



THE SECRETARY OF HOUSING AND URBAN DEVELOPMENT
WASHINGTON, D. C. 20410

July 18, 1970

MEMORANDUM FOR: John D. Ehrlichman
Assistant to the President
for Domestic Affairs

This is in response to your letter of July 13 regarding proposed procedures for the Domestic Council. I am encouraged at the general approaches outlined. Some specific comments and suggestions follow:

1. How a Domestic Council policy study is launched is, of course, of prime concern.

After the President has identified a topic for study, it is important for the Domestic Council to have an opportunity to help shape the broad guidelines within which staff will conduct the study. Procedures to involve the members themselves at the beginning of a study are essential so that the Council may play an active and significant role in developing policy recommendations for the President, rather than merely ratifying staff initiatives and conclusions.

To this end, I believe that each major policy study should begin with a plenary session of the Council, or a meeting of the Council members from directly affected departments, at which general guidelines would be developed for the study.

Likewise, care should be taken to avoid pre-empting policy decisions at the "alter-ego" briefing sessions, so that the Council itself will have maximum opportunity to establish the broad policy recommendations.

2. I cannot stress too strongly my concern that the President, within the limits of the priorities which only he can set, undertake to preside personally at Domestic Council meetings whenever possible.

In my judgment, the issues which the Domestic Council will be confronting are equally important -- and, in a real sense, even more fundamental -- than the issues with which the National Security Council deals. As we all recognize, strength at home is the only real basis for national security and strength abroad.

If the Domestic Council is to be a body of true significance, fully comparable in function and status to the National Security Council, it will need the same personal attention, leadership and presence of the President.

3. The chairing of plenary sessions by a Council member, on those hopefully infrequent occasions when the President cannot attend, is highly desirable. It will encourage Council members and their departmental associates to rise above narrow bureaucratic attitudes, and will tend to increase essential inter-departmental cooperative effort.

This can be furthered even more, in the functioning of the sub-committees, by recognizing at all times the lead role of the chairman -- and, in the chairman's absence, by designating another sub-committee member to serve in this capacity, rather than calling upon a staff member of the Domestic Council or OMB to preside. Use of staff personnel to chair inter-departmental meetings denies Council members the responsibility of providing objective leadership, and also places them in a subordinate role. This is particularly true when staff members preside despite the presence of a Council member whose department has administrative as well as statutory responsibility to act in a lead agency capacity.

Surely, if we expect regional, state, local and private cooperation that places the public or mutual interest above bureaucratic or self interest, the example must be

provided through the ability of Domestic Council members and the members of their organizations to cooperate in the national interest. Domestic Council staff has an indispensable role to play in bringing this about, but not by assuming the leadership responsibility.

4. Most issues which are deemed important enough to deserve subcommittee study in all probability should also have a final review by the entire Council before policy recommendations are submitted to the President. On any major issue, all Council members should have at least one formal session at which they can hear the issues discussed and make their views known.
5. In this regard, it is important for members to receive the materials that will form the agenda for sub-committee or plenary sessions several working days in advance of the meeting. Even though members of their own staffs presumably will have participated in preparing the agenda materials, the principals will need a reasonable time for personal study and reflection if their own participation is to be meaningful. For example, as of this date, the materials for the July 22 Council meeting have not yet been received.
6. Finally, it is important to delineate clearly how Council recommendations are to be transmitted to the President for his decision.

When the President himself is present at the plenary session where the final policy recommendation is reached, there would appear to be no need for a special procedure for reporting the results to him. However, when he has not had the benefit of first-hand exposure to the discussion and debate, it is essential that at least those members of the Council whose responsibilities will be directly affected by the President's policy decision should be given the opportunity to present their views to him in person.

Again, the basic procedural outline you presented has great merit. These comments and views are possibly even contemplated in it. I look forward to working with you and the other members in making the Domestic Council an effective policy instrument to serve the President and the people of the country.

George Romney