

THE WHITE HOUSE

WASHINGTON

August 24, 1973

MEMORANDUM FOR: THE PRESIDENT  
FROM: ROY L. ASH  
SUBJECT: Strengthening the Presidency

During eight months of viewing the Administration from the inside, I have made some observations which may be useful for your consideration during your thinking time here at San Clemente.

One observation deals with the highest level of doctrine; another with more mundane operations; together they deal with the way the President is served by his White House organization.

DOCTRINE

First is the obvious need for a much better doctrinal base in both our social and economic areas. We have excellent capability in the National Security field for developing doctrine and providing overall policy direction. We badly need, but do not have, the same capability in the Domestic (Social) or Economic fields. The latter is especially critical at this time.

From the point of view of forming basic doctrine and giving broad policy direction then, two of three major segments of top level government are deficient. And they are very important ones. Specific courses of action can much better be developed, and certainly better sold, if basic policy and strategic plans are in place first. It is true that States of the Union messages, and others, have set out Presidential goals and policy positions; yet even those should be followed by living, breathing, continual policy management.

Specifically, some of the "big economic questions" that need to be posed, answered, and formed into basic doctrinal positions are the following:

1. What basic economic principles do we believe in as our base philosophy?
2. What population growth, demographic trends, and living pattern trends are expected, or possible, and what baselines do they establish for economic strategy?
3. What supply constraints must we be prepared to deal with?
4. What basic changes in world economics will impact on the U.S. economy?
5. What should be the relative roles of the private sector and government in the times ahead?
6. What should the government do, and its policies be, to increase national production and productivity?
7. How do all the above policy issues interrelate with each other, with our social goals and with our international position?

From work on these, and other "big questions" we can form the Nixon Economic Doctrine, present it in Presidential Leadership style, and policy-manage our affairs according to it. Similar questions need to be stated and answered, and the results formed into a Nixon Domestic Doctrine for policy management in the social area.\*

Yet I observe that an important problem needs to be solved as a part of meeting the above needs. The problem is that we are operating under ambiguous definitions of what "policy" is. This needs to be clarified. Doctrinal policy, the highest order of policy, a bit abstract to some but essential, is too often driven out by the pressure of daily problem solving activities. Since this daily work also has some policy implications, it is often seen as the only policy work we need to do. Big problem solving becomes equated to policy making. The net result is that those working on policy (in their minds) are nevertheless leaving the important doctrine work undone as well as effectively precluding others from doing it. Let's recognize the two kinds of work and do them both well.

\* Not only do we need the substance of doctrine, we need to portray it in the grand style of the Nixon (Foreign) Doctrine

From eight months of intimate participation in White House activities and the above observations of the work that should be done to serve the President best, I conclude that there should be two additional "Henry Kissingers", one for Economic and one for the Domestic (Social) area. Also, and particularly in the Domestic area, I would clearly recognize the distinction between doctrinal policy development and political policy activity. They must, of course, be interrelated closely but in a way that both functions get done well rather than one driving out the other.

#### OPERATIONS

I have also drawn the following conclusions about the role of operations in government.

To a great extent, particularly in the domestic area, legislating is perceived as governing and governing is equated to legislating. Legislation - conceiving it, proposing it, fighting over it, winning or losing, making the proper proclamation when passed or signed - not only is the main "action" seen in Washington but is the key political currency in dealing with the voting public. What happens after legislation is anticlimactic.

Therefore, in domestic affairs, the leading politician - the President - must necessarily consider legislative initiatives and actions as central to his own interest and his own leadership efforts:

In contrast, the work in the "boiler room" of government - of 2 1/2 million civilian employees who carry out legislation - is thankless, without glamour, and gets little public credit. In fact, where legislation is a dramatic high point of public expectation, and therefore good political currency, program performance (which inevitably lags promises) can be a source of smouldering problems and running criticism. For this very reason, it has been good politics to run against government performance.

Yet, government operational performance is important. Problems can be avoided; criticism can be less deserved; the government can better serve the people (even though they may not recognize it being done). For that matter, when the agencies look at themselves and set out their

own priorities, as they have just recently done in response to your request, this internal work, rather than legislation, dominates the agencies' view of what is important in government.

