged them to feel that they had clients on the White House staff. Alan Raul, for example, was in charge of presidential travel. That was a big and difficult issue because of what had to be paid for by private funds, by political funds or by government funds. The people in the political office and in the travel office were constantly calling Alan for advice on that subject. So, if an issue like that came up at the staff meeting, Alan would get a head's up: "There's something coming along here. The President is going to Iowa. He's going to speak on such and such a subject; it's going to have these political consequences." That kind of thing.

The staff meeting would last probably an hour or so and, after it was over, usually about ten o'clock in the morning, I would start to handle the crises of the day, whatever they happened to be. Mostly that's what you did. William French Smith was once asked what it was like to be attorney general and he said, "It's one damn thing after another." And that's basically what it's like to be White House counsel; "It's one damn thing after another." After the staff meeting, usually one or two members of the staff would have things that they wanted to talk with me about in detail.

MK: So, mainly what one has to do is have an operation in place, have procedures in place, to handle the things that you know are going to come along, and have capable people assigned to handle them.

PW: Yes.

MK: And then for the counsel himself, the counsel has to go into the specific things that come up at a time—

PW: Right.

MK: —that are the aberrant or the unusual.

PW: That's right. And that's the only way the job, I think, can be done. You have to give your staff, you have to delegate to your staff, responsibility in separate areas and trust them. Your trust of the staff is very, very important. It's not hard to find really good people for that staff, because it's an exciting place to work.

When I made it known that I was going to be White House counsel and that I was interested in talking to people who would like to work on the staff, I had lots of resumes from terrific lawyers and wonderful people. I hired some of them; some of them I couldn't hire; there wasn't enough room. But I had a lot of choices. There are also some people who did turn me down, who I wanted affirmatively, but they were in the midst of their careers and couldn't leave.

MK: Is it usually financial?

PW: Yes. In one or another sense, financial. "Look, I'm here; I've been at Smith and Jones for six years. If I stay another year, I might be made a partner. If I leave and go to Washington, I've lost that." That's the kind of choice that people might have to make. Yes, it was financial, very frequently.

MK: Were the rhythms different, as far as what you could see over the course of an administration, of the kinds of things that come to a counsel? For example, early on it's: setting procedures, dealing with ethics, and all the other kinds of things, and it's also doing appointments; the office would be flooded with vetting kinds of things. Are there other kinds of things that come along that affect the balance during an administration?

PW: Well, a couple of things, I guess, you might say. First of all, one of the rhythms is politics. Every two years there is an election. So, as the election approaches, the president becomes more involved in direct politics -- which raises questions about just the sort of thing I was talking about before: How much of his time would be devoted to it? Who pays for it?—all those things. That becomes much more important every two years. Whether the president is running for election or not, usually he's out doing things, raising funds or otherwise supporting candidates, which require you to make these kinds of allocations in the best possible way to avoid charges of wrongdoing. So that's one rhythm.

Another thing you can always count on is some kind of big scandal. It's like that; something is going to happen. When I took that office I assumed there was going to be a blizzard. What I didn't realize was that there would be a hundred-year snow in the form of Iran-Contra. You don't know those things in advance. The last six months was virtually all Iran-Contra. I couldn't escape it.

MK: What about pardons and executive orders?

PW: Not much. The executive orders took some time for the office, but for the counsel himself not much time. It was all pretty cut and dried. And pardons, there's a pardon attorney at the Justice Department. They send very few over to the White House for action by the President. That was just their policy.

MK: But aren't there requests? Like, there's pressure from somebody like George Steinbrenner; Patty Hearst's family is putting on the pressure, forever, on everybody, to let her loose. So you have that kind of pressure.

PW: My recollection of these things, as was so true throughout the Reagan administration and why it worked so well with the exception of Iran-Contra, is that the President articulated a policy. People basically knew they'd be wasting their time if they tried to overcome that policy. Now in the pardon area I'm not sure that I ever heard the President speak of a policy, but it was pretty clear that the Reagan administration was a law-and-order administration and—I'm using the Supreme Court's term—strict scrutiny would be required for a pardon or clemency or anything like that. If someone had been tried and convicted of a crime—[Jonathan] Pollard, for example, was one of the big issues during the Reagan administration.

MK: That continues.

