

**The Eisenhower Administration: Bridge  
to the Institutionalized Legislative  
Presidency**

**By Stephen J. Wayne  
Georgetown University**

Prepared for delivery at a Conference, "Eisenhower and Congress: Lessons for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century" held At the Center for Congressional and Presidential Studies, American University, February 19, 2010.

**Introduction\***

The Eisenhower administration linked the modern and post-modern presidencies. It continued, even built on the structures and processes developed by Franklin D. Roosevelt to address the country's deep-seated economic problems and later, the onset of World War II. Significantly, a more conservative Eisenhower administration did not reverse these policy initiatives, the mechanisms that produced them, or even the annual legislative programming process. In fact, Eisenhower added to the structure by creating an office of legislative affairs in the White House.

After some initial hesitation, caused more by the transition and the lack of a well defined domestic policy agenda emanating from the 1952 presidential campaign, the Eisenhower administration retained, even expanded, the presidency's institutional capacity to develop, coordinate, and achieve legislative policy initiatives. For Eisenhower, unlike Harding, normalcy had become an active legislative presidency rather than a return to the more traditional "Congress proposes and the president disposes" model.

---

\* Most of the data for this paper were collected in interviews which the author (and the late James C. Hyde) conducted during the 1970s with participants in the legislative policy making processes in the white House and the Bureau of the Budget. Some of this material also appears in my book, *The Legislative Presidency* (Harper & Row, 1978).

---

For a person who began his presidency with a fairly literal understanding of the separation of powers,<sup>1</sup> Eisenhower accepted an expanded legislative role for the president, even though his domestic policy initiatives were fewer in number than his Democratic predecessors. He followed Truman's practice of using the State of the Union Address to highlight his legislative priorities. Moreover, his administration retained the structure and operating procedures already in place to coordinate executive branch policy initiatives, eventually extending the practice to congressional initiatives.

Where the administration differentiated itself from its predecessors was in formalizing a process for developing key administration priorities and presenting them to Congress. Eisenhower's use of the cabinet and National Security Council as advisory bodies was much more extensive than in the Roosevelt and Truman administrations. They were used as sounding boards as well as decision-making bodies.

### **The Executive Office of the President**

Eisenhower maintained the structure of the Executive Office of the President (EXOP), even adding to it in his second term. He averaged 1,229 full time employees (FTEs) in the EXOP in his first term and 2,357 compared to Truman's 1,269 and Kennedy's 2,058.<sup>2</sup> The large expansion of that office was to come in the Johnson and Nixon administrations when the trends toward centralization of authority in the White House and politicization of the bureaucracy by the White House accelerated.<sup>3</sup>

### **The White House Staff**

In size, informality, and functions, the Eisenhower White House resembled those of the Roosevelt and Truman administrations when the White House operated more an

extension of the person of the president than of the institution of the presidency. Both Roosevelt and Truman had relatively small staffs and charged them with action-forcing assignments, decisions and take actions that the president had to take. Both presidents served as their own chiefs of staff, giving out assignments and receiving reports. Roosevelt overlapped staff duties on a case-by-case basis;<sup>4</sup> Truman did not. Both presidents met with their senior aides at the beginning and end of the workday, and individually, as needed.

Although the Truman staff remained small, consisted of generalists, who interacted informally with one another, it was slightly more structured than Roosevelt's with some titles designating primary spheres of responsibility. One of Truman's top aides, John Steelman, had the title, Assistant to the President; his duties were in the areas of interdepartmental coordination and economics. Nonetheless, the staffing continuities between the two administrations continued to outweigh their differences. Both presidents used their staffs primarily for informational and liaison functions as well as for assisting them in routine and expected presidential activities such as briefings, speech writing, and overseeing the implementation of presidential decisions. They both depended on the executive departments and agencies to generate proposals for policy and the Bureau of the Budget to coordinate these proposals, allowing the president to pick and choose the initiatives he wanted to promote as his own.

