



President George W. Bush Oral History Project

BRIEFING MATERIALS

Clay Johnson III

February 10-11, 2014

Prepared by Bryan Craig, Senior Researcher

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Presidential Oral History Program

MAY NOT BE REPRODUCED OR CIRCULATED

CLAY JOHNSON III NEWS TIMELINE

Prepared by Bryan Craig

Miller Center, University of Virginia, 06/03/2013

- 1964** Clay Johnson III graduates from Philips Academy in the same class as George W. Bush. (George W. Bush, *Decision Points*, New York: Crown, 2010, p. 12)
- 1964-1968** Johnson rooms with Bush at Yale University and both graduate in the same class. (Bush, p. 13)
- 1970** Johnson receives his M.S. from Massachusetts Institute of Technology.
(http://www.sourcewatch.org/index.php/Clay_Johnson_III)
- 1970-1978** Johnson is director of marketing services at Frito Lay.
(http://www.sourcewatch.org/index.php/Clay_Johnson_III)
- 1978-1979** Johnson is vice president of marketing for Wilson Sporting Goods.
(http://www.sourcewatch.org/index.php/Clay_Johnson_III)
- 1979-1981** Johnson serves as area vice president at Citicorp.
(http://www.sourcewatch.org/index.php/Clay_Johnson_III)
- 1981**
- November* Johnson and his wife, Anne, visit Laura Bush at Baylor Hospital before Laura gives birth to twin girls. (Laura Bush, *Spoken from the Heart*, New York: Scribner, 2010, p. 106)
- 1981-1991** Johnson is president of the Horchow Collection.
(http://www.sourcewatch.org/index.php/Clay_Johnson_III)
- 1992-1994** Johnson serves as the CEO of the Dallas Museum of Art.
(http://www.sourcewatch.org/index.php/Clay_Johnson_III)
- 1994-1999** Bush reportedly asks Johnson to be his appointments director if he wins the Texas governorship. Johnson stays on until Bush runs for president. (John P. Burke, *Becoming President*, Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2004, p. 12)
- 1999**
- June* On the 12th, Bush announces his candidacy for the Republican nomination for president. Johnson becomes Bush's executive assistant. Bush also reportedly asks him to begin the pre-election planning for a transition into office if elected. Johnson begins to talk with George Shultz, Ed Meese, Ed Fuelner, Condoleezza Rice, Chase Untermeyer, C. Boyden Gray, and Jim Baker as he identifies key issues in a transition and how to best deal with them. (Burke, pp. 12, 14-15)

2000

- Spring* Martha Joynt Kumar conveys to Johnson the White House 2001 Project. The project consists of a group of scholars who examined issues, wrote essays, and conducted oral histories that relate to presidential transitions. (Burke, p. 16)
- July* On the 25th, Bush asks Dick Cheney to be his running mate. Cheney is made the transition's chairman with Johnson serving as executive director. (Dick Cheney, *In My Time*, New York: Threshold, 2011, p. 265; Burke, p. 18-19)
- August* Johnson travels to Wyoming to meet with Cheney to discuss further tasks and priorities for Bush's possible transition. (Burke, p. 16)
- November* Andrew Card is picked to be chief of staff before Election Day. (Burke, p. 19)
- The election is too close to call as Florida's votes are in dispute. The General Services Administration refuses to turn over \$5.3 million to help with the transition. The transition team rents workspace and continues to operate with private contributions. (*The Washington Times*, 11/28/2000)
- December* As the Florida vote dispute continues, Johnson helps get the pre-election candidate lists down to one or two names. The transition team also completes a plan for creating policy coordinating groups. (Burke, pp. 27-28)
- On the 13th, Gore concedes the election. On the 16th, Bush announces his first cabinet nominee: Colin Powell for secretary of state. (Burke, p. 37)
- On the 19th, departmental and agency transition teams are announced. On the 29th, 474 members of the "transition advisory teams" are announced. (Burke, p. 28)
- On the 29th, Bush announces that Johnson will be the assistant to the president for presidential personnel. (Burke, p. 42)

