

Mission is Possible Presidential Transition Mini-Series

Episode 4: Jim Williams: GSA's Leadership Role in Transitions

INTRO: Welcome back to Mission is Possible. I am Sasha O'Connell and I am thrilled to be introducing this miniseries of the Mission is Possible podcast, a joint project between Guidehouse and American University. This spin off series dives into the world of Presidential transitions and explores what can be expected inside the agencies during this timeframe and how best to prepare for success by talking with the folks who have been there. Thank you for tuning in, and please enjoy.

On this episode, we are pleased to welcome Patricia Cogswell as the host. Patty is a Strategic Advisor for Guidehouse's National Security Segment, having recently retired as Acting Deputy Administrator to the TSA. Prior to the election, Patty sat down with former Acting Administrator of the GSA, Jim Williams. Together they reflect on what makes a Presidential transition successful.

PATTY: Welcome, Jim. Thank you so much for your willingness to share your experiences with us here today. If I could start by asking you to perhaps spend a bit of time just summarizing your background and highlighting some of the roles you have had in past presidential transitions.

JIM: I spent almost 31 years in government - my wife used to call me a migrant worker because I worked at many different government agencies, including the honor of working with you at DHS. But also, IRS, GSA, three different times, Commerce three different times, Education and other things. But I had a great career. I was involved in presidential transitions from those other agencies in terms of getting ready, briefing papers and things like that. But then when I was at GSA, President Bush appointed me as the acting administrator of GSA in the summer. I think it was of 2008. Then I got to oversee the presidential transition as the acting head of GSA from 2008 to early 2009.

PATTY: As you noted, we briefly worked together right at the start of the Department of Homeland Security on a brand-new program called US-VISIT. You were asked to take on this role after a successful career, as you highlighted in a number of different places, and in particular at IRS. Can you talk about two things for us? First, a little bit about how you approached a major decision to accept that posting? And second, describe your thoughts on how career employees should prepare for such opportunities that they might receive during a transition, and how should they think through the decision if asked?

JIM: Well, Patty, if you remember, I came over with very short notice. I was told to go, I was not given a choice. I actually left the IRS, left pictures of my kids on my desk and never went back. But I approached it like any other change of a job where, I had to prove myself to you all. I had to prove myself to people every day. As you know, I went into a job where I knew nothing about so many different topics that you are an expert on: immigration, counterterrorism, biometrics, border security.

I mean, I literally came from procurement and from program management over IRS modernization. So, this was all new to me. I had to rely on and listen to all the people around me and try to get the best people around me. And, you know, the old thing of get the best people around you and try not to let them know that they're smarter. That wasn't even a contest. Everybody was smarter than me. My only job was to try and get the right resources and try and get the people to work together as a team, get the smartest people, people like yourself, and then get out of their way.

PATTY: I had forgotten that you didn't really get much say in that decision. I just remember the first time I met you, how positive you were about the opportunity and where we were going to go with the program.

I had a similar experience when I was asked to serve as the Acting Undersecretary for DHS Intelligence and Analysis while the nominee was going through confirmation. I was called on a Tuesday or Wednesday, I think, by someone I'd known for quite a while who was in the Secretary's office. She said "Patty, your country needs you." She got the laugh she was going for, but then explained that she needed me formally in the chair the following week. Basically, as soon as they could get the interim appointment signed.

After the call, I remember going upstairs to talk with my bosses. We all agreed that there wasn't really a choice in response to that kind of a call.

But, for arguments sake – if a career employee is given more of an option, do you have any thoughts on how they should think through and approach the decision?

JIM: Well, what I always tell young people is volunteer for everything. I mean, all these things that are new. I always liked to tell myself, give me the toughest challenge in government, and maybe you won't succeed, but maybe you can, maybe you can get the right people and you can succeed. And that feels great. But you also learn more when you have the bigger challenges and I learned a ton from people like you and many other people, but also it's just more fun. So I would say always volunteer. And if somebody wants you to do something like that, jump at it because it means they think highly of you, they want you as part of the team. And I would say, go for it.