Eisenhower did not change the principal functions of the White House or the primary responsibilities of senior aides. In size and tone, Eisenhower's initial White House resembled those of Roosevelt and Truman. Most of the principals came from the

1952 primary and general election campaign or were people Eisenhower knew from his military days.

The major structural difference was that Eisenhower had a chief of staff, relieving him of a lot of the day-to-day detail that Roosevelt and Truman personally handled. Although the former Army general he was used to a more hierarchical staff structure, Eisenhower never seriously considered installing a military staff system in the White House. According to Sherman Adams, Eisenhower's first chief of staff:

he [Eisenhower] and I knew that the varied work of his office could not be neatly compartmentalized and divided among specialists who closed their eyes to everything outside their respective narrow areas of responsibility....Eisenhower and I both felt that the complex and wide-ranged variety of work in the White House could be handled most efficiently by a small group of versatile trouble shooters, who could move with knowledge and assurance into any problem that happened to be pressing the President at the moment.<sup>5</sup>

Wilton B. "Jerry" Persons, long-time Eisenhower aide and his second chief of staff echoed a similar refrain when he said: "Although Eisenhower was a military man, he ran a very informal staff. You got into anything you ought to get into. And you brought in anybody that you thought could make a contribution."<sup>6</sup>

The Eisenhower White House was relatively small. In 1951, there were 262 people on the staff, slightly less than in Truman's last year; by 1960, there were 355, a figure that included 80 people assigned to special projects. Table 1 contrasts the size of the Eisenhower White House with its predecessors and successors.

---

**Table 1      Full Time White House Staff, 1950-1973**

	<u>FTEs on White House Budget</u>	<u>FTEs Budgeted</u>	<u>Detailed Employees</u> <u>to Special Projects</u>	<u>Total</u>
<i>Truman</i>				
1950	223	--	25	248
1951	257	--	40	297
1952	252	--	31	283
<i>Eisenhower</i>				
1953	262	--	28	290
1954	250	--	23	273
1955	272	--	28	300
1956	273	78	41	392
1957	271	93	59	423
1958	272	80	51	403
1959	275	79	31	385
1960	275	80	33	388
<i>Kennedy</i>				
1961	270	72	134	476
1962	253	56	123	432
1963	249	69	111	429

*Johnson*

1964	236	70	125	431
1965	235	59	154	448
1966	219	37	219	475
1967	209	42	246	497
1968	203	47	206	456

*Nixon*

1969	217	97	232	546
1970	250	95	287	632
1971	547	8	17	572
1972	522	28	34	584
1973	483	13	24	520

Source: Dr. James Connor, Staff Secretary, Ford White House

---

Most of the senior staff were generalists, who interacted easily and frequently with one another. Senior aides had access to the president in part because Eisenhower preferred oral interchanges to written memoranda and face-to-face meetings to telephone conversations.<sup>7</sup>

Sherman Adams was given the title, Assistant to the President. His job was to decide the issues that merited presidential attention, handle problems that did not need to

go to the president, and keep Eisenhower apprised of information he needed to know and decisions he needed to make. Unlike Harry Truman, Eisenhower was not nearly as concerned with the buck reaching his desk.

From Adams' perspective, his principal job was to reduce the president's workload. In his book, *First-Hand Report*, Adams wrote: "Eisenhower simply expected me to manage, simplify and expedite the urgent business that had to be brought to his personal attention and keep as much work of secondary importance as possible off his desk."<sup>8</sup> Adams' operational rule was that "nothing should go to the president if it could be handled elsewhere." If it did go to the president, the issue had to be summarized in a short executive memo not to exceed one page.

Adams exercised considerable discretion in deciding when to involve the president. The president did not want to be immersed in routine or relatively minor decision making. Eisenhower was a big picture president and needed time to think.

According to his staff, Adams was a tough taskmaster, known for his all business attitude and demanding work schedule.<sup>9</sup> He gave out assignments and received staff reports. He presided over staff meetings and settled internal disputes. He ran a tight ship. His successor, former General and legislative aide, "Jerry" Persons, a long-time acquaintance of Eisenhower's, was more easy going and less authoritative than Adams; he emphasized teamwork and consensus building and maintained an open door to his staff.

