President George H.W. Bush
Oral History Project

Briefing Materials

Fred McClure

September 20, 2001

Prepared by Patrick Roberts and Gar Culbert, Research Assistant
1985

March  McClure moves from the Justice Department, where he was the Associate Deputy U.S. Attorney General in charge of political appointments, to the White House office of legislative affairs as a Special Assistant to President Reagan for Legislative Affairs.

May       The Reagan administration, on the 1st, announces a trade embargo against Nicaragua.

December  Reagan signs Gramm-Rudman deficit reduction bill on the 12th.

1986

February  In his State of the Union Address, delivered on the 4th, Reagan suggests that it is time to focus on strengthening family values and cutting the budget deficit.

June      Supreme Court Chief Justice Warren Burger announces his resignation on the 17th. Reagan nominates William Rehnquist to be Chief Justice of the United States and nominates Antonin Scalia to the vacant position on the court.

August    Senate and House approve tax reform, which Reagan signs on Oct. 22.

September In a news conference, on the 14th, the President and Mrs. Reagan announce a “national crusade” against drugs.

October   Congress passes anti-drug legislation and the Simpson-Mazzoli immigration bill on the 17th.

November  In midterm elections on the 4th, the Democratic Party improves its position on the Hill by winning control of the Senate and increasing its majority in the House.

McClure leaves his position with the Reagan administration to work in the private sector.

1988

November  George H.W. Bush defeats Michael Dukakis in national elections to become the 41st President of the U.S. on the 8th.

December  McClure agrees to serve as Special Assistant for Legislative Affairs for President Bush.
The President-elect nominates John Tower as Secretary of Defense on the 16th. McClure had served as Tower’s Legislative Director during Tower’s tenure as a U.S. Senator.

1989

January

Bush inaugurated as 41st president.

February

President Bush unveils his savings and loan bailout plan on the 6th.

Congress rejects a 50 percent raise for its members along with other raises for executive and judicial branch members (New York Times, 02/08/89).

The Senate Armed Services Committee votes 11 to 9, along party lines, to recommend that the Senate reject the nomination of John Tower as Secretary of Defense (Washington Post, 2/24/89).

March

As Democratic Senators pledge to vote against him for his questionable ethics, Tower claims he is a victim of “character assassination.” (Washington Post, 3/2/89).

In hopes of saving his nomination as Secretary of Defense, John Tower makes a pledge on camera not to drink while in office, but McClure and the congressional relations staff reportedly learn of the pledge only from reporters after Tower appears on TV (Newsweek, 3/13/89).

The Senate rejects Tower’s nomination on March 9. Richard Cheney’s nomination to be Secretary of Defense is confirmed by the Senate on the 17th.

April

A bill granting almost $50 million in humanitarian aid to the Contras is signed by Bush on the 18th.

Republicans in Congress reportedly “complain that McClure fails to keep them abreast of such major actions as the recent White House announcement on proposed child-care legislation” as well as of federal grants in their home states (Newsweek, 4/23/89).

May

Speaker of the House Jim Wright announces his resignation on the 31st.

June

Thomas Foley becomes the next Speaker of the House on the 6th.

Congress fails to override Bush’s veto of a bill that would raise the minimum wage.
July  Bush asks Congress to raise salaries as much as 25 percent for many members of the executive branch and recommends that Congress increase its own pay if it reduces the amount of money members may keep from outside speeches (New York Times, 7/8/89).

Senators request that Bush meet with representatives of Baltic states seeking independence. McClure promises to look into the request but does not expect a major change in U.S. policy toward the Baltics (Washington Post, 7/9/1989).

August  Bush signs into law a $166 savings and loan bailout on the 9th.

September  On the 5th, Bush unveils his $7.9 billion war on drugs plan.

November  Congress approves a compromise on the minimum wage bill on the 1st.

1990

May  President Bush signals that he would consider a budget package that included tax increases, while White House Chief of Staff John Sununu tells reporters that the president might veto any budget package that includes a tax increase. Senate aides called McClure to complain about the mixed signals, and called Sununu’s comments “untrue, unfair, and ill-timed” in a public statement (The Wall Street Journal, 5/11/90).

June  Conservative and more liberal Republicans split over whether Bush should veto the Kennedy-Hawkins Civil Rights Act (New Republic, 6/11/90).

On the 26th, Bush acknowledges that tax increases could be necessary to reduce the Federal budget, which is viewed as a departure from the “no new taxes” pledge from the 1988 campaign.

July  Journalists report that McClure and Marlin Fitzwater were left out of the loop when the President approved a tax increase (U.S. News & World Report, 7/16/90).

