

**EVOLUTION OF THE WHITE HOUSE CONGRESSIONAL RELATIONS OFFICE**  
**THROUGH PRESIDENT RICHARD M. NIXON**

By

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President Dwight D. Eisenhower was the first chief executive to establish clear responsibilities for White House functions, many along military concepts of chain of command. While there was no Office of Congressional Relations, as such, key individuals were assigned legislative roles among their other duties. General Wilton B. “Jerry” Persons was to lead the legislative team with Bryce N. Harlow concentrating on the House of Representatives and Gerald D. Morgan focused on the Senate. Morgan held several key legislative slots in the House of Representatives before joining the White House staff.

Harlow first came to Washington as assistant librarian to the House of Representative, moving later to the House Committee on Ways and Means. He was recruited to the Pentagon during World War II by General Persons. In the Eisenhower Administration Harlow doubled as a speechwriter (later to be named chief presidential speech writer) During WW II Persons and Harlow had worked together in the Pentagon performing legislative duties. At the end of the war Harlow became staff director of the House Armed Services Committee.

While members of the Eisenhower Cabinet lobbied for measures within their jurisdictions, the President utilized several others for legislative work such as former California Representative John Z. Anderson, Edward A. McCabe who had worked on the House Education and Labor Committee, and Clyde A. Wheeler from the Agriculture Department.

Presidents Kennedy and Johnson did not like the formality of President Eisenhower’s structure and preferred “spokes of the wheel” organizations without clear lines of specific authorities. These were not Congressional Relations offices, but individuals who were tasked jobs depending on current issues. Two stand out in Kennedy’s administration with Capitol Hill roles: Lawrence “Larry” O’Brien was a special assistant for personnel and

congressional liaison and Mike Manatos was a presidential administrative assistant who followed some legislation. Cabinet members were expected to handle their bills in Congress. For example, Attorney General Robert Kennedy was frequently lobbying Members personally.

Johnson continued to use Kennedy holdover O'Brien for a period, but gradually Barefoot Sanders became the principal officer with Joseph A. Califano, head of domestic policy, Billy D. Moyers, legal advisor Harry C. McPherson, and others tasked to lobby depending on the issue in the legislative process.

After the 1968 election President-elect Nixon named his old comrade Bryce Harlow from the Eisenhower Administration to be Assistant for Congressional Relations. Harlow called William "Bill" E. Timmons and said Nixon wanted him to join his staff. Timmons accepted and went to the Pierre Hotel in New York where he worked during the transition. In early January, Harlow and Timmons moved the operation to Federal Building 7, next to the Blair House in Washington, until Inauguration Day.

Timmons previously worked six years for Senator Alexander Wiley of Wisconsin and six years for Representative William E. Brock of Tennessee, had been involved in managing Young Republican conventions for a decade, and in 1966 was one of the team that recommended Nixon visits to selected districts and states. Timmons was Nixon's Convention Manager in the contested 1968 Miami national gathering and invited afterwards to the staff retreat in Mission Bay, San Diego, for planning the fall campaign. There the candidate asked him to handle Congressional Relations for the Nixon/Agnew campaign. It was a one-man operation located in the small downtown DC campaign office (the principal headquarters were in New York). Timmons worked with the Mundt-Arends group of longtime Nixon congressional friends and supporters. Senator Karl Mundt and House Whip Les Arends brought in others who were willing to help. They prepared issue papers, recommended tactics for their states and districts, and were consulted about possible visits to their areas. Candidate Nixon met with the group on several occasions during the fall of 1968.

After the election President Nixon reverted to the tight White House structure of Eisenhower and enhanced it with clear lines of authority and responsibility. Offices created, among others, were the Domestic Council, Congressional

Relations, Office of Management and Budget, Public Liaison, and Consumer Affairs. Bryce Harlow made some new hires in January 1969: Andrew Lamar Alexander from Tennessee Senator Howard Baker's office became his personal aide, Kenneth E. Belieu from the Senate Armed Services Committee was brought in as Deputy Assistant to concentrate on the Senate, backed up by Eugene "Gene" S. Cowen from Pennsylvania Senator Hugh Scott's office. Timmons was Deputy Assistant for the House of Representatives and Harlow recruited William "Bill" E. Casselman from Illinois Rep. Robert McClory's staff to be Special Assistant for the House.

It must be noted that Chief of Staff H.R. "Bob" Haldeman needed to place several people who worked in the 1968 presidential campaign somewhere on the White House payroll, and the Office of Congressional Relations was called upon to absorb H. Dale Grubb, John E. Nidecker, and Franklyn "Lyn" Nofziger although they were not part of the working operation in any way. Later Grubb went to NASA, Nidecker retired from government service and entered the ministry, and Nofziger became deputy chairman of the Republican National Committee. In addition, while not formally on the Presidential staff, Walter L. Mote and H. Spofford "Spoff" Canfield, working in the Capital offices of the Vice President were effective eyes and ears for Congressional Relations on site.

