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THE COUNCIL FOR EXCELLENCE IN GOVERNMENT'S 2008-09 PRESIDENTIAL TRANSITION INITIATIVE

I. The Council's Role in Presidential Transitions

The eyes of the world will be firmly focused on America on the first Tuesday in November when millions of citizens head to neighborhood polling places to select the 44th President of the United States. Six blocks from the White House, the eyes and energy of everyone at the non-partisan **Council for Excellence in Government** already are fixed on the critical dimensions of the transition, which officially spans eleven weeks, from election day until the new Chief Executive takes the oath of office at noon on January 20, 2009. The planning and management of this historic changing of the guard in the federal government is of vital importance not only to the new President and his team, but also to the American public and the world.

Transitions by their nature are times of great hope and anticipation, when citizens look to newly elected leaders to deliver on the promises of their campaigns and to bring people together. This transition is the first in more than half a century without an incumbent president or vice president on the ballot. It will unfold with economic, energy, environmental, health care and national security challenges certain to test the mettle of the new President and the 111th Congress. This will be only the third transition taking place with the country at war (Nixon succeeded Johnson in 1969 at the height of the Vietnam conflict; Eisenhower became President during the Korean War), and the first post 9/11 transition.

The Council for Excellence in Government offers a variety of resources to the new Administration to help navigate a smooth transition and get its programs, personnel and policies off to a strong start. Founded a quarter-century ago by business leaders who had held high government posts and believed passionately in public service, the Council serves as an independent, trusted and valued source of information and assistance for the White House and those the President appoints to run the executive branch. The Council is not an advocacy group, think tank or association with a point of view to pitch to the new Administration; it is a pragmatic, results-oriented, non-partisan organization that works to facilitate excellence in government performance and accountability to the public for progress and results.

The Council has played an active role in past transitions and already is engaged in preparations for the 2008-09 transition—to provide valuable information and assistance for the candidates' transition planners; the official transition team of the President-elect; the Senators and Senate Committees that will consider the new President's nominees; the nominees themselves; the career public servants who will keep the government running through the 77-day transition and beyond;

the news media that even in quieter times covers transitions with a special intensity; and every citizen with a stake in excellence in government.

- **Orientation for the President’s Team.** Both the Clinton and Bush Administrations called on the Council to organize leadership and orientation programs for hundreds of senior appointees and White House staff. These workshops and briefings were first offered in the second Clinton term from 1997 until 2000 and, with new authority under the Transition Act of 2000, for the Bush Administration from 2001 until 2004. They were designed with the guidance of White House steering groups to help new managers prepare to run major government enterprises, drawing on best practices and lessons learned and with a special focus on collaboration, accountability for measurable results, ethical principles of public service, and the strategic use of resources, including people, technology and partnerships, in the context of the process requirements, oversight and media coverage that are often intense and unique to government and politics.
- **Profiling the top Prune Jobs.** Since 1988 the Council has published the invaluable [Prune Book](#) series profiling the toughest management jobs in government. Beyond mere title and job descriptions, these books give the White House and nominees a hands-on view of the challenges ahead, drawn principally from those who once occupied these top appointed positions. The title is a play on the [Plum Book](#) that Congress publishes every four years listing the thousands of jobs and board seats subject to political appointment. “Prunes,” in Council lexicon, are “Plums,” seasoned by experience and with a much thicker skin. The *2009 Prune Job Profiles* will appear in an expanded online transition resource with links to a wealth of information from the Office of Personnel Management, the Office of Government Ethics, Senate committees and other sources. In this new, electronic format, the *Prune Job Profiles* will be fully searchable and kept up to date beyond 2009. The Council this fall also will update its *Survivor’s Guide for Presidential Nominees*, a lively compendium of practical advice for nominees to posts that require Senate confirmation. The Council published the [original Survivor’s Guide](#) in 2000 in conjunction with The Brookings Institution.

II. 2008-09 Transition Resources Web 2.0

The Council is taking its transition assistance online by creating a dynamic new web resource which, along with a variety of meetings, workshops and other gatherings, will provide transition leaders, prospective nominees, and others the following resources:

- ***Appointing the President’s Team: Prune Job Profiles***

Appointing the right people to a select group of top leadership and management posts in the federal government is critical to the success of a new President and Administration. Beyond the Cabinet appointments and White House Staff, sub-cabinet appointments to lead critical government agencies and functions – such as emergency management, social security, Medicare and Medicaid require seasoned experience and savvy management skills.

For nearly two decades, the **Council for Excellence in Government** has produced the *Prune Books*, comprehensive guides written specifically to equip the incoming presidential administration with insights into one of its most difficult tasks: staffing the key appointed positions that carry out the new President's agenda throughout the Executive Branch of government.