PW: Still is. There wasn't a chance in the world that Pollard was going to get any kind of leniency from the Reagan administration. I think most people knew that, so I don't think we had a lot of claims for clemency or pardons. I can't recall more than a handful during the year I was there.

MK: At the end of an administration it gets particularly high.

PW: Maybe that's right, but I wasn't there at the end of the administration. So, those were the kinds of things that had some rhythm to them. At least politics and crises are the two things that you know will be around when you take the job. One of the reasons you need a capable staff with clear lines of authority and responsibility, is that at some point you are going to be completely consumed with something, and that means your office has to function without you. So you need a really good and capable deputy, which I had in Jay Stephens, and you need very good lawyers, and then they have to know what their areas of responsibility are, so that they don't have to keep coming to you for the allocation of assignments.

Also, one other fact that is very important—two facts, actually—in these staff meetings I always articulated a principle about why we were making a decision. I always tried to make it clear to the lawyers that we made these decisions on the basis of some principle. Now this may be natural for lawyers, maybe everyone does this, but I made sure to do this. These are mostly younger people; some of them hadn't practiced very long. But in the government, in a bureaucracy of any kind, you have to [have] a principle of some kind on the basis of which you're making a decision. If you don't, the number of requests that you get will rise astronomically. If people don't understand, if people think that all these things are completely discretionary with you and you're making decisions on the basis of fairness, on the basis of friendship, on any discretionary basis, then you will be flooded with an enormous number of requests to do this or that or allow the president to do this or that. So

whenever an issue came up I would say, "What is the principle here? Let's try to define for ourselves what the principle is?" And we would work out among ourselves what the principle was, so the lawyers would know in the future what to say when people called them and asked for advice. That tended to reduce the ongoing work of the office just because people then, pretty soon, came to understand what it was the White House Counsel's Office would or would not say about something.

The second thing that is very important is: to have frequent staff meetings. Largely, it's a morale question. Most people serve in government because they want to do something good, but they also want to be involved. They want to be a part of whatever is going on. Sure, they can't all be in the senior staff meeting in the morning, but tell them what Larry Speakes said, and what Regan said, and what Poindexter said. That made them feel as though they were a part of things and, in fact, they were. So they got along very well with one another, and I think they felt that they were really part of the Reagan administration. That made the office function very well. So, as advice to future White House counsel, this is how I think an office should be run.

When I was at the Treasury Department with Regan, Regan was fantastic about this. The guy knit together a staff so that, today, we all still get together with him periodically. Sixteen or eighteen years later we all go for reunions with Regan, and we all are still friends. He would have a staff meeting every day, and he would tell us everything that he was doing, who he was dealing with at the White House, what the White House was saying, and of course what David Stockman was doing wrong. And then we would report to him about what we were doing in our specific areas. So we all felt that we were part of something, and in a government that's fantastically important because the work is very, very hard, the pay is low, you don't see your family, and you're constantly under pressure. The tensions are enormously high, particularly because of the scrutiny you're getting, and the fact that you're responsible for how the president is viewed. You've got to give people some compensation for all of this. One of the ways you do this is to bring them in and make them feel part of things. Don Regan showed me the importance of this.

MK: In talking about the pressures—you worked for the vice president and you worked on the staff at Treasury, and then you've been in corporate life, a corporate lawyer. Describe the White House pressure in relation to all those other spots.

PW: First of all, politics is the most important thing in the White House, and it diminishes as you go down, as you go to Treasury and then, of course, as you go to the private sector. The component of your work as a lawyer in the White House is, I would say, 75 per cent politics, 25 per cent substance. Then, in the Treasury it was probably 60 per cent substance, 40 per cent politics, and then in the private sector fortunately it's 5 per cent politics and 95 per cent substance. That's why the private sector succeeds, because they don't have to worry too much about the politics of things. I think that is the principal difference.

Then there is the question of tension and pressure. In the White House you never get away from the tension and the pressure of the job. You can go home, but when you turn on the television or you listen to the radio or you look at a newspaper, there are things that you are working on, or you know about, or you know that are constantly coming at you. So, even though you don't even recognize it, you're constantly at work and constantly under pressure. It can be extremely wearing, for that reason. As I say, you don't recognize it. You don't know that you are always at work. You don't realize it, but you are, because your mind is constantly occupied with what is going on in your office.