I see the President as having two alternatives for dealing with the "inside" government in carrying out his role to oversee the agencies of government.

a. Tell the agency heads to do a good job - then forget it and hope they do, at least until a crisis arises. (I recommend against)

b. Inject himself into overseeing the functioning and performance of government agencies. ( I recommend, only to the extent the public credit he can gain justifies his time - very little)

Obviously, I believe the new program for management emphasis, just put into affect, is a good trade off of Presidential time and agency performance. A minimum of Presidential time is multiplied many fold through the OMB role as the President's assistant for operating management. I see its assistance as making sure the agencies correctly translate Presidential goals, policies and priorities to consistent goals and objectives for themselves, to follow agency progress in meeting those objectives, to assist the agencies as necessary and to make sure the President knows in time of matters needing his attention.

What is the program? How can it improve agency performance? How can the President benefit by it? What should be his involvement?

a. The "management" program OMB is carrying out is a simple one. It's just a matter of working with the agencies in an organized and non-crisis fashion to agree on what they are trying to do over the year ahead (their work priorities alongside their spending priorities), and then systematically and jointly with them observing their performance in doing it, helping as necessary. This management approach is not a process or set of procedures or reports; it's the common sense ability merely to decide as clearly as possible what to do and then make sure it gets done.

b. The very stating of definitive objectives clarifies agency thinking and allows it to align its energies according to the President's priorities. Setting our own goals

taking our own initiatives, and gearing executive efforts toward them - can to some degree avoid daily "coping", i.e. reacting primarily to others' initiatives and to outside circumstances and developments. Keeping stated agencies' objectives in front of us makes sure we keep our, and their, eyes on results, not just best efforts. Then, also we get some lead time in seeing and working on problems.

c. The President benefits by making sure the agencies understand and are pursuing objectives consistent with his own goals and priorities. He also benefits, of course, as agency performance improves. A further Presidential benefit is the opportunity for the President to demonstrate that he is leading all aspects of government - policy forming, legislative initiatives and the program performance work of 2 1/2 million civilians. He is indeed managing. The agencies and their personnel will perceive it; the public will. Perceived Presidential involvement is a strong energizer of government personnel.

d. As it is now working, the President can gain these benefits by minimum use of time. The Presidential request of the agency heads to set forth their objectives for the year ahead, which went out in April, got the process going with a strong start. The next step is to let the agency heads know the President has received and considered their view of agency objectives and priorities, and is looking forward to their accomplishment. There are two or three ways to do this with efficient use of time. A Cabinet meeting can be used to acknowledge their work and ask each member to convey to the group (in 5 minutes) the two or three most important matters his agency is working on. The President might also inject incisive, preprepared, questions into the discussion. The same process can be spread over more such meetings. Alternatively, the President might meet for 15 minutes separately with each Cabinet member over a period of a month and, working from preprepared information, discuss agency goals and accomplishment. Any of these processes can also generate desirable public attention to Presidential management activities alongside that given to policy and legislative activities.

#### SUMMARY

Now, Mr. President, let me put together these observations about doctrine and about operations management in a way that can best serve you. I see the White House organizational arrangement best suited to your need today as comprised of six major functions, three of which would be policy oriented, and three process oriented. The six together would be the "President's Office" and, hopefully, work as one. The best way I know to express these, and their relationships, is:

POLICY

PROCESS

Presidential

Political

Managerial

International	Domestic	Economic

This matrix way of demonstrating the executive relationships shows the clear necessity of interaction between substantive policy and the cross-policy processes of government. Of course, the process responsibilities must work closely with each other, as must the policy ones on many issues. It is obvious that there can be no mutually exclusive "territory"; in fact the President needs the cross action among his subordinates. These six executives cover a broad range of Presidential responsibilities; they do so in a way that clarifies the charge given each, thus generating better performance; they do so in a way to ensure effective interaction. I recommend this concept for your consideration. With it in place, we should be able to get on with the very important work now undone.