Eisenhower also had an appointments secretary, Tom Stephens, who handled requests to see the president, a Special Counsel who was responsible for legal matters including legislation going to and coming from Congress, and a Press Secretary, James

Hagerty who met with the White House press corps. In her book, *Managing the President's Message*, Martha Joynt Kumar writes that Hagerty was the first press secretary to design a communications strategy for a presidential administration and the first to coordinate publicity for the executive departments and agencies.<sup>10</sup>

With broadcast television expanding rapidly in the 1950s, Eisenhower was the first president to hold filmed press conferences; Hagerty and his staff would review the films prior to its release to the news media. John F. Kennedy held the first live press conference on television.

The Eisenhower White House formalized the presidential briefing sessions prior to his conferences, which were held on a weekly basis if the president's schedule permitted.<sup>11</sup> Hagerty would meet with Adams and senior White House staff for breakfast on the day of the conference, usually a Wednesday. He would present the questions that he anticipated the press would ask and the staff, collectively, would go over the answers they thought Eisenhower should give. At 10 am, Adams and Hagerty would meet with the president for a half an hour to give him a preconference briefing. Eisenhower occasionally would show some impatience with the spoon feeding by his staff. On one such occasion following their conference, Eisenhower told Adams, "I don't really need prompting from you fellows on these questions, but it's well for me to listen to you because you might point out some angles that I might otherwise overlook."<sup>12</sup> Hagerty and an assistant would generally accompany the president to the conferences.

### **The Bureau of the Budget**

Established by the Budgetary and Accounting Act of 1921 and placed in the Treasury Department, the Bureau was moved into the Executive Office of the President

when it was created in 1939. The Bureau ran the budget review process. Out of that process, procedures for developing an annual legislative program developed. Any proposal for new legislation or the reauthorization of existing legislation was sent to the president's Special Counsel to review. The counsel's job was to sift through the proposals to determine which, if any, the president might want to promote as part of his legislative program. A centralized clearance process also developed on less important legislation to enable the Bureau, as the president's surrogate, to stop and change any proposal which conflicted with the president's program.

A special office in the Budget Bureau was created to handle this central legislative clearance operation, the Legislative Reference Division (LRD). Operating as an extension of the White House, its job was to coordinate department and agency's requests for legislation so that they would not be in conflict with one another, monitor their progress on Capitol Hill, and keep track of any changes Congress made to executive branch initiatives. The criteria the Bureau used in evaluating department and agency legislative requests was the program of the president as determined from his last campaign, State of the Union Addresses, and other messages to Congress.

In 1947 when the Republicans gained control of Congress, Truman appointed Roger Jones, a registered Republican, but also a civil servant who at the time was deputy director of the Legislative Reference Division to serve as an informal liaison with the Republican majority.<sup>13</sup> Jones' charge was to keep members of Congress, particularly committee chairs, informed of the president's position on legislation they were considering.

Following Truman's election in 1948, Jones became head of the Legislative Reference Division; the informal liaison activities, which he undertook on behalf of the president, became a regularized part of the clearance process with the LRD regularly reporting the president's position on congressionally-initiated legislation that reached the committee stage of deliberation. Jones also met regularly with policy aides in the Truman White House and even with the president himself to discuss legislative clearance matters as well as department and agency recommendations to approve or veto bills Congress had enacted. Jones estimates that he saw the president about eight to ten times a year for the duration of the Truman presidency.<sup>14</sup> Jones was also was to become a critical link to the transition to the Eisenhower administration.

### **The Legislative Programming Process**

Although President Eisenhower eventually decided to continue the practice of presenting an annual legislation program to Congress, he did not do so in his first year in office. The burdens of the transition, the need to get up to speed on the issues, and the process of program development, which paralleled the budget process in time and schedule, made it difficult for the administration to hit the ground running, even if it was so inclined. Within a few months, however, pressures from a variety of quarters, the executive branch, Congress, and outside groups, forced the administration to direct more attention to legislative program development.