At the Treasury Department, it was less. You're not consumed all the time, because the things that the Treasury Department was dealing with are not in the *Washington Post*, the *New York Times*, or the *Wall Street Journal* every day and, what's more, they are not always things that are perceived as problems to be addressed. Whether the Federal Reserve raises interest rates is not a problem for the general counsel of the Treasury; it might be a problem for the secretary but the general counsel doesn't have to worry about that. So you have a chance to relax when you're at the Treasury Department in a way that does not occur when you're in the White House. Then, of course, in the private sector, you can get away completely. Not as much as it used to be like—we won't go into what the problems are of being a lawyer nowadays—but you are still able to separate your practice, your business life, from your personal life, in a way that you can't really do in government.

So, to me, those are the principal differences.

MK: What about the pressure of the opposition? I know some people have talked about the fact that, not only do you have the scrutiny of news organizations, but you also have your opponents out there after you, all the time, and that you're very aware of them.

PW: Sure. That's absolutely true. Again, that same calculus applies. When you're in the White House you've got every possible opponent, in effect; all the political opponents are at you all the time. Political points are scored against the White House, not the Treasury. When you're in the Treasury Department or even when you're working for the vice president—I had left that out—the pressure is much less. People pay less attention to the vice president; they don't bother with him so much, even less with the Treasury Department. There in the Treasury Department, your opponents are a much smaller group of people with much more particularized interests. Everyone, however, has an interest in what the White House is doing, so you have a legion of opponents.

MK: If a candidate who wins the election, becomes the President-elect, was to say: "What is a White House staff going to do for me, in what ways would it mean my success or failure?" What would you say?

PW: What the president would—?

MK: For them, they're going to have to figure out where they're going to spend their time. Should they spend all their time selecting Cabinet? Why should they pay any attention to the White House, because what is a White House going to do for them anyway? A White House is very important for them, and in some ways it can mean a success or failure for them. In what ways is that so? What does an effective White House staff get a president, what does it buy for him?

PW: Well, it multiplies the president's skills. That's basically what it is. The White House staff is an extension of the president and if a president thinks that he's going to accomplish anything in his presidency, if he has anything he wants to do, it is the White House staff that allows him to do it. The president himself is so taken up with his ceremonial duties, with the major problem of communicating effectively with the American people, that he doesn't have the time, literally, to think about policy questions, the structure of the legislation, how to deal with this or that senator or congressman or this or that issue. His staff is, in effect, an extension of him. They must understand what he wants to do, and how he would go about doing it. A staff that is able to do this for a President, allows him to accomplish the things his presidency is supposed to be about. There's no other way to describe it, I think. They are his arms and legs, in effect.

So your choice of a staff is, I think, the most important thing you're doing when you become president. Your choice of your White House staff will determine how successful you are going to be as president. You can be as brilliant a person as has ever held that office—you could be Teddy Roosevelt; you choose the person—but if he's exceedingly capable, he can be that much more effective if he's got a capable White House staff. If he's not, if he's a dim bulb, his abilities, however limited they might be, are going to be multiplied by the quality of the staff, if they serve him properly.

Until you've been in the White House, and until you've been in the government, you don't realize how important the White House staff is, in comparison to the cabinet. The Cabinet as advisers to the president are not really very important. Each cabinet position is, of course, important as manager of a huge agency and a gigantic amount of money, but basically the cabinet secretaries are absorbed in their respective areas of activity, and are not particularly useful as advisers to the president.

[Interruption]

MK: Let's explore some more what it is that White House staff does. What are some of the things they can do for a president? For example, making sure all the information that he needs is gathered. What role will he have in determining how procedures are set up? Do you have any sense, for example, when Regan talked to Reagan about the job, if they talked about what sorts of procedures to set up for decision-making?

PW: I doubt it. I don't know for a fact, but I suspect that Regan probably learned from Baker, his predecessor, how Howard Baker dealt with the President, and then he just followed that pattern. The difference in Regan's case was that, when Baker was Chief of Staff, Meese and Deaver were also there, so there was kind of a troika. But there weren't equivalent people when Regan was there. So most of the responsibility fell directly on Regan. How the president likes his staff to act, or the structure he finds most useful, is very personal to the president.

