
Since the publication of *Locked in the Cabinet*, Robert Reich's tale of life in the Clinton administration, the former secretary of labor has come under attack for relaying events with less than a strict adherence to the facts. But we believe that Reich has betrayed neither the truth, nor his readers. What he recounts is the truth as

he saw it, and we applaud his attempt to capture the nuances and nuisances of the nation's capitol. So while others may point to his failure to tell the literal truth in certain sections of the book, we stand behind the following excerpts as telling essential truths about life in the cabinet.

Unlocking the Cabinet

*Robert Reich provides an inside look
at life in the inner sanctum*

BY ROBERT B. REICH

March 2—Washington

This afternoon, I mount a small revolution at the Labor Department. The result is chaos.

Background: My cavernous office is becoming one of those hermetically sealed, germ-free bubbles they place around children born with immune deficiencies. Whatever gets through to me is carefully sanitized. Telephone calls are prescreened, letters are filtered, memos are reviewed. Those that don't get through are diverted elsewhere. Only Tom, Kitty, and my secretary walk into the office whenever they want. All others seeking access must first be scheduled, and have a sufficient reason to take my precious germ-free time.

I'm scheduled to the teeth. Here, for example, is today's timetable:

6:45 a.m.	Leave apartment
7:10 a.m.	Arrive office
7:15 a.m.	Breakfast with MB from the Post
8:00 a.m.	Conference call with Rubin
8:30 a.m.	Daily meeting with senior staff
9:15 a.m.	Depart for Washington Hilton
9:40 a.m.	Speech to National Association of Private Industry Councils
10:15 a.m.	Meet with Joe Dear (OSHA enforcement)
11:15 a.m.	Meet with Darla Letourneau (DOL

budget)

12:00	Lunch with JG from National League of Cities
1:00 p.m.	CNN interview (taped)
1:30 p.m.	Congressional leadership panel
2:15 p.m.	Congressman Ford
3:00 p.m.	NEC budget meeting at White House
4:00 p.m.	Welfare meeting at White House
5:00 p.m.	National Public Radio interview (taped)
5:45 p.m.	Conference call with mayors
6:15 p.m.	Telephone time
7:00 p.m.	Meet with Maria Echeveste (Wage and Hour)
8:00 p.m.	Kitty and Tom daily briefing
8:30 p.m.	National Alliance of Business reception
9:00 p.m.	Return to apartment

I remain in the bubble even when I'm outside the building—ushered from place to place by someone who stays in contact with the front office by cellular phone. I stay in the bubble after business hours. If I dine out, I'm driven to the destination and escorted to the front door. After dinner, I'm escorted back to the car, into the apartment building, into the elevator, and to my apartment door.

No one gives me a bath, tastes my food, or wipes my bottom—at least not yet. But in all other respects I feel like a goddamn two-year-old. Tom and Kitty insist it has to be this way. Otherwise I'd be deluged with calls, letters, meetings, other demands on my

From the book Locked In the Cabinet by Robert Reich. Copyright © 1997 by Robert B. Reich. Reprinted with the permission of Alfred A. Knopf, Inc.

time, coming from all directions. People would force themselves on me, harass me, maybe even threaten me. The bubble protects me.

Tom and Kitty have hired three people to handle my daily schedule (respond to invitations, cull the ones that seem most promising, and squeeze all the current obligations into the time available), one person to ready my briefing book each evening so I can prepare for the next day's schedule, and two people to "advance" me by making sure I get where I'm supposed to be and depart on time. All of them now join Tom and Kitty as guardians of the bubble.

"How do you decide what I do and what gets through to me?" I ask Kitty.

"We have you do and see what you'd choose if you had time to examine all the options yourself—sifting through all the phone calls, letters, memos, and meeting invitations," she says simply.

"But how can you possibly *know* what I'd choose for myself?"

"Don't worry," Kitty says patiently. "We know."

They have no way of knowing. We've worked together only a few weeks. Clare and I have lived together for a quarter century and even she wouldn't know.

I trust Tom and Kitty. They share my values. I hired them because I sensed this, and everything they've done since then has confirmed it. But it's not a matter of trust.