Because Harlow was consumed with the grueling, nitty-gritty of dealing with Members of Congress, the President elevated him to Counselor without portfolio with Cabinet status early in 1970. In this position Harlow was tasked with molding strategic options and writing speeches and formal messages for the Chief Executive. Lamar Alexander returned to Tennessee to explore political opportunities. Timmons succeeded Harlow as Assistant to the President and brought on Richard K. "Dick" Cook who had been legislative assistant to Ohio Rep. Oliver Bolton and was minority staff director of the House Banking Committee. Bill Casselman moved to GSA as general counsel and later legal counsel to Vice President Ford. In 1971, Deputy Assistant Ken Belieu, a decorated Army colonel who lost a leg in Korea and had served on the Senate Armed Services Committee, desired to become Secretary of the Army, but he had to settle for being its Under Secretary. Gene Cowen moved up to become Deputy Assistant, and Tom C. Korologos, former journalist and nine years with Utah Senator Wallace F. Bennett, was recruited to become Special Assistant for Legislative Affairs on the Senate side. Later Max L. Friedersdorf who had

worked for Indiana Rep. Richard Roudebush on Capitol Hill and former Illinois Rep. Donald Rumsfeld at Office of Economic Opportunity was brought to the White House as Special Assistant covering the House.

President Nixon had encouraged Minnesota Rep. Clark MacGregor to give up a safe seat to run against Hubert Humphrey for the Senate in 1970. When he lost, the President felt he owed him a job in the Administration. Bryce Harlow retired to the private sector as vice president for Proctor & Gamble, and MacGregor became White House Counselor in 1971. He told Timmons he would not take the position if it interfered in any way with the current personnel and operations. A year later MacGregor became Deputy Chairman of the Committee to Reelect the President under former Attorney General John Mitchell.

John F. Lehman, Jr., a U.S. Navy aviator and later of the NSC staff who became Secretary of the Navy for President Ronald Reagan, provided critical support in Congressional Relations on national security issues. Also William L. "Bill" Gifford of OMB was helpful in legislative affairs that related to that organization. Gifford had worked for New York Rep. Charles Goodell, was a Special Advisor to Secretary George Shultz at Labor, followed Shultz to OMB, and later became top legislative officer at the Treasury Department for Shultz. Also in 1972 Cowen accepted a position as vice president of ABC, and Korologos moved up to Deputy Assistant working on the Senate side. That year Wallace H. "Wally" Johnson joined the team as Special Assistant for the Senate. He had served as minority counsel of a Senate Judiciary Subcommittee and Associate Deputy AG for Legislation. Johnson returned to the Justice Department as an Assistant Attorney General in 1973.

After Nixon's 1972 reelection the President called Timmons to Camp David and urged him to stay to help on the many new policies he envisioned for his second term. Timmons had several requests: First, he wanted assurances that personnel in his office would be allowed to remain and that he would recommend any new staff for the office. Another suggestion was to elevate congressional officers in the departments to assistant secretaries, confirmed by the Senate, with better pay. Before this each Cabinet officer selected his own special assistant to handle legislation, and frequently those chosen didn't respond well to presidential directives and some were outright uncooperative. Under this proposal assistant secretaries would become presidential

appointees. Also Timmons asked for at least one half hour per week to be set aside for the staff to bring to the oval office Members of Congress, and perhaps their constituents, for non-substantive meet-and-greets. Finally Timmons wanted to change the name of his unit and throughout the Executive Branch from "Congressional Relations" to "Legislative Affairs." President Nixon agreed and promised to support all the changes. (He had to be called on once personally to enforce the assistant secretary decision.)

In 1971 Chief of Staff Haldeman relayed the President's order that each office must accept one White House Fellow for a year to experience its operations as part of the program's educational responsibilities. Bill Timmons resisted since legislative affairs is sensitive and requires special knowledge and backgrounds, and the principals just didn't have time to teach and train outsiders. The President insisted, so Timmons looked over the list and picked a Marine Corps Major Robert C. "Bud" McFarlane whose father had been a Democrat Congressman from Texas. The second year Timmons was forced to repeat the requirement and selected Lt. Col. Lee R. Nunn, U.S. Army, who was from a distinguished Kentucky Republican family. McFarlane petitioned to stay at the White House after his fellowship and worked on the NSC staff. Powell A. Moore, former press secretary to Georgia Senator Richard Russell joined as Timmons' executive assistant in 1973.

In 1974, Patrick E. "Pat" O'Donnell who had worked in the White House Public Liaison Office, the FCC, and DC Corporation counsel, joined the Senate operations; and W. Eugene "Gene" Ainsworth, a Democrat from Mississippi Rep. Sonny Montgomery's office; Frederick L. "Fred" Webber who had been on the staff of Oregon Rep. John Dellenback, and Vernon C. "Vern" Loen, who worked for Minnesota Rep. Al Quie, became White House teammates for House relations.

After President Nixon's resignation new President Gerald Ford asked all the congressional staff to remain in his Administration. Bill Timmons agreed to stay through the legislative session but asked to resign at the end of 1974. He felt it was better for President Ford to be surrounded by new senior staff and Cabinet since the press was attacking him for not removing all the old Nixon "hangers-on."

**Tom Korologos, Gene Ainsworth, Stan Ebner (general counsel at OMB) and Bill Timmons started a consulting company in Washington in January 1975. Max Friedersdorf was invited to join, but he elected to stay in the White House if Timmons would recommend him to become the Assistant to the President. Therefore, Max became Bill's successor for the Ford Administration.**

**PERSONAL NOTE: I write about this office's evolution to the best of my recollection since I lived it for all six years of President Nixon's terms and knew the people involved. Bridging the branches was not an easy assignment and was done by skilled and dedicated professionals. Indeed this is their story.**

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