

**Exit Interview with Tom Belford, Presidential Reorganization Project**

**Interviewer: David Alsobrook of the Presidential Papers Staff**

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**Transcribers: Lyn Kirkland and Winnie Hoover**

**Alsobrook:** First of all, Tom, I would ask you a little about your own background and specifically anything that you feel like helped prepare you for this job you have had in Richard Pettigrew's office.

**Belford:** Well, for the seven years preceding joining the administration I worked for Common Cause which is a public interest lobby group which is oriented toward government reform kinds of issues, things like reorganization, civil service reform, ethics legislation, campaign financing, that whole set of issues. My job there was directing their issue program, was to figure out more or less, first of all the substantive position that we ought to be taking, what kinds of issues we ought to be getting into, but also how to strategize them in terms of outside pressure being brought to bear on the Congress. Basically the job that I have had here on this staff is reorganization. While we sort of monitor and contribute substantively to what is going on, our purpose, our function, has been more to do the political assessing and once the decision is made, do the selling, whether it is an interest group, or media or what have you. So what I was doing previously in my case, maybe unlike some others, is very analogous to what I have been doing here.

**Alsobrook:** Now how did you happen to come to work here? Who hired you?

**Belford:** Dick Pettigrew hired me. For some time at Common Cause I oversaw all the state lobbying programs that the organization had and Dick was the Speaker of the House in Florida and was very active on the national circuit and was seen as one of the leading state legislators when he was in the Florida legislature. So he and I had come into contact a number of times when we were each wearing those hats so I just looked him up when I heard about his appointment here and that's how it happened.

**Alsobrook:** Did you come into Dick Pettigrew's office at the very beginning of the reorganization project?

**Belford:** Well, yes and no. I came at the beginning of Dick Pettigrew's office. Now he was here for some months before that, as were Harrison Welford and some of the people working with Harrison from the transition days so there were people who initially showed up on the OMB side of this who were carryovers from, you know, well into the campaign period. Dick, as I can best reconstruct, was here maybe as early as the end of March or so as a sort of free agent. Basically he hired myself and the others who worked on his staff when a sort of line of demarcation was established between what the President's reorganization project, per se, would do for those people in OMB versus what would Pettigrew do, who initially I think was brought in

to head a commission on reorganization which they then decided not to proceed with that kind of vehicle. So the line was drawn on sort of an inside outside basis. OMB with the inside, analytical work actually generated the studies, did all of that, and we did what I would term the outside work, dealing with the interest groups, in Dick's case dealing with the Congress to some extent, and then all the media and general selling process that is involved with any major initiative.

**Alsobrook:** I was curious. Now this may have happened right before you came in, Tom, but what was the role of, for example, A. D. Frazier? Didn't he have something to do with that commission that didn't come about, if that makes any sense?

**Belford:** I don't know what hand he might have had in the decision of whether or not to have an outside commission. In this office, Dick is really the only one who goes back that far. What A. D. Frazier did do was head the reorganization of the executive office of the President which was the very first organizational effort that was undertaken. It had sort of a quasi autonomous status in that, first of all, it was commenced before any of us were here and it was really not within the mainstream of the President's reorganization project. He is someone who apparently Bert Lance brought in specifically to handle that project. It eventually did flow through Harrison Welford, and so on, in a final review sort of sense. But A. D. as I perceive him was pretty much an independent operator reporting to Bert Lance on that project. At the very end of that when they were finalizing their recommendations is when we arrived on the scene and we played a very marginal role with respect to certain aspects of it that had some political bearing. Like they wanted to eliminate the CEQ, for example, and we came in and met with a lot of environmental groups and so forth, who as you might expect didn't think that was such a hot idea. So we tried to intervene on that score and eventually the President decided not to recommend that, but we came in right at the tail end of that.

**Alsobrook:** Were they any members of your staff during those early days who are not here now? There are three of y'all –

**Belford:** Chris and I arrived at virtually the same time. Jay was working on the EOP study and then when that wound down, joined our staff. There have been a number of administrative types of detailees at different parts of the project, but I wouldn't say anyone who had some really programmatic or operational kind of authority.

**Alsobrook:** During those early months when you were first here how would you describe Harrison Welford's role in the presidential reorganization?