In the Ford administration, there was a wheel arrangement. Gerald Ford was at the center and there were five or six senior people with areas of responsibility and they all had access to him and reported to him. There was a chief of staff. During most of the time I was there, it was Dick Cheney, but before that it was Don Rumsfeld. They were important advisers, they collated the papers, and were the last people to see the President before he made a decision, but they didn't act as gatekeepers the way that Regan acted as a gatekeeper. Ford, because of his congressional experience, was much more willing to take advice from a large number of people coming in on various matters. At one of the first staff meetings I attended, representing Rockefeller, Rumsfeld described a wheel-shape structure with Ford at the center and Jim Cannon, in charge of policy. About six principal advisers and their deputies were to have direct access to the President. "That's how the President wants it," said Rumsfeld. That was the Ford administration.

MK: But that wasn't held throughout, because the spokes broke down.

PW: They probably did, although I didn't see it. Being in the vice president's office, I didn't have much of an opportunity to determine how the things were going on in the White House. What I did know was that, when a decision memo went to the President in the Ford administration, it had the initials on it of all of those people I'm talking about. When a decision memo went to the President in the Reagan Administration, it came in an entirely different way. It didn't have the signatures of the staff people on it because, at that point, I

was one of those, and this went an entirely different route. In the Reagan administration we had Cabinet councils. So for a policy question, the decision would come up through the Cabinet council and the head of the Cabinet council would write a memo to the President with the options that the Cabinet council had decided on. That memo would go to Regan and then from Regan it would go in to the President. The President might sign off on it, or he might ask for a meeting, or Regan would recommend a meeting. But the White House staff had a lot less to say about particular substantive policy decisions in the Reagan administration, than they had in the Ford administration, based on my impression, I know this, because the Vice President was not one who got a chance to sign off on these memos, and that annoyed him no end. He was, in Bush's famous phrase, out of the loop.

MK: On the other hand, he met with Ford regularly for lunch—

PW: He met with Ford regularly for lunch.

MK: —and gave him a lot of ideas.

PW: Maybe. I don't know. He might have. I worked on some of those ideas. I don't have any idea what ideas Rockefeller gave the President, other than the Energy Independence Authority, which I think was the only one that I can think that Ford actually adopted as a policy during that period.

What I'm saying really is that the President has ways that he's comfortable with in dealing with his staff. So I don't think there is a right way. It is what the president is comfortable with, and how he functions best.

MK: How do you mix the campaign people with people who have experience governing? That's a tough thing. When you come in, there's just such a momentum just to bring into the White House the people who brought you there, but once you're there, you're doing different things that you are during a campaign.

PW: Well—.

MK: Did you see a difference between the people that are involved in a campaign and then were involved in governing?

PW: This is one point where I hate to generalize, because I was not there in the transition period. I'm trying to think back. Meese was in the campaign; Baker was in the campaign; Deaver was in the campaign.

MK: For Reagan, it was a little different. Although the people underneath them, like somebody like [David] Gergen; Speakes was brought in, too—they brought in a lot of people who had experience in previous White Houses.

PW: Yes.

MK: I remember going in to the Reagan White House—I had worked on a book on the White House and the press during the Ford administration—it was like going into the Press Office of the Ford administration. There were so many people that were brought in, it was similar and it was just true throughout.

PW: That's why I was at Treasury; because I had been in the Ford administration. I knew all those people; and the people who were staffing the Reagan administration were largely people who had staffed the Ford administration. That was quite important. I didn't take any part in the campaign, and most of the people who ultimately staffed the Treasury Department did not take any part in the campaign. But I don't really know. I think Fred Fielding was campaign counsel or something like that, and became White House counsel.

There is an idea that there is a political party and then there's a governing party within each political party, that there are people who help you win elections and there are people who help you govern. That probably is true at the Cabinet level, but I don't think it is true at the White House level. And I don't think it should be true because, as I said before, the White House is a highly political operation. It should be politics in the best sense and the President should have around him people whom he trusts—that is, whom he has bonded with in the heat of the campaign and whom he knows he can rely on. It's very important that he have confidence in his people, otherwise he will not be willing to confide in them.

One of the very sad things in the Dick Morris book, about Clinton, is that Clinton withdrew from his staff. He wouldn't tell them anything. He would listen to what they said but he wouldn't tell them anything, because he felt they were leaking. Every time he told them something, it would leak to the press. That's true in every administration, but it may have been worse in the Clinton administration.

