

Collection: Office of the Chief of Staff Files

Series: Hamilton Jordan's Confidential Files

Folder: Early Months' Performance, HJ Memos to Pres., 1977

Container: 34a

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Early Months' Performance, HJ Memos to Pres., 1977, Container 34a

Jimmy Carter Library Staff Processing Note: (2/13/87)

Staff archivists have determined that Hamilton Jordan's office staff transferred these materials to Susan Clough, the President's secretary, sometime near the end of the administration. In June 1986, they were subsequently transferred to the Jimmy Carter Library by the Office of Jimmy Carter. The folder titles appear to have been created by Hamilton Jordan.

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TO: PRESIDENT CARTER
FROM: HAMILTON JORDAN *H.J.*

*Ham - I agree
you help me with
this - from my
frantic situation I
often do not see
this problem -
J.C.*

A very wonderful thing has happened in the last two weeks which will mean a great deal to your Presidency and should be recognized by you for what it is.

You have given the diverse group of people that you rely on for advice an opportunity to function as a team, and they have taken full advantage of it. This is an opportunity that they previously lacked.

The result - as was demonstrated on the energy policy decisions and the rebate decision - has been a more deliberate decision-making process which allows full debate and adequate time for consideration. And even those decisions which were not unanimous will be better decisions because all of your advisers have been a part of the process and the final decision.

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My guess is that you have developed - in several months - a more effective decision-making process than most Presidents have ever had. If continued, it could be one of the real strengths of your Presidency.

My single criticism of your first few months would be that we have not done a good job of "political scheduling" - too many arbitrary deadlines and decisions made without considering the impact of other projects. This same group could help on those problems.

77
(March?)

PERSONAL AND CONFIDENTIAL

TO: JIMMY CARTER
FROM: HAMILTON JORDAN

As I mentioned to you earlier in the week, I feel a real need to convey to you - possibly in exaggerated form - some of the concerns and problems which we face. In spite of your successful efforts to "depomp" the Presidency which has had a great impact on the people of this country, I find on a day-to-day basis that very few of your staff or Cabinet members are as direct and frank with you as you would like. The institution of the Presidency is still a powerful and awesome thing.

This is good and bad. On one hand, it prevents you from having to deal with a lot of "crap" that is considered "too important to bother the President with". On the other hand, it stifles in an unhealthy way the hard

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criticisms and true beliefs of persons who are dedicated to you and the objectives of your Administration.

You would be amazed - and probably disappointed - at the number of important people who consult with me on things I know little or nothing about in hopes of gaining some insight into what would please and/or satisfy you. A great premium is placed on anticipating what you want instead of providing you with the frank and hard analysis you need. This is one of the continuing challenges of your Presidency which can only be solved by your inviting and encouraging different points of view.

I realize, of course, that we are only two months into your Presidency and that personal relationships will become stronger with the passage of time which will result in persons being more direct with you. But I state this problem so you will realize it exists (as I am sure you do) and hopefully so you will realize that problems that I present here may very well exist even if you are not aware of them.

You are making major domestic policy decisions with tremendous political implications in a political vacuum. These decisions are also being made at the 11th hour with no opportunity for political give and take. Before you make a final decision on aid to Zaire, the SALT treaty or other foreign policy matters, you convene meetings with Cy, Zbig and others to discuss your thinking and the international political ramifications. Yet, in recent weeks you have made decisions on minimum wage, price support and other important domestic issues based mostly on written memorandum. Yet, these decisions could jeopardize your political base and undermine the priorities of your Administration yet they are receiving much less of your time and attention than foreign policy questions.

I am not suggesting that you spend any less time on foreign policy, but simply spend more on domestic issues.

The result of all of this is that we send proposals to the Congress which represent your own views and are probably correct technically, but they are not politically credible. Our position on several of these issues does

not even represent a bargaining position that can be used in pursuit of your goals. Instead of being considered seriously by the Congress and having an impact on the final outcome of the legislation, the Administration's position on minimum wage and price support will be discarded, and the likelihood is that Congress will come up with a more expensive program than would have been originally acceptable to the various interests if we had come in with a politically credible proposal.

In trying to understand exactly how this happened, I talked with Stu. As I understand it, on the price supports Bob Bergland proposed the smallest possible increase that he believed would be politically acceptable on the Hill. You rejected his recommendation and sent him to the Hill with a package that was not taken seriously by the Congress. When Herman Talmadge calls your farm bill "a silly thing", we have made a political mistake somewhere.

I realize that you are trying to balance the budget and improve the economy, but these goals are not well served if your economic proposals are not even a factor in the

minds of the Congress.

Whenever you have to make a major domestic decision,
you should have Frank Moore, Mondale, myself and others
in to talk about it. This is not happening now.

We continue to have a major problem in the coordination of the goals and objectives of your Administration. Each cabinet officer is pursuing programs and goals independent of one another and oblivious to the political interrelationships of their programs. Part of the problem is simply one of scheduling. If we have several controversial programs before the Congress at the same time, a coalition of opponents will develop. We have to pace ourselves, relating our goals to a timetable that is sensitive to the problems in the Congress and takes into account the need for public awareness efforts.