**Belford:** Well, he was in charge in form and fact of the reorganization project. In the spring and summer of '77 that was quite a large undertaking. They were in the process of sort of screening what areas of government they were going to look at and so on. There were very large numbers of detailees. There were somewhere in the neighborhood of thirty plus areas being looked at as

possible areas of study. Harrison managed all that process, from my perspective, fairly independently within the OMB structure. Bert Lance didn't appear to me to pay a great deal of attention to the project in those early days. I think they felt they were setting up in a way that the real recommendations, the real action, wasn't going to come until late in '77, beginning of '78. So Harrison it appeared to me had a pretty free hand to get the thing organized and he ran it through a project management staff that he had that reported to him and he was pretty much on top of things and I think probably made all of the basic substantive decisions as to what went forward. So, he had a pretty free hand.

**Alsobrook:** Did his role change though as time went along or did Bert Lance's role change?

**Belford:** Well, from my standpoint Bert Lance played hardly any role. I mean he was the person you went to or had to go through if you were Harrison Welford before something was put on the President's desk, but in terms of active oversight or prodding "why don't you look at this area versus that area" or that sort of thing, he seemed to be much more into handling the budget process and just generally politicking for the President. So I would be hard pressed to say what the impact of Bert Lance was on the reorganization agenda or on individual decisions within that program. Harrison, from my standpoint, from day one has always had a fairly independent hand. We were in a situation where the body of work has generated up from the staff. There has been very little in the way of top down, Bert Lance or Jim McIntyre, or Dick Pettigrew or someone saying, "We must study this issue. Put a team together." I think a little bit of that but it happens more actually in response to congressional pressure than to any place higher up in the bureaucracy. So I don't think Harrison – he has been in charge from the day I got here, he's in charge now and has had a very wide degree of policy control of the project. The only difference is in operational differences that have had to do with the scope of the project itself in terms of bodies and numbers of issues. As I said, in the early days he had...it was such a big enterprise it was managed through a complicated staff process and all that with big workbooks and all this that had volume milestones for every project and time tables and all that sort of thing and now it is down to a very discreet number of on-going projects which are managed in a much more personalized scale, but programmatically I think he has always been on the top of the

**Alsobrook:** I want to ask you another question about the first few months you were here. During this time did the Domestic Policy Staff have a lot of input into the reorganization project?

**Belford:** Not to my observation. We were the – most of '77, in the fall of '77 – we produced some sort of second level reorganization plans, like equal employment opportunity consolidation. When an issue would get to the point where we were right down to the presidential decision on the substance of a proposal, the DPS folks would get involved usually, well generally, commenting but usually all of these things would generate some particularly vexing trade off and they would tend to get involved heavily in that. In the case of EEOC, it was whether EEOC or the Civil Service Commission at that time ought to run the EEO program for

federal employees. That was something that was being sharply contested between the two agencies and I can remember Cy Lazarus and Billy Baker, with Cy, getting involved at that point to try to work that issue out. But I think I am aware that sort of in the background there was always a great deal of effort made to keep relevant DPS people informed of the progress of studies. But I would say that it wasn't really until the last year that we got into some of the major cabinet level shifts that they got more intensively involved. I mean usually they were there in a reactive posture. When we put something forward, they would put their two cents on it, but it wasn't really an intensive relationship.

**Alsobrook:** Are you talking about some of these things like the natural resources thing?

**Belford:** Yeh, well with civil service, which is sort of an oddball in this mix and then the natural resources, we had a local economic development study that involved HUD and the Commerce Department and those major ones they have gotten, you know, much more engaged because they were such large projects politically that not only domestic policy but everybody started getting in on the act in terms of assessing those.

**Alsobrook:** The natural resources one was the one that had so much coverage in the press though I believe and I think some reporters point out that there was supposedly a difference of opinion between OMB and the White House staff. Does that ring a bell with you? Do you remember anything about that?

**Belford:** Well, there are sort of two levels to that. One is that reorganization was kind of endured by the rest of the White House staff so long as it involved sort of pretty containable kinds of initiatives, like equal employment or creating an international communications agency or whatever. They were pretty discrete, if politically controversial, at all to a pretty narrow slice of constituencies. That was really the posture that the project was in from the summer of '77 when all these people were, you know, thrown out on the streets and said, "Okay here are your thirty projects, go to it," and probably the spring of '78. By that time all of these groups were well into the analytical work but except for these small projects they were not yet generating the recommendations. At that point civil service reform came along in the beginning of '78 and from this office's standpoint that soon came to occupy probably 80 – 90% of all of our resources here. Chris, Jay, myself, Dick all of us worked virtually full time on civil service reform and I probably more than any of the rest of them kept some track of what – since I was supposed to be normally the linkage between this office and Harrison – I tended to keep a little more track of what was going on on other fronts and spent more time on other things like Department of Education or whatever, but it was almost wholly civil service. Now civil service from the standpoint of the rest of the White House, to move toward your question, was seen as a – it developed into a political winner. Let's put it that way. So by the time that issue got to the point where it began to demand major White House energies, it was by that time, it was pretty well rolling along and it was seen as a winner for the President and there was absolutely no hesitance