The *real* criterion Tom and Kitty use (whether or not they know it or admit it) is their own experienced view of what a secretary of labor with my values and aspirations *should* choose to see and hear. They transmit to me through the bubble only those letters, phone calls, memoranda, people, meetings, and events which they believe *someone like me* ought to have. But if I see and hear only what "someone like me" should see and hear, no original or out-of-the-ordinary thought will ever permeate the bubble. I'll never be surprised or shocked. I'll never be forced to rethink or re-evaluate anything. I'll just lumber along, blissfully ignorant of what I *really* need to see and hear—which are things that don't merely confirm my preconceptions about the world.

I make a list of what I want them to transmit through the bubble henceforth:

1. The angriest, meanest ass-kicking letters we get from the public every week.
2. Complaints from department employees about anything.
3. Bad news about fuck-ups, large and small.
4. Ideas, ideas, ideas: from department employees, from outside academics and researchers, from average

citizens. Anything that even resembles a good idea about what we should do better or differently. Don't screen out the wacky ones.

5. Anything from the President or members of Congress.

6. A random sample of calls or letters from real people outside Washington, outside government—people who aren't lawyers, investment bankers, politicians, or business consultants; people without college degrees.

7. "Town meetings" with department employees here at headquarters and in the regions. "Town meetings" in working-class and poor areas of the country. "Town meetings" in community colleges with adult students.

8. Calls and letters from business executives, including those who hate my guts. Set up meetings with some of them.

9. Lunch meetings with small groups of department employees, randomly chosen from all ranks.

10. Meetings with conservative Republicans in Congress.

I send the memo to Tom and Kitty. Then, still feeling rebellious and with nothing on my schedule for the next hour (the NEC meeting scheduled for 3:00 was canceled) I simply walk out of the bubble. I sneak out of my big office by the back entrance and start down the corridor.

I take the elevator to floors I've never visited. I wander to places in the department I've never been. I have spontaneous conversations with employees I'd never otherwise see. *Free at last.*

Kitty discovers I'm missing. It's as if the warden had discovered an escape from the state pen. The alarm is sounded: Secretary loose! Secretary escapes from bubble! Find the Secretary! Security guards are dispatched.

By now I've wandered to the farthest reaches of the building, to corridors never walked by anyone ranking higher than GS-12. I visit the mailroom, the printshop, the basement workshop.

The hour is almost up. Time to head back. But which way? I'm at the northernmost outpost of the building, in bureaucratic Siberia. I try to retrace my steps but keep coming back to the same point in the wilderness.

I'm lost.

In the end, of course, a security guard finds me and takes me back to the bubble. Kitty isn't pleased. "You shouldn't do that," she says sternly. "We were worried."

"It was good for me." I'm defiant.

"We need to know where you are." She sounds like the mother of a young juvenile delinquent.

"Next time give me a beeper, and I'll call home to see if you need me."

"You must have someone with you. It's not safe."

"This is the Labor Department, not Bosnia."

"You might get lost."

"That's ridiculous. How in hell could someone get lost in this building?"

She knows she has me. "You'd be surprised." She smiles knowingly and heads back to her office.

April 29—Washington

"The White House wants you to go to Cleveland." Kitty is sitting next to my desk, reading from her daily list of Things to Tell the Secretary.

"Why?"

She sighs. "Because we're hitting the first hundred days of the Clinton administration and the President along with his entire cabinet are fanning out across America to celebrate, because Ohio is important, because there are a lot of blue-collar voters out there, and because you haven't been to Ohio yet."

"What'll I do out there?" I feel bullied.

Kitty is glancing through the rest of the list while she reels off the obvious. "Visit a factory, go on local TV, meet the *Plain Dealer* editorial board, plant the flag. It'll be one day. No big deal."

She is about to move to the next item on her list, when I stop her. "*Who* wants me to go to Cleveland?"

Kitty rolls her eyes. This is going to be another one of those days. When will this guy learn that he has to be a cabinet secretary? "The White House. They called this morning."

"Houses don't make phone calls. *Who* called?"

"I don't know. Someone from Cabinet Affairs. Steve somebody. I'll schedule it. Now, can we move on?" She looks back at her list.

"How *old* is Steve?"