PATTY: As you highlighted in your opening, one of the other interesting aspects of your career is that you served as both a long-time career employee and were nominated for a political appointment as GSA administrator. Can you tell us a little bit about the process you went through for your nomination?

JIM: Well, it was, it was kind of fascinating. The current political appointee administrator was fired by the White House, essentially with quite a few months to go, which is not an easy thing to do. And I happened to be standing around, even though I was a career official. And I knew somebody in White House presidential personnel who liked me and then the president nominated me, and I went through the entire process.

So, first the FBI investigation, which I was very honest with the person, which I think was something that surprised the person when they asked me if I ever smoked marijuana. I said, "Oh, sure, lots of times." You know. "Have you ever have used alcohol?" "Well, yeah. I was in college, who didn't?" Which was an interesting thing. And then I went in front of the joint grilling by the staff up on the Hill and that is both sides. Really, they don't hold anything back and I answered all of their questions and said, "You know, I'm here as long as you like."

And then I met with many of the different senators on the Homeland Security & Governmental Affairs Committee, which was the committee responsible for confirming a GSA administrator. And I had a hearing which was quite interesting. I met with Senator Warner beforehand. And if I can tell a quick story, somebody introduced me as, "Jim's going to be heading GSA and he's going to be responsible for presidential transition." And Senator Warner said, "Oh, I was responsible for that once." And he said, "I was sent over to that big, gray building next to the White House with all those columns."

And I said, "You mean the old executive office?" But he goes, "Yeah, I think that's it." And he said, "I was told to go over and get ready for transition." And he said, "I go over there and this guy has got like a hundred keys on his belt. He unhooks it, throws the keys at me. There's no labels on the keys." Said, "It's all yours." He said that was transition." So, I thought that was pretty interesting.

PATTY: (laughs) Thank you for sharing those stories. I have to say I do always love the story about the keys, that is one of my favorites.

JIM: I like it too.

PATTY: You noted, you were serving as the Acting Administrator at GSA during the transition from President Bush to President Obama. Can you describe GSA's role in a presidential transition for us?

JIM: Sure. And you know, first during a presidential transition, the most vulnerable time in our country is actually that day, January 20th at noon. If you think about it, all three branches of government, are

outgoing and they are incoming all in a very, very small space. And, certainly it is something that is an enormous impact in American history when this happens. And there will be a transition, but I guess I can come at this as though there will be a change in administration. That's when it's most complex.

Well, in 1963, The Presidential transition Act of 1963 passed, which really gave GSA some clear authorities to provide for the smooth and orderly transition of power. It was really based upon going from Truman to Eisenhower. They had a very bitter campaign. They didn't like each other and there really was no real coordination. And in fact, even long before then the incoming president often did not come to Washington until January 20th. And people said that's not good. So, it also gave GSA's administrator, which I was acting in that role, the authority to designate an apparent successful winner to the presidential election. Would you like me to explain why that is?

PATTY: Yes please.

JIM: So, the election of 2008 happened on November 4th. This year, it will be November 3rd. Well that year, November 4th, meant that from November 4th to January 20th, there was 77 days. And you want to use every one of those 77 days for that transition of power, but you actually don't know the official winner of the election until the electoral college votes, which is always the first Monday after the second Wednesday in December, which that year was December 16th. Then that electoral college will want a full session of Congress that has to actually certify those results on January 6th.

Well, you can't wait until December 19th or January 6th so the GSA administrator designates an official apparent winner so you can begin working with that transition team as quickly as possible. Now, truthfully GSA has been working with the Biden team and with the Trump team for over a year, and there's been a whole series of events leading up to it. But when you can really start working with the incoming team is as soon as that official apparent winner is designated.

People often talk about transition as it's prior to the election and after election. I think it's the three phases. I think it's prior to the election, it's from election to inauguration day. And then it's after that.