on the part of anybody around the White House to lend assistance. So, you could get the Vice-President's time and the President's time and DPS was plugged into it very substantially and later on in the process Ann Wexler, so everybody was chugging along there. As that wound down in October and November, you then all of a sudden, well as you came out of the summer, you began to have some of these projects in Harrison's domain spewing forth major recommendations and so really as of September or so we started closing out civil service and started, and I in particular in the interest group area, started getting into the natural resources and the local development proposals, because it was clearly emerging that those were going to be the two out of all the competition that were going to emerge as the major recommendations. So the last three or four months of the year in '78 were spent in a very intensive consultation process on our part in terms of trying to accept the politics of these proposals, intensive but quiet in a sense in that we had not committed to do them. We didn't want to air them before the election and we were really aiming at an early January decision point in getting them up to the Hill and so on, so we had to do the congressional and interest groups stuff somewhat quietly. That is where we got into the crunch because as we got to the end of the year, you might remember, that it was sort of the winter of '78 that the Vice President really got into this formal agenda setting process and priorities and all of that, and so the competition, there was in a sense for the first time a formal competition, for places on the priority list and so the reorganization folks, us included, were coming forward with what promised to be very controversial initiatives, and others around the White House who were players in the agenda setting process questioned sort of both the micro politicians – that's really what we want to do to the timber industry – but also how much capital should be invested in efforts like this versus welfare reform or hospital cost containment assault or whatever. There was also a certain feeling that civil service reform was such a popular victory that does it not in effect bestow any expectations that we have created in the name of reorganization. Can we coast on that one and bunch of smaller ones but not trip any heavy duty wires. So I would say it was those two projects beginning in the winter of '78 and the early part of '79 which did develop into a quite intensive intra-White House battle and for that matter you know government because the cabinet departments were out there stimulating their own constituencies, and so forth, and so the period really when this began to surface as a matter of White House priority and so on was like in November - December through the first three or so months of '79 were just intense periods of internecine warfare as to, well as I say, both the individual politics of the two proposals, who would bring in X number of mayors saying they liked this one and who would bring in another set of mayors saying no, they really want this. Then the cabinet departments would get in and they would cook up their list of mayors that supported HUD and another one would support Commerce. We were in the thick of that because we did the interest group assessment and that's what a lot of this and the congressional assessment is what it all hinged on. There were lots of conflicting signals around so I would say at that point yes you were getting into things that were, if EEO was sort of in the middle of a spectrum as being limited, non-controversial or limited controversiality, civil service over here is a real bandwagon that everybody was running to jump on. As Chris Matthews would say, there

are probably forty people in this building alone who claim to be the seller of civil service reform without getting over to the Civil Service Commission, the White House, or the West Wing or what have you. Then all the way on the other end of the spectrum would be these two proposals, natural resources and economic development, which were just very bitterly fought out.

**Alsobrook:** I want to ask you now a little bit about your involvement with civil service reform. Talking about all the people involved in it, particularly I want to ask a little bit about yours. Exactly how did the civil service reform task force come about and what was your role in that?