2001

- January* On the 4th, Karen Hughes is appointed counselor to the president. To help with the communications part of her job, Johnson gives Hughes organizational charts of communications departments in previous administrations. (Karen Hughes, *Ten Minutes From Normal*, New York: Viking Penguin, 2004, pp. 189, 203)
- On the 4th, Johnson comments on the next stage of appointments after the cabinet is finalized, namely, the subcabinet appointments. He says the cabinet will play a major role in their selection, "We're going to do this with each other, not to each other." (*The New York Times*, 01/05/2001)

On the 29th, Bush announces the National Energy Policy Development Group chaired by Cheney. The mission of the panel is to look at reducing the U.S.'s reliance on foreign oil, including drilling in Alaska's Arctic National Wildlife Refuge (ANWR). Johnson reportedly helps identify appointments for the group, which includes Powell, Lawrence Lindsey, Secretary of Treasury Paul O'Neill, Agriculture Secretary Ann Veneman, Interior Secretary Gale Norton, Transportation Secretary Norman Mineta, Secretary of Energy Spencer Abraham, Secretary of Commerce Donald Evans, Christine Todd Whitman of the EPA, deputy White House chief of staff Josh Bolten, Mitchell Daniels of the OMB, FEMA Director Joe Allbaugh, and Ruben Barrales of Intergovernmental Affairs. (*The New York Times*, 01/30/2001, 05/25/2001)

June The Brookings Institute reports that only a fifth of the cabinet and subcabinet appointments has been confirmed by the Senate. Brookings says the problem can be traced to both Senate partisan disputes and the White House's cumbersome process for background checks and financial disclosures. After the 9/11 attacks, the vetting process reportedly becomes longer, due to stricter security screenings. (*The Washington Post*, 05/21/2001; *The New York Times*, 06/14/2001; *The Washington Times*, 10/31/2001)

August Bush announces the President's Management Agenda (PMA). It scores 26 major agencies by a "red," "yellow," or "green" status that measures progress toward efficient management. (http://www.whitehouse.gov/omb/financial_fia_pma)

2002

Summer Johnson and Albert Hawkins, secretary to the cabinet, take left-over transition money and develop a Website, www.results.gov, for new and current appointees who do not have direct access to Bush. The site includes information about senior White House staff, ethics rules, and Bush's management agenda "to encourage team building and a personal identification with the president." (Burke, p. 119)

June Johnson holds a series of meetings with union leaders and Administration officials on the creation of a Department of Homeland Security (DHS). Nearly 170,000 employees would be consolidated under this new department. Johnson and the team work throughout the summer. (*The Washington Post*, 06/10/2002; *The New York Times*, 11/26/2002)

Hughes will leave her post at the White House to return to Texas in early July. Johnson plans the good-bye dinner for her that Bush attends. (*The Washington Post*, 07/05/2002)

November On the 25th, Bush signs into law the creation of the DHS.

On the 27th, Henry Kissinger is named chairman of the National Commission on Terrorist Attacks, also known as the 9/11 Commission. (*The New York Times*, 12/17/2002)

December It is reported that Lee Hamilton will replace former Senator George Mitchell (D-ME) as vice-chairman of the 9/11 Commission. Mitchell quits the post due to a reluctance to leave his law firm. (*The Canadian Press*, 12/11/2002)

On the 13th, Henry Kissinger resigns as 9/11 Commission chairman. Johnson, Card, and Rice reportedly search for a new chairman. They select Hamilton. (*The Washington Post*, 12/14/2002)

2003

January Johnson is nominated to be deputy director of management at the Office of Management and Budget (OMB) under Mitch Daniels. His job is to focus on improving agency and program performance at executive branch agencies. He will also chair the President's Management Council and manage both PMA and the Program Assessment Rating Tool (PART), to help prepare annual budget requests to Congress. (Burke, p. 184; *The Washington Post*, 06/13/2003, 02/05/2006)