PATTY: If you could perhaps cover some of the specific roles of GSA, in addition to designating the apparent winner. You have highlighted previously some of the other important tasks in terms of preparing space or otherwise establishing that routine mechanism.

JIM: Well, GSA has a lead role. There's also the White House Transition Coordinating Council, which I believe the year we did, it may have been Josh Bolton, the President's chief of staff who chaired the GSA is a member of that. And every agency has an agency transition coordinating council, but GSA's role is to number one, provide for all the facilities, the space, the computers, the telecommunications, all of those things necessary for the incoming team. Also, GSA has a role in helping if there is an outgoing, helping the outgoing president and vice-president set up their offices, which are set up for six months after the election.

They also have a role in the inauguration, which is really pretty much done by the inaugural committee, which has a lot of private sector volunteers, but involves Department of Homeland Security, Department of Defense, all the different police agencies, the Congress, and all of their law enforcement agencies, because it's all getting ready for that inaugural day, the inaugural parade. Even in 2009, the FBI learned of a specific threat that was trying to attack them all, again at our most vulnerable time in history, and GSA provides the space for what can be in the past as many as 1500 inaugural volunteers.

They also historically have contracted for the orientation that is provided to every incoming political appointee, as well as they provide for the internal GSA transition. And they also act as kind of a knowledge center when they're coordinating all these meetings, they gather what's going on. They know it's been done in the past. They answer questions. If Department of Labor has a question or Department of Defense, it probably applies to all, and they become a knowledge center for everybody.

My experience has been that, earlier in your career, you're expected to be more of a subject matter briefer; to concisely explain your program or programs, put it in the greater context of your agency or Department, and highlight any politically sensitive or significant decisions coming up. Later in my career, I had more opportunity for ongoing discussions with the transition teams and incoming appointees to explain wider cultural and organizational issues, and to help them meet the key people they would need to pursue their goals.

PATTY: Can you spend a few minutes talking about how your experience as GSA Administrator compared to some of your earlier experiences during other transitions, such as while you were at IRS or DHS or commerce?

JIM: Well, again, when I was at some of the early ones, my job was really to be part of preparing the briefing books, the giant three ring notebook that you are going to hand over to the new agency leader, whoever that was, to really describe your organization. That's where employees have to complete the briefing books now by November 1st. They're working on them right now and they're preparing all the materials that will go into that. And again, before that was a physical book, now it's probably a digital book of sorts of particularly because we're in a virtual mode, but that's really describing all of your operations,

your metrics, your budget, and, and all of the pending decisions, pending regulations, all those things that if you were thinking about putting on the shoes of that incoming leader, what do they need to do to know, to be ready to govern on day one?

You're really trying to facilitate that smooth and orderly transition of power. And as I said, this is our most vulnerable time and we have to do this well because it sends a message to the American people, to our allies, and also to our adversaries, don't try to take us on, don't think that there's going to be a gap here that you can exploit. It's very important that it's all hands on deck - everybody do the best they can to make this smooth and gracious and orderly.

PATTY: Two things you touched on in that, that I'd like to spend just a few more minutes talking about. First is, based on your experience with those briefing books and briefing incoming teams, how should career officials prepare for those discussions? They've already written the book, they've written the background memos, they're now doing the briefings. How should they think about those sessions and what should they be ready for?

JIM: Well, first of all, you don't really know who's going to be on those parachute teams or jump teams, which you do know right now. If you're looking at President Biden, you can Google and see who all his leaders on his transition team are. And there's some names that you've seen before. People like on the Biden team, Jeff Tollefson, who was the first Deputy Director for Management in the Obama administration. And then I think he might've been on the Domestic Policy Council or National Economic Council, but you see those names, but then you're wondering, okay, who's going to be on those parachute teams?