Eisenhower maintained a dual programming process, one for priority legislation and the other for more routine, department matters. The priority process was cabinet oriented with a heavy staffing role for the White House; as in past administrations, the

secondary one was coordinated by the Legislative Reference Division working in conjunction with the Special Counsel in the White House.

### **Priority Policy Making**

The procedure adopted for developing a program was based on the institutional practices that had been developed previously. The annual call for budget estimates became the vehicle for soliciting legislative policy proposals and ideas, some of which were highlighted in the president's State of the Union Address.

Proposals and ideas that merited White House sponsorship were first discussed by senior White House aides at meetings, chaired by the chief of staff, with anywhere from six to ten senior aides in attendance. A representative from the BOB, usually Jones, participated at the meetings, providing technical information and advice. Occasionally, department secretaries and agency heads would present their requests in person, using visual aides to clarify their proposal and estimate its costs. Only after the legislative request had been thoroughly staffed out by the White House would the president be involved, either alone or in conjunction with his cabinet

Major proposals were presented to the cabinet with the same elaborate staging as accompanied their White House presentation. Eisenhower and or Vice President Nixon attended these cabinet sessions and were active participants in the discussion. The cabinet served as a sounding board for the president as well as a dry run for congressional leaders, if the president approved the policy initiative. The administration quickly discovered that involving legislative leaders at the end of the executive phase of legislative policy development improved the chances for passage on Capitol Hill.

Congressional leaders were given the opportunity to recommend changes prior to the proposal being formally presented to Congress.

### **Routine Policy Making**

The Bureau of the Budget through its central clearance and budget review processes coordinated department-oriented legislative policy making in much the same manner as it had in the past. There is little evidence of any friction, even initially, between the political appointees in the Eisenhower White House and the civil servants that worked in the Bureau. Roger Jones attributed the smooth transition from the Truman to the Eisenhower administration to the fact that he was a known commodity to the senior White House staff. He had worked with the military's legislative liaison team (which included General Persons and another Eisenhower staffer, Bryce Harlow), during World War II, and even had met Eisenhower on occasion. The White House knew that he was a Republican. And by chance, one of Jones' former assistants, worked for the law firm of Bernard Shanley, the person Eisenhower chose to be his Special Counsel.

Eisenhower's Budget Director, a banker by the name of Joseph Dodge, also became an early booster of the Budget Bureau. Initially impressed by the level of work and objectivity by civil servants in the Bureau, Dodge recommended that the ongoing budgetary and clearance functions be continued without changes in structure or modes of interaction, a recommendation that a career military officer could obviously understand and appreciate. Eisenhower's concern with unbalanced budgets and the need to control agency spending was another reason that he relied on the Bureau of the Budget to oversee and coordinate so many executive branch activities.

With a small staff, limited knowledge of the government, and a steady flow of legislative matters to consider, Bernard Shanley, Eisenhower's first Special Counsel, had little choice but to rely on the Legislative Reference Division for departmental coordination and information. He knew little about the executive's role in developing legislation, asking Jones at their first meeting to give him some idea of the Bureau of the Budget's role in the process. Shanley noted in an interview with the author that he had little knowledge of how to put a program together. "So they explained to me in some detail what their functions were in a very modest way without fully realizing how invaluable they would become to me as time rolled on."<sup>15</sup>

Roger Jones also developed a personal relationship with Eisenhower as he had with Truman. He saw Eisenhower on frequent occasions but usually with White House staff also present. Jones stated, "For reasons best known to himself, Ike would sometimes stop and talk to me when he saw me around the White House. Several times he took me out in the backyard when he was getting ready to hit golf balls."<sup>16</sup>

In addition to the personalities of Jones and Shanley that helped bridge the civil servant-political appointee divide, the process itself worked toward its own perpetuation. Departmental policy initiatives, encouraged by the administration, soon became an expectation of president and Congress. The Bureau of the Budget made sure that the initiatives were acceptable to the White House. If they were not, Budget returned them to the issuing department with instructions on how to revise. In this way, the Legislative Reference Division acted as the president's executive branch coordinators and police.

