

Proposal for the 11th Presidential Conference:

**Getting Ready for the Second Term:
The Clinton Presidency's 1996-1997 Transition**

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President Clinton prepared for his second term of office amid much discussion about the number of changes among his senior staff. Many of his advisors on the White House staff, in the Executive Office of the President, and in the cabinet left office as Clinton's second term began. Some observers suggested that the number of advisors appeared to be abandoning the president was unprecedented. Others argued that the many potential scandals confronting Clinton encouraged aides to depart before the inevitable downturn of the administration. Such assessments of the Clinton presidency showed little systematic study of the history of second term transitions or analysis of their nature. In actuality, some internal turmoil and change among senior advisors inevitable any time a new term of office begins.

Four different types of transitions take place in the American presidency. The first and most typical type of transition in the modern era occurs when a new president representing the opposing political party is elected. Such transitions represent clean breaks with the incoming president having the freedom to build his own team from the ground up. Transitions also can be between a president and his successor within the same political party, as with the passing of power from Ronald Reagan to George Bush. These transitions are likely to be friendly, especially when the incoming president is part of the same ruling coalition as his predecessor. Transitions also can be unexpected, as in the cases of the death or resignation of the president. In these instances, the new president must rely to some extent on his predecessor's staff and continue with his agenda for a period of time. Transitions of these types have been studied often (see, for example, the discussion of Clinton's 1992-1993 transition in John P. Burke, *Presidential Transitions* [2000] and Charles O. Jones, *Passages to the Presidency* [1998]).

The final type of transition, which occurs when a president is reelected to a second term of office, has received little attention from presidential scholars. Second term transitions are the least disruptive but nevertheless represent new beginning, a time for the president to reevaluate the administration and choose between renewing the first term agenda and developing a new legislative program. This paper examines President Clinton's second term transition in comparison with those of his recent predecessors who won reelection: Presidents Eisenhower, Nixon, and Reagan. Was Clinton's experience similar to those of his predecessors? Was the second term transition successful? Did the agenda articulated by the president for his second term come to fruition? We attempt to answer these questions.