MK: It sure hasn't been, though, in the period from, I'd say, 1997, on. I guess I've been surprised to the degree to which the pieces of information released in leaks are calculated ones.

PW: I think that's probably true. And, of course, Morris was talking about the period prior to 1996, where he had Panetta, and he had [George] Stephanopoulos and he had—I can't think of the guy from New York.

MK: Harold Ickes?

PW: Harold Ickes, all of whom had a lot of political connections, and press connections were the top White House staffers. So I think it's perfectly natural for the president to bring in people at senior positions who helped him in the campaign, because he trusts them and they have the political instincts he needs. And the White House is a political environment. It's mostly politics. There is nothing wrong with politics. Politics is the most important thing at the highest government levels because, basically, there isn't any right or wrong decision; there are just decisions that hurt some people and help others. Choosing who will be hurt and who will be helped is inevitable; the important things are to make that decision on the best possible grounds, to understand whom you're helping and hurting, and to build a coalition of people who believe that the decision was fair and in the national interest, even though they might have been disadvantaged by it. But you ought to understand you're helping and hurting, and how you can build that calculus of keeping a coalition of people who are happy with that while at the same time you're making decisions that some people are going to be unhappy with, and other people are going to be happy with.

MK: What sense did you have of Reagan, of where Reagan took part in the decision-making process, and what he had to do with setting it up, or just where he came into it, other than what we've already talked about?

PW: Reagan controlled the decision-making process by making speeches. The thing about the Reagan administration that I found so exciting and was, I thought, a reason for the Reagan

administration's success—at least up until the Iran-Contra affair—was Reagan's clarity about what his policies were. People understood way down in the Treasury Department, when I was at Treasury, what Reagan would do in a certain situation, because he had articulated a set of principles and convictions that could be understood and implemented. A lot of decisions could be made at lower levels, without having to go all the way up to the top of the Reagan administration.

In one sense, Reagan made all of the decisions in the Reagan administration early on, before they even got to him, because his speeches and statements were read, digested and assimilated. So, for example, I had lawyers saying to me—this is in the Treasury Department; these are civil service lawyers; these are people who have been there for twenty-five years: “The President said the other day that it was wasteful for the government to carry on its business in a particular way. Shouldn’t we stop doing that at Treasury?” These are people who said, “I work for the President. I’m a civil servant, I am not a politician. I work for the President. I know what he wants. I’m supposed to know that; let’s do it.” So in a way Reagan’s administration was very orderly and very successful at the beginning, because he made very clear what he wanted, all the way down the line.

Then you had other initiatives that came up to Reagan through the Cabinet council process. When things were presented to the President, they frequently took the form of explaining how they conformed to or carried out his principles. Then the proposal would suggest different ways of carrying out the idea. The President was asked to check the box, so to speak, yes or no. Sometimes he would have meetings. I was in several meetings with the President where he considered issues raised at the Cabinet council level. But I suspect that mostly he didn’t have meetings. Mostly he would look at the memo and he would decide which way he wanted to go. Regan would transmit that back to the chairman of the Cabinet council and then it would go back to the Cabinet department that was responsible for it; they would draft whatever it was that had to be drafted, a speech or legislation or a regulation or an executive order, something like that, and the process would continue. So Reagan obviously made all the decisions, but he made it in two ways. He made it through the Cabinet council process, and he made it by making speeches that settled a lot of questions in advance.

MK: That’s interesting, that it had that kind of resonance.

PW: It did. It was amazing.

MK: Were you surprised that civil servants were so cooperative?

PW: No. I had been in the government before. Was I surprised the first time I got into the government? I don’t think so. I do normally expect people to do the right thing.

MK: One structure that’s discussed sometimes in political science is an iron triangle of American politics, of institutions at a national level, and the iron triangle being congressional committees, agencies and interest groups.

PW: Absolutely. Right.

MK: Reagan each year used to meet in Constitution Hall with all of his appointees. I think he brought them together for the last time—I think that’s where he gave the speech, although it was in December in his last year. He talked about the iron triangle but he didn’t talk about executive agencies being one of the feet of the triangle. Instead he had the media. I assume

that he didn't have agencies because he found the agencies to be cooperative. He didn't find them to be resistant.