You should be more careful in setting arbitrary deadlines. Relating goals to specific deadlines forces work completion. On the other hand, in the case of your energy policy statement, the Congress is simply going to hold the legislation creating the department hostage until they get the policy legislation. So, instead of going into summer with the mechanism created to deal with the problem, my own hunch is that both the policy and the legislation creating the department will be months getting through the Congress. Ultimately, I would guess that you will be forced to sacrifice policy and structural goals to get these measures through the Congress.

The Cabinet meetings could be more worthwhile to all involved with a slightly revised format. As it is now, the Cabinet meetings are a verbal report of things which are usually presented to you in the weekly reports. There is, of course, an opportunity for different persons to react to problems presented at the meetings, but they are - by and large - information sharing sessions. There is nothing wrong with this, but I believe that the same basic information could be shared and the bulk of the meetings devoted to topics which are substantive.

I believe that some innovative things could be done that would result in a fuller sharing of the Cabinet's views on controversial issues and problems. For example, a Cabinet meeting could be devoted to each member's outlining to you the mistakes that they think the Administration is making in any area. Or, what are the main goals of the Carter Administration? Or, are the policy mechanisms of the Administration (Economic Policy Group, National Security Council, etc.) functioning adequately and/or what improvements could be made?

Jack Watson could summarize the written reports submitted to you weekly and circulate them to the Cabinet members. Then the Cabinet meetings could focus on major topics presented by each member and spend half of the time or more on a substantive area such as the ones suggested here.

I would recommend that you take a hard look at the Economic Policy Group to determine if it is an effective mechanism for the development of economic policy.

The people who comprise EPG are superb as individuals but my own sense is that they have not yet melded as a group into an effective mechanism for developing policy or presenting you with options on complicated economic issues.

It seems to me that you are spending very little of your own time on domestic economic policy and entrusting the EPG to reach a consensus on complex economic matters. The EPG is composed of people who have different backgrounds and constituencies. The result is that the policies which they evolve are negotiated out which does not make the policy particularly good nor necessarily right.

Politically, I have a different concern. If the purpose of the EPG is to serve as an economic synthesizer which weighs the conflicting political and financial interests

of our country and presents you with comprehensive and feasible political options, then the numbers and dynamics of the group work to the disadvantage of the people who you were elected to represent. Let me explain.

I am not advocating that the EPG make major economic policy decisions based exclusively on political considerations. I would expect - as a basic premise for their long-range policy decisions - that they have an understanding of and sensitivity to the commitments made by you to the American people in the campaign.

The large majority of the people on the EPG have small but very powerful constituencies with well defined needs and goals. By their sheer numbers and the positions they occupy, this group has disproportionate influence in shaping the options and policies presented to you. If you are presented an option supported by Kreps, Blumenthal, Lance and Schultz but opposed by Marshall, the likelihood is that you would support the majority opinion. My argument (which is basically political) is that the majority groups represents a very small group in this coun-

try and that Ray Marshall represents a large majority of the working people in this country who are responsible for your election.

I am not suggesting here that the majority group is usually wrong and Marshall always right - I really don't know. Nor am I suggesting that this process is intellectually dishonest or unworkable. I do not feel strongly that the dynamics and the composition of the group does not lend itself to a balanced political consideration of the economic decisions you must make.*

Your successes in every other area can and will be jeopardized if the economic recovery is weak or aborted. A solid economy will strengthen the goals of your Administration in the mid-term elections and will make you unbeatable in 1980. It will make everything else you want to accomplish easier. It is also the only thing

*This is, I believe, the reason for Stu's comment that Strauss was making a real contribution to EPG. He is a politician who realizes the necessity for reconciling political forces and interests

that I can envision that might permanently erode your popular support with the American people.

The economy deserves more of your time and your continuing personal attention. The EPG - as a mechanism - should be watched closely.

For the purpose of our own planning, we should presume a challenge from Jerry Brown for the Democratic Party nomination. I feel strongly that he will probably run against you. By 1980, he will be bored with the job of being Governor. He probably feels that he would be President now if he had gotten into the race earlier. He beat us in most of the places he faced us. His attitude will probably be that he has nothing else to do and nothing to lose so he might as well challenge you.

His only option is to wait for eight long years when you will probably want to turn the party and the presidency over to Mondale. Brown will try to find encouragement for his effort in the public opinion polls and among the party elite and elected officials who have never been close to us. This argues for the effective use of the DNC in building the party and building good relationships with elected officials and party types across the country.

You have resisted doing much early fundraising for the DNC. The general election deficit and the previous debt from the 1968 campaign have left the DNC in poor shape

financially. Instead of being able to help us on a range of projects, they have been preoccupied trying to raise monies. I would strongly recommend that you give them an hour on two separate occasions in the next few months to deal with the debt and be in a position to assist us in the pursuit of our political and legislative goals. A strong DNC operation is the key to staying in close touch with our political supporters and neutralizing party opinion makers who might encourage or discourage a Brown candidacy.

I hear continuing rumors about Brown's early work for 1980. The attached letter is just a sample.

I am assuming, of course, that you like this job and would like to keep it beyond 1980.