President Eisenhower tended to be involved at the end of the process during cabinet meetings or when aides brought information requiring a presidential judgment.

Occasionally, the president would offer a suggestion or push a particular idea. Jones recalled such an incident. “We would not have had a health benefits bill for federal civilian employees if the president hadn’t grabbed this for himself “[with the words]“my God, we do it for the military why shouldn’t we do it for the civilians?””<sup>17</sup>

Jones’ successor, Phillip Hughes, had less contact with Eisenhower personally but continued to have a close working relationship with his staff.<sup>18</sup> Over time, however, the White House-cabinet-driven legislative policy-making reduced the influence of civil servants in the Bureau to overseeing decisions that the political officials in the White House and cabinet had made. According to Stephen Hess, a speech writer in the Eisenhower White House and subsequent presidential scholar:

...the Budget Bureau continued to do about what it had always done, but it was not as central to the making of policy. This was caused less by suspicion of the career bureaucrat than by a simple law of physics: everyone could not occupy the same space. Eisenhower’s system of an expanded White House staff and a more powerful cabinet left less room at the center for the Budget Bureau to occupy.”<sup>19</sup>

Thus began a process, accelerated in the Kennedy, Johnson, and Nixon years, of centralizing policy making and politicizing administration decisions. The halcyon days of the Budget Bureau, operating as senior staff, were ending. As the White House grew in size, the Budget Bureau got smaller. At the beginning of the Eisenhower administration, the Bureau had over 500 FTS; by the end it had about 440.<sup>20</sup>

## **Lobbying Congress**

In addition to maintaining the executive clearance processes, the Eisenhower administration institutionalized relations with Congress by its creation of an office of legislative affairs in the White House. The charge of this office was to keep Congress abreast of the administration's major policy initiatives. In the words of "Jerry" Persons, first head of the office, "What I really had in the back of my mind was to create a mutual understanding between downtown and uptown so they [president and Congress] would not have all these misunderstands through the news media."<sup>21</sup> After the Democrats regained control of Congress in 1954, the office had an additional task according to Bryce Harlow, assistant director of legislative affairs for the House of Representatives, and later head of the office, "to keep Congress from doing something different such as the blunting and thwarting of such harmful congressional activities as investigations, speeches, and excessive display of partisan activities."<sup>22</sup>

Eisenhower did not like to engage in heavy-handed lobbying nor did he believe that would be productive when dealing with Democratic Congresses. Harlow noted, "On major presidential initiatives, we tried to bring all the influence to bear with propriety."<sup>23</sup> The approach of Persons and Harlow was low-key and generally bipartisan. Both had worked in military liaison during World War II and did not want to appear to intrude on Congress' legitimate prerogatives. They worked primarily from the White House rather than from an office on Capitol Hill.

When performing their liaison activities, the president's aides depended on the Legislative Reference Division to track legislation enacted by Congress that was awaiting presidential action. This legislation went through an internal, executive branch process in which departments with an interest in the legislation provided advice to the president on

whether to approve or veto the bill. Departments that recommended a veto also had to provide a draft of the veto message. As a general rule, the president's liaison staff did not voice their opinions on the substance of the legislation unless requested to do so by senior White House aides. They did, however, provide strategic information on potential veto overrides as well as political factors that the president might consider when making his decision.

The liaison staff engaged in other kinds of liaison activities: passing on recommendations from members of Congress for patronage appointments, anticipating congressional deliberations and actions, and providing some help with constituency-related matters. But they did not get involved in the wholesale servicing of members of Congress. That was to come later in the Kennedy and Johnson administrations and has continued to this day.

The White House liaison office also tried to oversee department and agency legislative activities. Throughout the first term and much of the second, the liaison chief and his deputies met with their counterparts in the departments and agencies on a weekly basis (usually on Saturday morning) to inform them of the president's policy initiatives and loosely coordinate department and agency activities.<sup>24</sup> In general, the administration tried to discourage the departments from relying on the White House on matters considered to be of limited presidential interest. The meetings also provided a useful exchange of information, some of which was used to brief the president prior to his Tuesday morning breakfasts with congressional leaders.