**Belford:** How did it come about? Well, the study that the recommendations grew out of developed as a part of a joint venture between OMB and the Civil Service Commission and we, being linked to the OMB side of it, well, they went through a year or so of work that I couldn't tell you anything about. The analytical work, they had millions of study teams and people detailed from all over government and that analytical process was run by OMB and Scottie Campbell. Probably the lead person over here was Wayne Granquist in OMB. This was all going on in '77 at the same time that Harrison was spending all of his time; all of his immediate troops in the President's reorganization project were out doing these thirty studies. Harrison, more or less, devoted his energies to these other projects. Wayne, who is his next in line, concentrated on Civil Service. Well, as it emerged, Civil Service you know sort of erupted as a major issue and Wayne, having been the lead OMB guy on it, really in effect sort of claimed the turf. Harrison did these other things. He got involved in the sense of since this had to go up to committees that reorganization constantly dealt with and that is where his expertise was, he was involved to a certain extent in the lobbying of the Governmental Affairs Committee and the Government Operations Committee, but it was really Wayne who emerged as the policy and political key in OMB on this stuff, so I can't even recall when was the first time it was actually a collegial thing. Wayne, Scottie, started heading down toward the end of '77 shaping up their recommendations. As they were getting close to a presidential decision, out of necessity began to involve other people like the Domestic Policy staff, our office, and so on and somewhere in the end of '77 we began meeting as a unit irregularly to just to plot out a strategy, when could we move it, how would it fit in with other reorganization initiatives timing wise, and so on. As I recall, it wasn't really probably until, I don't know, January, February of '78 that there was actually a task force that had some organic entities to it, in membership and so forth, that began getting together to manage the issue. Later on in the summer, that task force, which had up to that point been the aficionados of civil service... A lot of people were interested in it so you had to fight for space on the committee. It operated like that up to a point then all of a sudden it took off and there were a lot of people around the White House making their little contributions and eventually Hamilton had to step in and prescribe who was responsible for what with respect to that initiative. From back in the December-January days, my role in this was to work the interest groups-to try to figure out what aspects of the proposal were of concern to various people, should they be modified in any way to account for that, what would be the different lines of attack that

different sorts of interest groups might theoretically make on this proposal, how do we deal with that politically, who can we enlist to support it and all that. So really beginning in January and February, I started working the interest groups, particularly the positively inclined ones, to start getting them ready to get behind it. That became my role through the entire exercise. Eventually I was appointed to head sort of the interest group component of this, working with people from Scottie's office, Ann Wexler's office, Hamilton's office, various other people pulled in for one shot types of activities. Jack Watson had a person on that group and we really were charged with putting together and orchestrating the outside support for the effort. There was a counterpart congressional committee and a counterpart media committee, and that I guess became the prototype for the way a lot of these things are now, major issues are now handled in the White House.

**Alsobrook:** Is this the same sort of work that you have done with the Department of Education, Tom?

**Belford:** Yes. Well, in my case not nearly as intensively. In the Department of Education in '77 actually, I probably worked on it more in the earlier stages and in the 1977-78 consideration of it than I did this past year when Ann Wexler's people were more heavily involved in it, Jane Hartley in particular, from an interest group standpoint. I was involved in it, put in more time in it, back in the days when we were trying to figure out which transfers we could get away with, and how different groups felt about different shapings of the department and that sort of thing. So I have kept a hand in it but it has probably been a diminishing hand over time to the point where now I probably spend less than 5% of my time on that.

**Alsobrook:** Where is most of your time, where has most of your time been spent say over the last six months or so?

**Belford:** Well, up until, I'm trying to think of exactly when we buried – from the beginning of the year through the decision not to proceed with natural resources, my time was almost totally absorbed in those two proposals, the economic development and natural resources. The economic development died earlier in that process in the sense that the decision was made to go with a politically much more feasible or less costly initiative and so that sort of dropped off of my scope and then sort of appeared after a couple of months or so where I probably spent 90% of my time on the interest group politics of natural resources and then, as I said, whenever we decided not to proceed with that, probably May or whenever, exactly at that time trade was emerging as something that Congress was going to demand us to act on and we had had one these thirty studies from way back when that had been looking at that area in tandem with some others and so that one was just coming, percolating up right at the right time, and so for the last now three months or so I have been spending virtually all my time on trade and then a much smaller portion on education.

**Alsobrook:** I've asked you about the input of several people and finally I'm curious, what do you think has been the President's input, especially in the earliest days of the reorganization project?