And as I said, it could be somebody you used to work with who just left. You know, it could be suddenly, you're sitting at Homeland Security and you see Patty Cogswell, well, what do you mean? She just left here. And it almost certainly could be somebody like that. It also could be that you, as an employee, are tagged to be on that team, to assist the transition team. And you don't know when you're briefing these transition teams, are they going to be your boss or are they just in here to help get the leader ready? You don't know that. And I think you also have to know that probably within the transition team, you have a reputation.

And whether it's fair or not, you may have a reputation that you were simpatico with their party, or not, or you're going to oppose their policies or something. But the point is as a civil servant, you serve the will of the people. You serve the elected and you want to be ready to assist them in whatever their policy changes are. And you really have to impart everything you can to help them.

PATTY: Along those lines. I have found in my experience that there are certain people who want to go into those briefs and try to jam every fact and figure into the incoming person's head. What do you think about helping an official understand a narrative or a story about the history of how your organization got to where it is on any given topic?

JIM: Well, I think you really want to again, put yourself in their shoes and convey what you believe is most important for them to know. You don't want to give them the 200-year-old history of your organization, but you do want to give them a good picture of what's going on right now. If it's an operation, what are the current operations, the metrics, how many people, what's the budget. And one of the things you might be asked to do is, when there is a change in administration, that transition team may also be in the middle of preparing a budget. You know the budget has to go up very soon after the president's new team comes in, they come in January 20th.

Typically, the budget goes to the Congress the first week in February. Now they may not even submit a budget. And every year, we as federal employees, we worked on preparing those budgets by the executive branch. There's nothing in the Constitution says that the Executive Branch will prepare a budget. They just do by practice. But if that new team wants to try and influence that budget with a very short period, then they should be working on whatever they're going to change to the budget that's already been prepared. And they may want your help to know what's in that? How do we prepare our changes to that budget? So again, I think doing everything you can to help them is critically important.

PATTY: Thank you for raising the issue of annual budget submissions. This is an issue that's also been raised with some of our other guests for this series, and it's one I have found is often misunderstood. You noted that while there is no constitutional requirement for the executive branch to submit a budget it's clearly in their interest to do so. I have a couple of questions to follow up. First, in your experience, can you describe which parts of the annual budgetary cycle continue regardless, and which parts are most likely to change or be put on hold during a presidential transition?

JIM: Well, I think in a normal optimal year, we would be executing an approved FY21 budget right now. And then the administration, if it was a change coming in, coming in on January 20th, they would be looking at how do they make changes to the FY22 budget in the next year. After they come in and they have about a month to try and get up to Congress any of their changes for the coming year, FY22, which budget goes in first week in February, hearings for the 22 budget in March of next year. The problem is there are no normal years anymore. We're still in the middle of, of FY21 budget year and we don't have approved FY21 budget. We're operating under a continuing resolution.

What the new administration coming in may do is see if they can make any changes to help finish off FY21 so we could get a real budget. The agencies could be operating under a real budget for the rest of this fiscal year, and then make changes to the FY22 that are reflective of their policy changes. It's really the campaign policy changes that they ran on. They've got a lot of work to do. I mean, right now, if you're the potential incoming new team, you're getting up to speed as much as you can on the budgets. During the transition, you want to see what had been prepared by the current administration or the FY22 budget, where they are on FY21 so you can look at what major changes can you propose when you have that very limited window of about a month to try and influence FY22, while also trying to work to see if we can't finish off FY21 with a real budget.

And sometimes there's continuing resolutions on all of the government. Sometimes there's continuing resolutions on part of the government. We've seen that where Department of Defense has an approved budget, but the rest of the government doesn't. If you're the incoming team, you're going to be working on trying to finalize for that continuing resolution, a budget for that current year, and then trying to see what changes do you want to make for the coming budget year.

PATTY: Continuing along those lines, to what extent do you think the transition teams and landing teams are looking to make quick decisions about what to add? And what real levers do they have at this stage, given, as you pointed out that FY21 budget is already up on the hill, but has not yet been enacted? FY22 usually formulation pass back is right after Thanksgiving, but is actually usually submitted in January or February.