In his memoirs, Eisenhower described his meetings with legislative leaders as the most effective mechanism for coordinating with Congress.<sup>25</sup> He held these leadership

meetings throughout his administration. He was personally fond of Rayburn and Johnson, perhaps less so of Robert Taft, one of three people who did not need an appointment to see the president. For the most part, however, Eisenhower interacted easily and frequently with the leadership, both partisan and bipartisan. He also engaged in discussions with members of Congress but usually behind closed doors. Although he did not like to use the telephone for public business, Eisenhower gave instructions to his staff that any member of Congress who wanted to speak with him would be put through as soon as it was convenient to do so. He also made it a practice to sign personally all letters and responses to members of Congress, a practice that did not survive his administration.

According to his senior aides, Eisenhower was not nearly as concerned with a veto override as he was with the merits of the legislation. Persons said that a possible override “was a factor, but never a controlling one.”<sup>26</sup> Harlow recalled, however, that Eisenhower did take notice of which Republicans voted to override his veto.<sup>27</sup>

During the course of his presidency, Eisenhower exercised a total of 181 vetoes; he had only 2 of his vetoes overridden by Congress (See Table 2). He was the last president to use the pocket veto extensively; almost 60 percent of his vetoes were of this type. Listed below are the votes of the presidents who preceded and followed Eisenhower.

---

**Table 2      Presidential Vetoes and Congressional Overrides, 1945 – 1974**

	<i>Regular</i>	<i>Pocket</i>	<i>Total</i>	<i>Overrides</i>
<u>Truman</u>				
79 <sup>th</sup> Congress	54	20	74	0

80 <sup>th</sup> Congress	42	33	75	6
81 <sup>st</sup> Congress	70	9	79	3
82 <sup>nd</sup> Congress	14	8	22	3
<u>Eisenhower</u>				
83 <sup>rd</sup> Congress	21	31	52	0
84 <sup>th</sup> Congress	12	22	34	0
85 <sup>th</sup> Congress	18	33	51	0
86 <sup>th</sup> Congress	22	22	44	2
<u>Kennedy</u>				
87 <sup>th</sup> Congress	11	9	20	0
88 <sup>th</sup> Congress	1	0	1	0
<u>Johnson</u>				
88 <sup>th</sup> Congress	4	4	8	0
89 <sup>th</sup> Congress	10	4	14	0
90 <sup>th</sup> Congress	2	6	8	0
<u>Nixon</u>				
91 <sup>st</sup> Congress	8	3	11	3
92 <sup>nd</sup> Congress	6	14	20	2
93 <sup>rd</sup> Congress	12	0	12	2
<u>Ford</u>				
93 <sup>rd</sup> Congress	16	11	27	4
94 <sup>th</sup> Congress	32	7	39	8

Source: "Presidential Vetoes," The American Presidency Project, University of California at Santa Barbara. [www.presidency.ucsb.edu/data/vetoes.php](http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/data/vetoes.php)

---

### **Legislative Success**

Eisenhower tried hard not to alienate Congress and for the most part succeeded. His even-handed treatment of members, his unwillingness to apply a lot of pressure, and his continued popularity provided an incentive for bipartisan cooperation which he achieved. Data collected and analyzed by the *Congressional Quarterly* indicate that Eisenhower received relatively high member support scores for a president whose party did not control Congress for six of the eight years of his presidency. In his first two years with Republicans controlling Congress, Eisenhower gained support on 86 percent of the roll call votes on which he took a position. He averaged 68 percent in support of his policy stands after the Democrats took over Congress in 1955. Eisenhower's level of support was higher than Kennedy (84.6 percent) and Johnson's (82.2 percent) when their parties controlled Congress and higher than Nixon's (64.35 percent) who faced a Democratic Congress throughout his administration. Moreover, Eisenhower took positions on as high a percentage of positions on congressional roll calls as did Kennedy and Johnson and far more than Nixon.<sup>28</sup>