February In Bush's FY2004 budget, military pay would go up by four percent, while civilians would go up two percent. A \$500 million Human Capital Performance Fund is created, however, where civilians are eligible for more raises based on performance. Employee unions argue that Bush created the fund just to scale back civilian raises. The Bush Administration responds that the fund is a way to move away from a federal pay system that rewards longevity rather than performance. Congress authorizes the fund later in the year. (*The Washington Post*, 02/04/2003; 07/23/2003)

Michael Brown, the director of FEMA and undersecretary of emergency preparedness and response, begins to transition FEMA to DHS. Brown reportedly appeals to Johnson and Deputy Chief of Staff Joe Hagin in his efforts to keep FEMA more independent within DHS. Johnson reportedly supports more integration within DHS. (*The Washington Post*, 12/23/2005)

May On the 22nd, Bush appoints Bolten director of the OMB. (*The New York Times*, 05/23/2003)

June On the 11th, Johnson is confirmed by the Senate. It is reported that his nomination was delayed by Senator Robert Byrd (D-WV) to protest Bush's "competitive sourcing" initiative. It is a plan that requires agencies to determine whether they can do the job just as efficiently as private contractors. (*CQ Weekly*, 05/24/2003; *The Washington Post*, 06/13/2003)

On the 11th, Johnson attends the first meeting of an interagency council to reform federal pay and employee performance evaluations. (*The Washington Post*, 05/27/2003)

July Johnson sends a letter to members of the House Appropriations Committee urging them to stop any attempt to block Bush's "competitive sourcing" initiative. (*The Washington Post*, 07/15/2003)

August Associate Director for Information Technology and Electronic Government Mark Forman leaves. Johnson names Norm Lorentz as acting associate director. (*Newsbytes*, 08/18/2003)

On the 20th, John Gage becomes president of the American Federation of Government Employees, which represents 600,000 civil service employees. Johnson states, "I look forward to working with him and with the AFGE on continuing to provide the best value and service to citizens." (*The Washington Post*, 08/22/2003)

2004

January Rep. Steny H. Hoyer (R-MD) urges Bush to continue the tradition of pay increase parity between civilian and military employees in next year's budget. (*The Washington Post*, 02/03/2004)

February The White House sends Congress its \$2.4 trillion budget for FY2005 on the 2nd. Bush's budget calls for a 3.5 percent pay increase for members of the armed forces and 1.5 percent increase for civilian employees. Johnson says the civilian pay increase would keep up with inflation and that better performing employees are eligible for more raises. Bush's budget includes the same \$500 million for the Human Capital Performance Fund to use for top performers. Also, Administration officials argue that military personnel need a higher raise due to combat conditions in Afghanistan and Iraq. (*The Washington Post*, 02/03/2004)

Bush announces the Federal Real Property Asset Management initiative as part of PMA. The largest federal landholding agencies will be given a "score" on the status and progress of their real-estate property management. (http://www.whitehouse.gov/omb/financial_fia_pma)

March The Senate Budget Committee proposes a budget resolution for "pay parity" for the next fiscal year. Johnson and Rep. Thomas Davis III (R-VA) reportedly broker an agreement not to use the words "pay parity" in the resolution, but to set broad goals to "recruit, retain, and reward quality people." (*The Washington Post*, 03/05/2004, 03/12/2004)

On the 17th, the House Budget Committee defeats an amendment to endorse pay parity. Johnson states that the Administration does not recommend a 3.5 percent

across-the-board civilian employee raise as “the best way to accomplish the goal of recruiting, motivating and retaining quality people...” (*The Washington Post*, 03/18/2004)

May The OMB releases a study that finds federal employees work better and more cheaply compared to private contractors nearly 90 percent of the time. Congress now requires agencies to report on “competitive sourcing” efforts every year. (*The Washington Post*, 05/26/2004)

July On the 22nd, the House Appropriations Committee approves a 3.5 percent raise for federal civilian employees. The Bush Administration counters with a 2.5 percent increase, but Congress passes the 3.5 percent raise later in the year. (*The Washington Post*, 07/23/2004; *CQ Weekly*, 11/20/2004)

August On the 9th, Bush meets with Johnson and the President’s Management Council. The council releases a report on Bush’s management agenda and how the government is result-oriented and the expectations for better efficiency by agency managers are greater than it has been in the past. (*The Washington Post*, 08/10/2004)