JIM: Yeah. And then it's easy to get these years confused. I hope I didn't get them confused. I may have. But I think what the transition and the landing teams are looking at is looking at what's been submitted, how does that really vary with their policy changes that they want to see made, and then looking those levers around reallocating money, if they can, how do they change that budget? And what they're probably hoping for is that they have a friendly Congress, meaning the Congress house and Senate are of the same party. And if that's the case, they're even more so looking to make those changes because they know they have a receptive end in the Congress.

But either way, they're trying to say, "Here are our policy changes and here's how we want to see those changes made in the budget process." So they're looking at what are those parts of the budget, you know, whether it's an allocation to people, to organizations, to new systems, to new programs, such as entitlement programs, what is it that they want to do that really is going to help them effect those policy changes?

PATTY: There are many outcomes in elections. We've spent most of the time talking about a change in the executive branch. But as you pointed out, change can also occur in one or both houses with change

of control, strengthening of majorities. Have you seen instances where administration budget priorities changed between pre- and post-election, not just because of a change in the White House, but because of that change in the makeup of Congress?

JIM: Well, absolutely because you've got people coming in with different priorities around what they believe are the policy priorities of the country and where our resources should be. And even when you look at people who are maybe more willing to have a bigger deficit, so they want to spend more, but they don't want to raise taxes. I mean, the federal government takes money in through taxes and other means, and that's a part of the fiscal policy in a way. They're looking at the spending. How much do you want to spend and where? And I think if you get in a new Congress, whether it's house or Senate, they're going to have different ideas. And particularly if they come in and the majority swing shift, then all of a sudden the people who've been laying in wait as the minority party, the ranking party are going to say, "Wait a minute, we're the majority, no matter what the administration says, we want to affect our influence on that budget process and on the budget priorities."

And that's really about the priorities at the highest level that they're trying to influence, because again, so much of the budget has already been set. Trying to tinker too much it's just going to mean that we're not going to get a budget for one thing. Plus if you want to do something in that short amount of time, you've got to really limit where do you really pull those chips to try and redirect based upon the new priorities and the new policies that you're coming in with, whether you're the House, Senate, or the new administration.

PATTY: And I think you're hitting on a key point. For years now, we've been living under the, uh, Balanced Budget Control Act top lines for agencies and departments and the government overall. This has really meant that, to your point, there's not a lot of immediate levers for someone to come in and immediately change the swing of exactly how much is available within a department or agency, they really have to take money out of something to put money in something else.

JIM: On the other hand, right now we're in the middle of an international crisis worldwide, and we're spending money to really help the economy. We're spending money to help citizens, to help businesses and incurring, you know, huge deficits. You know, deficit is the difference in how much you take in and how much you spend every year. But all of that is adding to the public debt, which I don't know what it is, \$23 trillion and rising fast. And if you're worried about that, you've got to, you have people who want to affect those policy changes and spend money on those policy changes. But somebody also is looking out is how much more in debt are we going to put the American people, the children, the grand children?

So you've got all kinds of counter balancing influences here. But if you have an administration that has a House and Senate, it's all the same party, they're going to get their way on, on things. If that's a change

and, you know, we know what the parties are now, if it goes to a Democratic executive branch and Democratic house and Senate, you are going to definitely see some budget changes.

PATTY: One of the items you noted was around continuing resolutions. While continuing resolutions have been the norm more than the exception for the last number of years, they're usually longer in a transition year and I think both of us can think of times where they went the whole year, because there was no agreement post-election on, on figuring out the budget. But can you talk a little bit about how agencies plan around those delays in receiving their appropriations?

JIM: As you said, it's rare that we actually start the fiscal year on October 1st with a budget for every single agency. I mean, it's terrible. And that's what the agencies have been living with for years. And they have to be able to understand looking back at what is the current budget year that the continuing resolution applies to. Sometimes it's not even the past year's, it's beyond that. And I think also, you know, coming in, you've got to be able to deal with shutdowns that come through continuing resolutions that haven't been passed. We even now have shutdowns based upon the debt ceiling needing to be passed. So it's not a normal process at all. Nobody would ever think they could run a business like this.