Although Eisenhower was concerned with excessive government spending and balancing the budget, he did not try to reverse the New and Fair Deal programs of his predecessors. In fact, he approved legislation expanding Social Security, increasing the minimum wage, and supporting low-income housing. He also approved the creation to

the Department of Health, Education, and Welfare. His major policy initiatives included the St. Lawrence Seaway Project with Canada in 1954, the Federal Aid Highway Act of 1956 that led to the creation of an interstate highway system, and the Civil Rights Acts of 1957 and 1960.

Eisenhower did not have as expansive a legislative agenda as the Democrats who preceded and followed him, but he did have considerable success in achieving his legislative policy goals. His popularity, which averaged 69.6 percent in job approval during his first term and 60.5 percent during his second, undoubtedly contributed to his success with Congress.<sup>29</sup> He was also fortunate, however, to be president during a period in which Congress had strong party leaders whom he liked and with whom he got along, did much of its business behind closed doors (thereby facilitating compromise), and had moderates to whom he could appeal on an issue-by-issue basis.

## **Conclusion**

The Eisenhower administration bridged the Democratic presidencies that preceded and followed it. After some hesitation, the president continued the annual programming process; he followed established internal executive branch procedures to coordinate and clear policy proposals, positions, and testimony. And he created a structure that contributed to the president's expanded reach and influence in Congress, the White House Office of Legislative Affairs.

Eisenhower used new communication technology to begin the era of a more visible presidency; television had the effect of magnifying the heroic stature that Eisenhower personally brought to the office, a stature from which Kennedy benefited as a

consequence of his good looks, charm, and wit. Television brought the presidential image as well as its voice into American living rooms.

The Eisenhower presidency was a respite on the road to a more activist government, one that maintained national unity in the face of a common threat, Communism, fostered economic growth, protected minority rights, and promoted more equitable resource allocation, particularly for the elderly. It is significant that Eisenhower consolidated, but did not reverse, the liberal policies initiated by Roosevelt and Truman and continued by Kennedy, Johnson, and even Nixon. He governed in a time of good will marred only by the discord generated by the Korean War, the paranoid frenzy, hyped by of the McCarthy hearings, and at the end, fear, generated by Spitznik, that the United States was falling behind in the Space race.

It was a different time. Government was viewed positively. Most Americans believed that they could trust the government to do what is right just about always or most of the time.<sup>30</sup> Congress was more placid, its members more civil; its staffs were smaller; the seniority system encouraged apprenticeships, reciprocity, and playing by the rules. The filibuster was still an extraordinary mechanism, not the regular threat it has become of the minority party in the Senate.

The civil rights revolution, the church bombings, the assassinations of Jack and Robert Kennedy, Martin Luther King, and the attempts on George Wallace and later, Ronald Reagan, the reaction to Vietnam, Watergate and other public scandal, changes in gender roles, divisive social issues--school prayer, abortion, and same sex partnerships--cultural issues stemming from ethnic and racial diversity, and a political climate fueled

by ideologically-based partisanship have made the 1950s seem tame by contemporary standards. It makes lessons drawn from the Eisenhower presidency problematic at best.

- Is a small White House of generalists desirable or even possible today, given the expansion of expectations and demands on the presidency?
- Can contemporary cabinets fashion domestic policy more effectively than specialized councils or czars that have been created?
- Is the distinction between merit-based and political advice still viable?  
Was it in the 1950s?
- Can civil servants really be considered neutral in an antigovernment era?  
Many Republicans apparently do not think so.
- Can a “hidden-hand presidency be exercised effectively in the age of 24/7 “gotcha” journalism?
- Would a relatively closed White House policy-making apparatus be consistent with President Obama’s democratic goals of transparency and accountability in government?
- Should the contemporary legislative liaison office in the White House continue to provide constituency services for members of Congress?
- If Eisenhower couldn’t combat the military-industrial complex, then can Obama reign in special interests and the lobbyists who work for them?
- Are bipartisanship and civility as practiced in 1950s possible today? If so, are staged White House policy conferences and presidentially-appointed commissions ways to achieve them?

