

SOURCE	Bush-Cheney Transition documents
DATE	April 10, 2001

Memorandum on Congressional Relations During Transition

To: Future Director, Congressional Relations/Transition
From: Dave Gribbin
Subject: 2000 Bush/Cheney Transition

I am summarizing the important activities that comprise the Congressional Relations portion of the transition beginning with those activities that are important things to do; I then list those things we did that we would have been better off not doing, and conclude with those activities that we should have done but did not.

Do these things:

- a. Get staff committed quickly. You will need about 10 full time people, as follows – Executive Director, Deputy Director, House Director and Deputy, Senate Director and Deputy, Correspondence Director, Nominations Director and three administrative support people (one for Executive Director, one for the House and Senate Directors and one for the Nominations Director). You should also plug in quickly with the office that coordinates the volunteers. As your operation matures you will probably need another half dozen volunteers –primarily in the areas of correspondence and nomination support. The reason you need to secure your staff quickly is that Members of Congress will begin communicating with you almost immediately. They have constituents that are leaning on them for jobs and they want some way to relieve that pressure.
- b. Quickly develop the capacity to communicate with Congress. Again, time is of the essence. You need to have the capacity to answer letters to Members of Congress within a week of standing up your operation, or you will get buried. And, you have to coordinate that capacity with the Office of Presidential Personnel so that your correspondence system is easily integrated into theirs. They must carry this capacity with them when they go into the White House at the end of the transition period. Communication with Congress should be run out of the Congressional Relations shop, not from Presidential Personnel (who will be busy enough with the rest of the universe). Someone on your staff should be designated to liaison with PPO.
- c. Director of Nominations. The whole of the job is roughly divided into two parts: communications with Members of Congress and getting the President-elect's nominees through the senate nominating process. The second part of the job is much more visible, much more important to the President-elect and much more difficult. So, you need to find an experienced hand to run that piece of it. If you choose to do it yourself, be advised that it is very time consuming, so you will need a good deputy to run everything else. Otherwise, try and find someone who has worked in the White House Office of Legislative Affairs, and has had responsibility for guiding executive branch nominees through the process. This person might also, de facto, become an informal liaison with the legal, press, presidential personnel and policy shops because he is involved in forming support teams around each nominee that consist of representatives from each of those areas. Whoever you have handle that process, it is very important that you designate someone from your operation to be a liaison with the policy shop. There is a lot of Congressional interest in being involved in the early stages of policy development in any incoming administration. Many of the staff that will help the Policy Director will be Hill staffers. In my case, I asked my Senate Director to also work with the Director of Policy. It worked very well.
- d. The nominating process. Since various Senate committees have different procedures for considering nominations you must begin communicating with them early on. They each have some materials and procedures that they will give you. You will include that information in the notebook that you prepare for each nominee instructing him/her on how the committee will conduct the process. You will also need to build a support team around each nominee consisting of someone from the legal shop, someone from the press operation, a person from the PPO, and a "shepherd". The shepherd is the key to successfully wending one's way through the nominating process. The shepherd is someone who carries one or more relevant forms of previous experience: has worked on Senate committee staff, has worked in White House or Executive Department legislative affairs, or has

guided nominees through the process before. There are a lot of these people around. You and the nominating director need to compile a list and call those people to secure their assistance early on....even before you have any nominees. You can then match up the shepherds and the nominees as they are named.

- e. Try not to do any of this without first talking with those who have done it before you. There is no sense in making it up as you go along, since there are people who have already made all the mistakes and who want you to succeed.

Don't do these things:

- a. Do not be profligate, but do not make the mistake of trying to save a few dollars on equipment or supplies. If you are offered 6 computers but think you might need more, order more at the beginning. You will get little credit for being frugal and lots of blame if you don't deliver.
- b. As far as talent to help you is concerned, you are in a buyer's market. Don't settle for less than the best people. The transition can pay people, if that's an issue.

Things I wish I had done:

- a. Get with the Presidential Personnel folks early and make sure you understand their correspondence system and their sense of priorities. In the end, you must accommodate your operation to their system (even though you will probably run a parallel correspondence operation in communicating with Congress) so you need to understand where they are coming from. We got it right eventually, but it took a few weeks....longer than it should have.
- b. Use the volunteers more wisely. The quality of the people who are available as volunteers is remarkable. We were too hesitant in making full use of that resource.
- c. Normally, the logistics and process surrounding the swearing in is the Cabinet Secretary's job. The incoming Cabinet Secretary may not know that, so you need somebody to coordinate that activity between the two offices. We were so focused on the nomination process that we did not do that adequately.
- d. You should have a team focused beyond inauguration day. They should prepare a draft schedule of suggested activities between the Congress and the White House for the first two weeks of the Administration.
- e. Because of the recount activities going on in Florida, we were not able to spend any time with the campaign staff in the beginning of the transition. You should do that early on, making sure that you know what they have going on with various Members of Congress.



PARTNERSHIP FOR PUBLIC SERVICE

CENTER *for* PRESIDENTIAL TRANSITION

The Partnership's Center for Presidential Transition helps ensure the efficient transfer of power that our country deserves. The Center's Ready to Govern® initiative assists candidates with the transition, works with Congress to reform the transition process, develops management recommendations to address our government's operational challenges, and trains new political appointees.

For original transition documents and additional resources, templates and tools, visit presidentialtransition.org.