In fact, we're one of the only countries in the world that actually has shutdowns. So I think you have to first, you have to understand all of the dynamics around this. When you think you have a budget and then somebody tells you, "Well, your budget's actually based on something from two years ago," and that doesn't change. And by the way, that means you can't make any new investments. I mean, that's really a shock to people that you have to keep going on really just maintaining the status quo. And that's, that's bad for everybody because it's bad for the party who were elected, the will of the people. They can't actually make new investments. It's just bad because the country needs new things and we need to not continue some things.

So I think the continuing resolutions are a horrible fact of life that you have to live with. You have to understand them and you have to be ready for the impacts of those based upon prior years, the impacts of potential shutdowns and how when you get a continuing resolution, it's not always, okay, now you're good for a year, now you're good for three months, for two months. We're waiting for the Congress to go through their brakemanship again. And it's just a horrible way to try and operate anything, particularly something as large as a government or a large government agency. But it's a fact of life these days.

PATTY: Now you raised two really good points in there. I think the first one just to highlight is even though you might be continuing resolution at even your prior level, given whatever the administration has put up is your potential budget and what some of the arguments are in the controlling committees over your budget, there's no assurances that even the number of personnel you have in the budget you have to pay your salaries will actually be there by the time you actually receive your appropriation. And so,

number one, you're kind of running at risk that if there's a significant shift in any part of your account, you may need to make it up from another part of the account, basically, as soon as the appropriation has passed. And then the second piece, which you highlighted, is during a continuing resolution, you're not allowed new contracts, there's no new starts. You must continue to work on existing programs or projects, but you are extremely limited in what you can start now.

JIM: You're right, Patty. And, you know, even things like the federal employees, now there are two point some million of them, get a federal raise. A lot of times that's not included as part of the budget. So you have to eat that out of your other priorities. So you're right. Not only are you limited in what you could invest new, but sometimes you actually have to start cutting things to pay for things that are already mandatory. I think it's a shock to the system, to anybody who's new coming into the executive branch when they find out they have so little flexibility.

And if you think about the presidency, if you think okay for the budget they're trying to influence now, how much can they really influence by making some quick policy change, top of the line changes? If they can make those changes, then they really only have maybe the following two budget years to really impact one term or the four years, because after that, you could actually change to another administration where they're trying to make their policy changes.

So people who are going to be dealing with the budget process, coming in as a new team, a new administration, really need to understand how much wiggle room they have, which is not much, to try to make changes in this budget. Hopefully you get a budget passing, not a continuing resolution. Hopefully if you get a continuing resolution, you don't have too many things eating into it where you actually have to cut things. And you can't have new starts. And then hopefully you get a chance to really influence things with the Congress being on your side. There are so many hope words there that you really have to understand the realities of what you can and cannot do through the budget process.

PATTY: One of the other items that you highlighted was the smooth mechanism for transition. Can you describe a little bit about how you think career officials in particular can prepare for a smooth and gracious transition?

JIM: Well, again, I think if you're kept to be part of one of these transition groups within your agency you will be asked to coordinate across your agency as a career official. There will be a career official at every agency who's leading that agency transition coordination council. As I said, you may be tapped to actually, say it's the Biden team and they know you and like you, to come be part of the transition team. You may be part of the group, that's actually not just preparing the books, but doing the briefings. And you want to be as professional and helpful as possible. And you're a career person, get the politics out of that.

It doesn't do any good to wear your politics on your sleeve ever, it probably violates the Hatch Act. You don't want to do that. So you do want to make sure that you are ready do that.

As we talked about in the Homeland Security and National Security arena, there's probably going to be tabletop exercises during the transition, during that 78 days, and you want to be ready to assist the new team. And again, you're riding a little bit of a fine line because you have an outgoing team and you don't know what they're going to be like, you have an incoming team, you don't even know who's going to be on it.