November Bush wins reelection. Johnson advises Bush on Cabinet appointments for his second term. (*The Washington Post*, 11/14/2004)

2005

January On the 25th, Hoyer writes to Johnson to support pay parity for FY2006. (<http://www.democraticwhip.gov>)

On the 26th, the Bush Administration announces a new personnel system for the DHS. Under the old system, employees are rewarded by how long they have been on the job. Employees will be put in 12 clusters based on occupation and salaries, and these clusters will be based on region and market surveys of what similar employees earn in the private sector or other government agencies. Raises and promotions will now be based on performance. Johnson states that Bush will propose to Congress that all other agencies will follow this new plan. Unions are critical of the system because it reportedly no longer requires DHS officials to negotiate where employees are stationed, the type of work they would do, and equipment they will use. (*The Washington Post*, 01/27/2005)

February On the 7th, the White House releases its \$2.57 trillion budget for FY2006. The proposal increases pay for civil service employees by 2.3 percent and 3.1 percent for military personnel. Hoyer offers an amendment to the Transportation, Treasury, and Housing and Urban Development fiscal bill to give pay parity to civilian employees. The White House opposes this as agencies reportedly face a tight budget. (*The Washington Post*, 06/20/2005)

The Bush Administration consolidates background investigations under the Office of Personnel Management (OPM) to relieve the large backlog of security clearances for employees and contractors. (*The Washington Post*, 06/29/2005)

June The Bush Administration drafts a bill to replace the old fifteen grade General Schedule with a new personnel system at other federal agencies beyond Defense and DHS. (*The Washington Post*, 06/13/2005)

On the 14th, the White House announces plans for creating a Sunset Commission and ad-hoc Results Commissions. The Sunset Commission will review each federal program to determine whether it is producing results and should continue. The Results Commissions will identify where government programs duplicate efforts and whether program and agencies should be reorganized. In July, the House and Senate introduce this legislation, but it never reaches the floors for a vote. (*The Washington Times*, 06/14/2005, 07/15/2005)

August Hurricane Katrina hits the Gulf coast causing widespread destruction, especially in the city of New Orleans. (<http://www.factcheck.org>)

September On the 6th, Johnson and FEMA Director Michael Brown exchange emails in the wake of the poor government response to Hurricane Katrina. Johnson reportedly tells Brown that he has not heard anyone “disparage you [sic] work.” On the 12th, Brown resigns. (*Newsweek*, 02/27/2006)

November On the 9th, Johnson testifies before the Senate Federal Workforce Subcommittee on processing security clearances faster. With improved technology and interagency cooperation, Johnson says the OPM can complete 80 percent of background checks within 90 days. (*The Washington Post*, 11/10/2005)

On the 30th, Bush signs a Transportation-Treasury appropriations bill that includes pay parity. (*CQ Weekly*, 01/02/2006)

2006

Early 2006 Card begins discussing with Bush the possibility of stepping down as chief of staff. Bush has lunch with Johnson over staff complaints. Johnson sketches out the organization chart of the White House for Bush. Bush states, “It was a tangled mess, with lines of authority crossing and blurred. His point was clear: This was a major source of unrest.” (Bush, p. 94) Bush agrees to make a change and replaces Card with Josh Bolten. (Bush, pp. 94-95)

February On the 6th, Bush announces a pay parity of 2.2 percent raise for both civilian and military employees for FY2007. Asked why the White House took a different approach this year, the spokesman for the OMB says pay parity was not the president's goal. Rather, the pay raise proposal reflects “an amount that will most effectively and responsibly allow us to recruit, retain and reward quality

employees.” Gage responds that the small increase “will do nothing to close the pay gap with the private sector.” (*The Washington Post*, 02/07/2006)