President Bush nominates David Souter for the Supreme Court on the 23rd.

August  A team led by Sen. Warren Rudman, and including McClure and political consultant Kenneth M. Duberstein, helps prepare David Souter for the judicial confirmation process (Washington Post, 8/21/90).

October  On the 2nd, David Souter is confirmed as a new Supreme Court Justice, replacing William Brennan.

Bush vetoes the Civil Rights Act of 1990 on the 22nd.
Congress passes a budget bill on the 27\textsuperscript{th}. The bill includes new taxes agreed on by President Bush as well as amendments strengthening the Clean Air Act.

1991

January

Early on, Sen. Lieberman informs McClure that he “supports Bush’s authority to go to war against Saddam if Iraqi forces weren’t out of Kuwait by January 15” (\textit{New Republic}, 2/4/91).

Congress passes a resolution approving the use of force in the Persian Gulf on the 12\textsuperscript{th}.

February

The Persian Gulf War comes to an end as President Bush declares Kuwait liberated and ends the ground assault on the 12\textsuperscript{th}.

June

Thurgood Marshall announces that he will resign from the Supreme Court.

July

President Bush nominates Clarence Thomas to the Supreme Court.

October

The Senate delays voting on the Thomas nomination in order to hold hearings about sexual harassment charges. McClure informs Republican Senator Danforth, on Saturday, October 5\textsuperscript{th}, that news outlets are about to report the allegations of harassment. The vote on Thomas’ nomination had been scheduled for the following Tuesday, but by Monday several Democratic Senators threaten to vote against Thomas if the vote is not postponed and an inquiry into charges of sexual harassment is held (\textit{New York Times} 10/08/91).

From the 6\textsuperscript{th} through the 15\textsuperscript{th} the confirmation hearings for Supreme Court nominee Clarence Thomas grab the nation’s attention. Thomas narrowly wins confirmation by the Senate. Kenneth Duberstein was again brought in to consult on the Supreme Court confirmation process.

November

California Senator Alan Cranston is reprimanded by the U.S. Senate for his actions in association with the Keating Five scandal on the 20\textsuperscript{th}.

On the 21\textsuperscript{st}, President Bush signs the Civil Rights Act of 1991, making it easier for employees to sue employers on charges of racial and sexual discrimination.

December

McClure resigns to become a director and member of the management committee of First Southwest Co., a Dallas-based investment-banking firm.
FREDERICK McCLURE SUGGESTED TOPICS
Prepared by Patrick Roberts and Gar R. Culbert
Miller Center of Public Affairs, University of Virginia

Work with the Reagan Administration
• Experience as special assistant to President Reagan for Legislative Affairs.
• Major legislative issues during tenure with Reagan, including Senate passage of tax code overhaul in 1985-86.

Joining the Bush Administration
• What kind of role, if any, did you have in the 1988 campaign and the Reagan-Bush transition? Efforts to establish an identity for the Bush Administration distinct from the Reagan Administration.
• Recruitment and selection as White House assistant to the president for legislative affairs in the Bush Administration.

Serving as Special Assistant for Legislative Affairs for President Bush
• Your role and responsibilities in Bush White House. Access to the President and senior White House advisers. Relationship with the President. The division of labor within your staff.
• Working with Congress. Strategy for working with Congress and dynamics of dealing with Democrats and conservative Republicans in Congress. Did you have any special responsibilities for outreach to groups off Capitol Hill? What were the major issue areas you handled?
• Division of responsibilities between Chief of Staff and Office of Legislative Affairs. Relationship with White House Staff, especially John Sununu, Richard Darman, and Roger Porter.
• Management of the Tower, Souter, and Thomas confirmation hearings. How involved were you in each? How did these processes differ?
• Work on the 1990 budget agreement. Discussions between Congress and White House and among White House staff. Who was in the lead in developing the agreement? What kinds of efforts, if any, were made to sell it to Congress and the general public?
• Relations with Congress leading up to and during the Gulf War. Decision to seek congressional authorization for military action. Who were the key actors? Did the process for seeking Congressional approval differ significantly from other efforts to win legislative support for the president’s policies? How?
• Nature of President Bush’s participation in domestic policy as compared to foreign policy.
• Your departure from the White House. Did you play any part in the 1992 reelection effort?
Retrospective

- Strengths and weaknesses of the Bush Administration. What features of the Administration were missed or misunderstood in the press? What criteria did the press use in assessing the President?
- How should the Bush presidency be viewed in history?
TIMELINES

• “News Timeline for Frederick McClure Interview,” prepared by Patrick Roberts and Gar R. Culbert, Miller Center of Public Affairs.


**SELECTED READINGS**