But, you know, I think you have to just be as professional as possible and be really thinking about the greater good of this country, because it's so important.

PATTY: I agree. I've been asked on panels how I have reacted when faced with new leaders who are planning significant changes in policy direction during transitions. I've tried to emphasize that our system of government relies on the ability of career officials to effectively and professionally implement the changes directed by elected and appointed officials in order to achieve the mission. Sometimes you will have new leaders that you will think the world of, sometimes you won't see eye to eye. Your job is to support their ability to make informed decisions, including ensuring they understand the feasibility of implementation, and potential second order impacts or unintended consequences. But you're not there to try to substitute your judgment for theirs.

We've covered a lot of territory during this discussion. Are there other thoughts you have, other advice you have for government officials who might be preparing for the transition, in particular recommendations or things that were meaningful to you as you went through prior transitions, and you navigated this dynamic and sometimes chaotic period?

JIM: Well, I think making sure you keep things confidential. I mean, there will be things you learn about the new team. It might be details about their policy plans, and if they come in as a new team, right away most of their people are going to be looking at changes in policy. There are going to be new leaders coming in, but you may hear things. And if people know that you're involved, all your neighbors, all your friends want to know what's going on. You know, it's better in this town to just learn how to keep your mouth shut. And, there may be things that you're hearing from the incumbents that shouldn't be telling people.

I think you also ought to pay attention to what does the Federal Records Act require. And, and I think that's important - what becomes a federal record.

And I think, you know, one of the things that I think you and I talked about before was driven by a prior transition and in every single transition, something new comes up and you learn something on how to do things better for the next one. There's also always a lot of give and take; in a smooth transition, things just happen where the incoming team says, "Hey, could I use the Blair house for a few extra days or something like that." And when it's smooth and gracious, then the outgoing and the incoming work together to really make it work well.

PATTY: Do you have any additional comments or advice to offer to our listeners?"

JIM: Now, honestly, with this administration, it's been transitioned constantly because there's so many acting. But nevertheless, I mean as a civil servant, do your job, do it in a confidential way. Tell them everything that you can, and even if they think you're part of the enemy, even if they're going to crucify you later on, still do your job.

PATTY: I couldn't agree more. Some of the more interesting times I have had is where you're the one briefing a highly controversial topic, something that there's a clear difference in policy perspective, between the outgoing and the incoming. And you're the careerist who has to be there to explain not what the rhetoric was, not what the newspaper headline was. This is what it is on the ground. Here's how I would think about looking at the decisions made, the course we're on, the types of changes. How would you implement them?

One of my favorite transitions I ever got to do was in terms of, I felt like a political who was really asking me the right questions was in fact I was the only careerist in the room. And General Kelly's advisors were giving him the political dynamics. Here's what the Hill's expecting. Here's what the constituency grips. And he said, so I know the last team really well, and they're not idiots. Why didn't they do this? And me being the only one in the room, I basically said, here's why. And it was perfect because I could say it without arguing for it, or it being politically loaded. I could just say here was their rationale. It was a perfect opening.

JIM: Yeah. Well, I think you bring up a good point. That, generally, when you're meeting with the transition team, the transition team usually says, we don't want any political in the room. And, those politicals, they want to be in the room, but it really takes the transition team being very strong because you're sitting there in the middle saying, I can't tell my bosses. They can't come to a meeting, but the bosses should respect the fact that the incoming is saying, we don't want you in the room. We want to deal with the careerist only.

PATTY: Yeah.

JIM: And that's interesting. I mean all the dynamics going on.

PATTY: Jim, thank you so much for joining us on today's episode. It was a pleasure talking with you about your experiences.

SASHA: Thank you so much for tuning in to this episode of the Mission is Possible Presidential Transition miniseries. If you are interested in hearing more, look out for new episodes in this special series, and check out our other episodes on Apple Podcasts, TuneIn, Stitcher, or on the Guidehouse website.