Since the first *Prune Book* was released in 1988, nearly a dozen additional editions have been published in book form, and have explored a range of issues: from the toughest management and policy making jobs to the toughest science and technology jobs.

As we approach a new administration in 2009, the Council is taking the *Prune* series from book form to a major web presence (*Prunes 2.0*) and expanding its value and reach as an ongoing resource for top government managers. This initiative is taking the concept of Prune Jobs to another level. Not only are we profiling the jobs, but we are explicitly pointing Page 3 of 5 to the management qualifications and attributes that the President and Senate should consider for these appointments. What are the qualifications and skills required for excellent performance in these jobs? What are the qualities and perspectives a successful candidate should have? We are selecting and highlighting **top Prune Jobs**, and we will also list and provide information about other appointed positions, using the *Plum Book* and other sources.

A Steering Committee has been formed to select the key appointed positions and to guide the development of the job profiles and qualifications. Members of the Steering Committee include selected Council Principals and others who have served in Prune Jobs, in Presidential Personnel or have experience in executive search. Their perspectives and insights are informing our analysis of recruiting best practices along with the skills and qualifications it takes to excel in these positions.

We are also conducting extensive outreach to past leaders of Presidential transitions, White House Chiefs of Staff, Senators and Committee staff, key career employees, and selected experts and stakeholders.

This year, as in the past, the *Prune* profiles will concentrate on a selection of Executive Schedule jobs, filled by presidential appointment and confirmed by the Senate. The Steering Committee has culled these jobs from the more than 1,100 in the PAS category. Key criteria for making these choices included:

- Budget and staff size and scope of management duties
- Congressional and public visibility
- Consequences of failure to perform effectively
- Missions that address priorities of the public and the candidates

The Council is also reaching out to past leaders of Presidential transitions, White House Chiefs of Staff, Senators and Committee staff, key career employees, and other experts and will share their wisdom and advice online.

- *Dynamic Online Communities*

We will organize dynamic online communities to share insights and information about how to succeed, best practices, and lessons learned. Utilizing the same tools that have drawn millions to Facebook and other social networking sites, the Council will manage the sharing of information, blogs, case studies, and other resources online and at workshops and briefings for new appointees and career managers as well as overseers, stakeholders, and the news media -- all designed with the singular purpose of improving government performance. Among the interactive communities envisioned are ones for:

- Chief Operating Officers
- Chief Information Officers
- Chief Financial Officers
- Chief Acquisition Officers
- Chief Human Capital Officers

We will also pursue cross-agency communities that manage programs in key areas of public priority such as:

- Health Care
- Homeland Security
- Jobs and the Economy

These online communities can and will be tailored, expanded and clustered around what new appointees and their teams decide are the categories and topics that interest them most.

- ***Selecting the Cabinet and White House Staff.*** Past Transition and Administration leaders will offer advice on strategy, timing, roles and responsibilities, what worked well, and lessons learned, with attention to history, context and effectiveness in the public interest.
- ***Inventory of Appointed Positions.*** In addition to the profiles in the *Prune Book*, the Council will provide a full inventory of appointed positions, drawing on the *Plum Book*, compiled by the House Committee on Government Reform, and other resources.
- ***New Survivor's Guide for Presidential Nominees.*** The Council also will publish online a new edition of its 178-page *A Survivor's Guide for Presidential Nominees*, which former OPM Director Constance Horner described on its release in November 2000 as "a classic on how Washington works." This electronic *Survivor's Guide* will explain how to navigate the often perplexing nomination and confirmation process, offer a ***Confirmation Roadmap*** with steps, mileposts, barriers and a path to the finish line, and furnish clear instructions and links to all the ***Government Forms Online*** that nominees must fill out, including the financial disclosure and other Executive Branch forms and as many of the Senate Committee questionnaires as available.
- ***Special Events.*** The Council will hold forums and workshops where appointees and other government managers can brainstorm and exchange best practices with each other, learn from the experiences of former officials and engage informally with stakeholders, the media and other transition watchers.

- **Blogs.** The Council's Transition Web site will include interactive blogs for senior managers and appointees to exchange experiences, information, and ideas on bringing out the best in managing government programs. Some features may be password protected.
- **Transition News.** Links to key media sites that track transition news.
- **Other Key Links.** We will also provide links to a full array of Transition-related Web sites, inside and outside the government, including:
 - ✓ White House
 - ✓ Office of Government Ethics
 - ✓ Congressional sites
 - ✓ Partner Web sites
- **Timing and Beta Web site.** While the public launch is scheduled for November, the Council will make a beta Web site available for testing and use by the candidates' transition planners in September. The beta site will contain extensive information about appointments, navigating the nomination and confirmation process, and gearing up to meet the challenges that will confront the new Administration.