- March* On the 28th, Bolten succeeds Card as White House chief of staff. (*The Washington Post*, 03/29/2006)
- April* Rob Portman becomes new director of the OMB. (*The Washington Post*, 04/19/2006)
- Summer* Congress fails to create pay parity between civilian and military personnel. (*The Washington Post*, 06/27/2006)
- September* On the 26th, Bush signs the Federal Funding Accountability and Transparency Act. The law creates a Web-based searchable database of all federal government contracts and grants of more than \$25,000. Johnson develops a plan to make the database operational by 2008. (*The Washington Times*, 09/27/2006)
- November* Johnson says he will convene a working group to examine the issue that some of the top-secret clearance investigations done by the OPM are incomplete and time-consuming. These allegations are from a recent Government Accountability Office report. (*The Washington Post*, 11/01/2006)

2007

- February* Bush’s FY2008 budget includes pay parity of a three percent increase for both civilian and military employees. Johnson replies that the figures came from “two independent agency processes” and that the goal was not for parity, “but that is what the two proposals ended up being.” Historically, the annual civilian pay raise is allocated across the board and by locality, but this year, the Bush Administration includes a recruitment and retention factor for pay increases in special occupations. (*The Washington Post*, 02/03/2007)
- Johnson presents a report to Congress saying that the Bush Administration is making “significant progress” toward clearing a backlog of top-secret clearances. He is considering eliminating interviews with neighbors and character references in cases where a candidate cleared other parts of the investigation, such as criminal and financial checks. (*USA Today*, 02/15/2007)
- May* Johnson attends the state dinner for Queen Elizabeth II. (*USA Today*, 05/08/2007)
- June* Portman resigns as OMB director.
- The House Appropriations Committee includes a 3.5 percent cost-of-living adjustment to achieve pay parity between federal and military personnel. However, the Senate wants three percent that the Bush Administration supports. (*CQ Weekly*, 06/18/2007, 10/08/2007)

September Jim Nussle becomes the new OMB director.

November On the 13th, Bush signs Executive Order 13450, Improving Government Program Performance. It imposes accountability for how each federal agency sets targets for improving the performance of its programs and tracks progress. Each agency must appoint a performance improvement officer to coordinate goals and plans for programs. The order also creates a performance improvement council within OMB to help coordinate these efforts. Johnson has been working on this since October. (*The Washington Post*, 11/15/2007)

2008

January On the 4th, Bush signs an executive order to give a 3.5 percent pay raise to both civilian and military personnel. (<http://congressionalresearch.com>)

February On the 4th, Bush asks for a 2.9 percent raise for civilians and 3.4 percent raise for military employees for FY2009. (<http://www.govexec.com>)

On the 5th, Bush issues a memo to agency directors asking for “aggressive efforts to achieve meaningful and lasting reform” for speeding up and improving background checks. Johnson responds, “It was done with a sense of urgency to get these things identified and set for launch, so when the next administration comes in, it is made better.” The Pentagon and National Security Advisor Stephen Hadley had already begun their own review of background checks. (*The Washington Post*, 02/07/2008)

The White House sends Congress a report saying it has met the 120 day requirement to process each security clearance as mandated by the 2004 Intelligence Reform and Terrorism Act. By 2009, each case must be cleared by 74 days. Johnson says, “There are better ways, more computer-aided ways, to do a lot of this.” (*The Washington Post*, 02/19/2008)

The Bush Administration outlines 151 federal programs to be eliminated or reduced, saving \$18 billion. (*USA Today*, 02/12/2008)

July Congress drafts defense appropriations that include a pay parity of 3.9 percent. (*CQ Weekly*, 07/14/2008)

September Johnson says in an interview that he has met with representatives from both campaigns of Senators John McCain (R-AZ) and Barack Obama (D-IL) to discuss a transition. (*The New York Times*, 09/21/2008)

On the 30th, Bush signs the FY2009 defense appropriations that include the pay parity. (THOMAS on HR 2638)

Nov-Dec. Obama wins the presidential election. After the election, Johnson coordinates with the Obama team on transition matters. He helps expedite security checks and other administrative needs for Obama's nominees. (*The New York Times*, 12/05/2008, 01/20/2009)