**Belford:** It's changed very visibly in the sense that back in the summer of '77 the President was personally signing off on which issues we were going to study. There would be a memo that would go in and say, we are going to look at all the law enforcement activities of the federal government and a little issue paper would be worked up and the President would sign off, "Yeh, let's do that one," and we would actually release that to the press as a major event and then be taken as a significant event. So he was – he had his hands all over the thing at that point. Then, his involvement certainly began to narrow down to particular moving ventures and that group that I was talking about at the end of "77-78, those issues that, as I recall, none of them really required much more than a presidential decision. I don't recall the President having to have been involved in buttonholing members of Congress or anything like that on that set of proposals. So, he basically was just rolled onto the scene to sign the successful plan or a White House ceremony or what have you. I don't recall him needing to do much politicking on those. Civil service came in and he was very substantially involved in civil service reforms from making a major speech – well, involved in the policy development in that several times we had to go to him as the recommendations evolved. He made a major speech in '78 announcing it to the National Press Club and then from that point on, not so much in the beginning when it was sort of germinating on the Hill, but always as needed and very intensively at the end, he was involved in everything from calling special Cabinet meetings to get all of the Cabinet folks out there working the issue to his town meeting out in Fairfax on this issue to other speeches and statements. This became one of the issues that was a staple of all of his meetings with out of town editors and speeches and all that, so a lot of congressional meetings bringing down the leadership of the committees or individual calls, so I would say just in "78 this was probably one of the handful of issues that the President spent very substantial time on. Then we moved into this other phase of okay, now we are rolling out the big guns of Cabinet reorganization and again in this case in an internal process way they were heavily involved. He had senior staff members just at loggerheads on the issue, people with very strong points of view on all sides of the proposal, Cabinet secretaries buttonholing them all of the time for their favorite option, and so I would say from December probably through February or March, the President was very aware of reorganization and probably from a negative standpoint from his perspective because it just meant a lot of trouble and dissension and so forth and all of those decisions eventually had to be presidential decisions. He had to... because there was simply no way of resolving the conflict short of him, so since neither of those two proposals wound up moving forward as initiatives, none of them ever involved him in a public display or use. I guess he did make a number of congressional calls and things of that nature as a part of the consultation, but this is mostly an in-house battle that did take a fair amount of his time, but it wouldn't be public. The general public would not even know that this was going on. Now with the trade reorganization, that is



something that I suspect will turn out to be a little bit like civil service reform, if it plays out the way we expect. It will have a proposal that there is a lot of support for from a whole range of different constituencies and it will make a lot of sense to have the President very visibly involved. He seems to really warm up to this issue as a priority, so I would think that we'd get a fair amount of presidential attention to it. It has been a sort of roller coaster sort of thing so far as the President.

**Alsobrook:** You know, one thing I'm curious about too, Tom, is now that Mr. Pettigrew is leaving, what do you think is going to happen to the reorganization? Is it going to go back to OMB?

**Belford:** I think that if you go back to seeing this office as the outside part that, beyond trade reorganization, it really doesn't appear that there is going to be anything generated in the way of reorganization that really requires this level of day to day intensive politicking. The ongoing process of analysis, management improvement activity, and so on, I think can very naturally be handled by the management side of OMB. This sort of operation is really something that is geared and works best for, you know, selling a major Cabinet level type of initiative of some kind. So, I would think the more day to day and there are lots of little projects going on out of the management side of OMB, that that sort of thing will just continue under Harrison's auspices, however they eventually organize themselves over in OMB. And the sort of natural players elsewhere in the White House who have congressional or interest group or deal with state and local governments and have these various different types of expertises will be there to be called upon if there is a need for White House involvement.

**Alsobrook:** Can you tell us anything about your own plans?

**Belford:** I would expect to either wind up elsewhere in the White House in a similar sort of capacity or over working for Jim McIntyre.

**Alsobrook:** You mentioned you worked for Common Cause. Do you think you ever might want to go back and pursue that line of work again sometime if the leave the White House?

**Belford:** No, I think I've done my public interest stint. I keep a very close relationship. Working over there was like working in a seven year long presidential campaign. You got very close to people and I have maintained all those relationships but when I leave the administration, I think it will be to go into some other area that I have not worked in, probably the for profit private sector somewhere to get a feel for that part of the world.

**Alsobrook:** And the last thing I need is a permanent legal address for the use of the future library. It may be even a telephone number if there is such a thing.

**Belford:** You mean just my home address?

**Alsobrook:** If that's the most permanent address. Like if fifteen years from now if somebody wanted to get in touch with, could they get you at this address?

**Belford:** I guess the best address I could give you is 5445 North 19<sup>th</sup> Street, Arlington, VA.

Alsobrook: OK, and the telephone number?

Belford: 536-6691

**Alsobrook:** Is there any organization, like, you know, alumni association, or any group that would always know your address and contact?

**Belford:** I am not particularly active in it, but I usually send in the form that comes from Georgetown. I went to Georgetown University and I usually manage to show up in their book, alumni directory and so on. That would probably be the best place.

**Alsobrook:** Thank you very much, Tom.