- Is Eisenhower's brand of moderate Republicanism possible today? If so, what kind of a leader and/or organization could foster it?

The only lessons I can confidently draw from the Eisenhower experience is the incivility, inhumanity, and inanity are not evitable consequences of the legislative process and that moderate Republicanism has not always a contradiction in terms.

---

---

**NOTES**

<sup>1</sup> According to Bernard Shanley, Eisenhower's Special Counsel, Eisenhower believed "that there were three branches of government and he had no right to interfere with the legislative branch." Interview with Bernard Shanley.

<sup>2</sup> "Size of the Executive Office of the President," *The American Presidency Project* at the University of California at Santa Barbara. [www.presidency.ucsb.edu/data/eop.php](http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/data/eop.php)

<sup>3</sup> See Terry Moe, "The Politicized Presidency, in *The New Direction in American Politics*, ed. J.E.Chubb and P.E. Peterson (Washington, DC: Brookings Institution, 1985).

<sup>4</sup> Richard Neustadt notes that Roosevelt purposely kept aides on their toes by overlapping assignments. "He eventually got a kick out of bruised egos." Richard E. Neustadt, "Approaches to Staffing the Presidency, *American Political Science Review*, LVII (December 1963), p. 857.

<sup>5</sup> Sherman Adams, *First-Hand Report* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1961), p. 54.

<sup>6</sup> Wilton B. "Jerry" Persons, Interview, May 29, 1974.

<sup>7</sup> Adams, *First Hand Report*, pp. 72-73.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid, p.50.

<sup>9</sup> Shanley, Interview.

<sup>10</sup> Martha Joynt Kumar, *Managing the President's Message* (Baltimore, Johns Hopkins University, 2007) p.xxviii.

<sup>11</sup> Eisenhower held 99 press conferences during his first term and 93 during his second. *The American Presidency Project* at the University of California at Santa Barbara. [www.presidency.ucsb.edu/data/eop.php](http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/data/eop.php)

<sup>12</sup> Adams, *First-Hand Report*, p. 74.

<sup>13</sup> Larry Berman, *The Office of Management and Budget and the Presidency, 1921-1979* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1979) p.42.

<sup>14</sup> Roger Jones, Interview.

<sup>15</sup> Shanley, Interview.

<sup>16</sup> Jones, Interview.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid.

<sup>18</sup> Phillip S. Hughes, Interview.

<sup>19</sup> Stephen Hess, *Organizing the Presidency* (Washington DC: Brookings Institution, 2002) p. 63.

<sup>20</sup> U.S. Office of Personnel Management, *Federal Manpower Statistics, Federal Civilian Workforce Statistics*. [www.opm.gov](http://www.opm.gov)

<sup>21</sup> Persons, Interview.

---

<sup>22</sup> Bryce Harlow, Interview, May 30, 1974.

<sup>23</sup> Harlow, Interview.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid.

<sup>25</sup> Dwight D. Eisenhower, *Mandate for Change* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1962) p. 194.

<sup>26</sup> Persons, Interview.

<sup>27</sup> Harlow, Interview.

<sup>28</sup> *Congressional Quarterly Almanac* (Washington, DC: various years). See also Harold W. Stanley and Richard G. Niemi, *Vital Statistics on American Politics, 2009-2010*. Washington DC: Congressional Quarterly, 2010) pp. 244-245.

<sup>29</sup> “Presidential Approval Ratings—Gallup Historical Statistics and Trends,” Gallup Poll. [www.gallup.com/poll/116677/Presidential-Approval-Ratings-Gallup-Historical-Statistics](http://www.gallup.com/poll/116677/Presidential-Approval-Ratings-Gallup-Historical-Statistics) (Accessed February 9, 2010.)

<sup>30</sup> “Trust in Government,” American National Election Studies, University of Michigan. [www.electionstudies.org](http://www.electionstudies.org)