PW: I think, in general, that is true. But there were many, many cases of resistance—but not on major policy issues. For example, in my experience, where the resistance occurred was on appropriations, OMB [Office of Management and Budget] would come up with its numbers and the President would bless these numbers and that's what the administration went up to the Hill with. Then you would hear that such and such a bureau or agency was up there on the Hill and they were saying that, in fact, they needed more money. The speech that everybody at the agency gave or the testimony cleared by OMB was all well and good, but afterward it turns out that the agency can't bring itself to support the numbers.

MK: A senator would ask them a question like, "Didn't you ask for more money in your original request?"

PW: And he'd reluctantly admit that. But then, someone from the agency would come up afterward, and brief, and you'd hear back that this was really an inadequate amount of money and people were going to be starving or the Washington Monument would have to be closed. So what could you do about that? We had very little policy objections from the agencies and that is understandable. The Reagan people were really chosen, just like in the judicial selection process, because they agreed with the Reagan policy. These were not, generally, people who were chosen because they were friends of friends. They were chosen because they were Reaganites and they believed in Ronald Reagan and what Ronald Reagan was doing. So, to the extent that they could control what was going on in their agencies, they controlled it, and the people in the agencies knew it and they mostly complied. It was only when they came to the money part, which had to do with staff and the long-term institutional interests of the agency, that they began to buckle, even the Reaganites at the top.

MK: And around budget time you'd have articles appearing that would say that the Soviet Union has many more submarines than we thought, and we therefore need some more. And then the Air Force would have its comparable story. They're just so predictable. Now they don't have the Soviet Union to kick around, and it's very tough at budget time.

PW: Or potentially kick us around.

MK: That's right. In your working in a White House, you came in at seven. How long did you stay? What was your week? Did you work on Saturdays?

PW: Sometimes. I didn't make it a habit, I don't think, of being in on Saturdays. When Iran-Contra started, I did; I would go in Saturdays and Sundays. But before that it was a pretty easy job, actually, except for the constant pressures. It didn't involve my having to work very late most of the time. As a lawyer, I was used to working twelve hours a day. I would always work twelve hours a day, no matter when I got to the office. A tough day was sixteen hours, but twelve hours was a pretty ordinary day. I doubt I left before seven many times; I probably left at eight. I don't have a distinct recollection of this, but I do know that I wasn't seeing my family all that much during this time.

MK: Did you have a staff meeting at the end of the day?

PW: No. Just at the beginning.

MK: And then just individuals during the day.

PW: Individuals as things went along.

MK: Thank you very much.

PW: My pleasure.

MK: I see one more thing: White House learning. How did you learn about your job? Did you talk to previous counsels?

PW: Fred [Fielding] was there when I was under consideration, and was going to be appointed. So I spent a little bit of time with Fred. I had a lot of questions about how the office ran, so I had someone to ask. My recollection is, I had a pretty good idea of what was going on. But virtually all of Fred's staff left at the time he left, or had left before he left. So I had to appoint all new people. So we all had something of a learning experience. I was helped a lot by the fact that I had an executive assistant, so to speak, who had worked with Fred and who stayed on with me. She was wonderful; she was just very competent and very loyal.

MK: Who was she?

PW: Her name was Dianna Holland; still is Dianna Holland. She's now in the real estate business in Alexandria. But she was just a super person. I could ask her any question about how things worked, and she was there to tell me. In the White House, there aren't many such people, but secretaries and executive assistants sometimes are held over, even sometimes from administration to administration, even across party lines. So they are among the few people with an institutional memory.

MK: There are probably going to be a few less after this administration and Linda Tripp.

PW: Linda Tripp was actually, I guess, in the Bush administration and was held over.

MK: Yes. She was in the Chief of Staff's office. At least in the phone book that I've got, I noticed she was in the Chief of Staff's office.

PW: In fact, that was the job that Dianna Holland had, now that I recall. Linda Tripp had the same general job that Dianna had, and that was to sort of manage the White House Counsel's Office, and keep track of where everything was – be a jack-of-all-trades.

MK: She was kind of a keep-track person.

PW: She knew what was going on.

MK: She certainly did.

PW: So that's basically it.

MK: Thanks.

PW: A pleasure. If you have questions you can certainly—.

[End of Disc 1 of 1]