2009

January On the 20th, Bush returns to Texas on a jet with Johnson, Hughes, Karl Rove, Dan Bartlett, Card, Evans, Bolten, Ed Gillespie, Margaret Spellings, Harriet Miers, and Alberto Gonzales. (*The International Herald Tribune*, 01/24/2009)

TIMELINES

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CLAY JOHNSON III SUGGESTED TOPICS

Prepared by Bryan Craig (revised)

Miller Center, University of Virginia, 05/22/2013

Early Relationship with President Bush

- How did you meet George W. Bush? What were your early impressions of him?
- Describe your friendship with President Bush at Philips Academy and at Yale. What characteristics did he exhibit in those years that served him well as a politician?
- How did you begin working for President Bush while he served as governor of Texas? Describe your responsibilities in serving Governor Bush.

Presidential Elections & Transitions

- Tell us about Bush's decision to run for president. Do you recall having any conversations with him about his decision to run?
- Describe your early efforts to build a transition team and to solicit advice from both Bush 41 and Bush 43 associates. What "lessons learned" did they teach you?
- Describe your relationship with Dick Cheney. Explain the decision that led to Cheney's selection as vice-president. How effective was he in developing a smooth transition?
- Discuss your role in the Florida presidential recount. How did this impact the transition process?
- Explain the selection and vetting process for nominees. At what times did President Bush get involved directly in the process? What was the role of the "transition advisory teams"?
- Tell us about your role in the 2004 election. How different was it compared to the 2000 campaign? What new challenges did you face in recruiting and vetting nominees for the second term as compared to 2000?

Assistant to the President for Presidential Personnel

- Discuss your appointment as assistant to the president for personnel. What discussions did you have with President Bush before accepting this position? What were his expectations of you in this position? Describe your role and responsibilities.
- Describe your working relationship with Andy Card and other key figures in the White House.
- Explain the selection and vetting process for nominees at the deputy and aide level. How involved was President Bush in the process? Discuss the backlog of confirmations.
- Where were you on 9/11? Describe its impact on the president. What effect, if any, did 9/11 have on the appointment and confirmation process?
- Describe your role in developing the President's Management Agenda (PMA) and President Bush's reasons behind it.
- Tell us about your role in organizing the Department of Homeland Security. How involved were you in working with Michael Brown at FEMA during this process and later when Hurricane Katrina occurred?
- Comment on the differences between the process for executive branch appointments and ones for special commissions such as the Energy Development Group and the 9/11

Commission. How involved was President Bush in this latter process and how did you respond when George Mitchell and Henry Kissinger resigned?

- What other issues were you involved with during your tenure?

Deputy Director of Management at Office of Management and Budget

- Discuss your appointment as deputy director of management. What discussions did you have with President Bush before accepting this position? What were his expectations of you in this position? Describe your role and responsibilities. What were your top priorities going into office?
- Discuss your working relationship with Mitch Daniels, Josh Bolten, Rob Portman, and Jim Nussle.
- Evaluate your working relationships with organized interest groups and unions.
- Describe your work with the President's Management Council.
- How well was PMA implemented during your tenure? Tell us about the conflict over competitive sourcing and the new personnel system at Defense and Homeland Security.
- Tell us about your efforts to improve the security clearances for federal employees, especially high-security levels. Describe your relationship with the Office of Personnel Management.
- Describe your efforts to create the Human Capital Performance Fund and the issue of pay parity between civilian and military personnel. How effective were you in communicating to Congress that it should focus on federal employee recruitment, retention, and performance?
- Explain the challenges of reforming government program performance. How effective was Executive Order 13450 and the Program Assessment Rating Tool?
- Comment on your role in the Barack Obama transition. What lessons did you share with President-elect Obama's team for an effective transition?

The Bush Presidency in Retrospect

- What do you consider your most significant accomplishments?
- What were President Bush's greatest assets as president? Assess his strengths and weaknesses as a communicator, domestic policymaker, a legislative leader, and administrator. Which of his attributes served him best in the presidency?
- Assess the strengths and weaknesses of the President Bush presidency. What features of the President Bush presidency were overlooked or misunderstood by the press and public?
- How should the President Bush presidency be viewed in history? What were its most significant achievements?