She puts down her pad and stares blankly at me. "I have *no idea* how old he is. What *difference* does it make? They want you to go to Cleveland. You're going to Cleveland." She picks up her pad. "Now, I have a whole list—"

"I bet he's under thirty."

"He probably *is* under thirty. A large portion of the American population is under thirty. So what?"

"Don't you see? Here I am, a member of the president's cabinet, confirmed by the Senate, the head of an entire government department with eighteen thousand employees, responsible for implementing a huge number of laws and rules, charged with helping people get better jobs, and *who is telling me what to do?*" I'm working myself into a frenzy of self-righteousness.

"Some twerp in the White House who has *no clue* what I'm doing in this job. Screw him. I won't go." Kitty sits patiently, waiting for the storm to pass.

But the storm has been building for weeks, and it won't pass anytime soon. Orders from twerps in the White House didn't bother me at the beginning. Now I can't stomach snotty children telling me what to do. From the point of view of the White House staff, cabinet officials are provincial governors presiding over alien, primitive territories. Anything of any importance occurs in the imperial palace, within the capital city. The provincial governors are important only in a ceremonial sense. They wear the colors and show the flag. Occasionally they are called in to get their next round of orders before being returned to their outposts. They are of course dazzled by the splendor of the court, and grateful for the chance to visit.

The White House's arrogant center is replicated on a smaller scale within every cabinet department. (The Washington hierarchy is, in fact, less like a pyramid than a Mandelbrot set, whose large-scale design is replicated within every component part, and then repeated again inside the pieces of every part.) The Labor Department's own arrogant center is located on the second floor, arrayed around my office. The twenty-somethings Tom and Kitty have assembled regard assistant secretaries with the same disdain that White House staffers have for cabinet officials. And each assistant secretary has his or her own arrogant center, whose twerps treat the heads of regional offices like provincial bumpkins.

"You'll go to Cleveland," Kitty says calmly. "The President is going to New Orleans, other cabinet members are going to other major cities. You're in Cleveland."

"I'll go *this* time." The storm isn't over, but I know I have no choice. I try to save what's left of my face. "But I'll be damned if I'm going to let them run my life."

In fairness, arrogant centers do serve legitimate purposes. They have a broader perspective than the view from any single province. And it is also occasionally true—dare I admit it even to myself?—that provincial governors go native, forgetting that their primary loyalty is to the crown, to the president, rather than to the inhabitants of the territories with whom they deal every day.

But I still hate those snotty kids.

Kitty is about to discuss the next item on her list. I interrupt again. "Next time when the White House gives me an order, find out how old he is. If he's under thirty, don't talk to me until you've checked with someone higher up."

"Yes, boss." Kitty is amused. ●

The pulse of the world from the heart of the nation.

Don't miss a thing. Subscribe to *The Washington Post National Weekly Edition*. And be privy to astute analysis of the policies, issues, debates and developments that make the world's pulse race.

You get the *inside* word here. Straight talk from the political pundits. In-depth coverage of the powers that be in Congress, the White House and abroad. Brilliant observations of the day's most significant political events. A roundup of rare, resourceful commentary on the Administration's every move.

This special weekly edition of *The Post* is read widely with the same high regard as our daily paper. It's full of exclusive reports and expert opinion to help you uncover the big-picture implications of today's agenda. It's written by individuals who are uniquely qualified to interpret Washington affairs with remarkable insight. Investigative reporters like Bob Woodward. Observers like Jim Hoagland and Robert Samuelson. Plus guest authorities in every field.

Week in and week out, *The Washington Post National Weekly Edition* keeps you abreast of our ever-swirling political scene. You get ...

■ **Capital Politics.** Penetrating assessments of the government's most controversial matters from the Pulitzer Prize-winning dean of American political analysts, David Broder.



Save 62% off the cover price!

■ **The Political Pulse.** Puts your finger on the significance of shifts and surges in the parties, voters, ethics, elections, campaigns, referendums, committees, lobbies and policies of America.

■ **The Global Pulse.** Amazing stories and investigative reports from the diplomatic front. We identify and examine the ripple effects of events as far away as the Persian Gulf to Peru, the Soviet Union to South Africa.

■ **The Economic Pulse.** Forecasts and appraisals that probe beneath the surface of such weighty economic matters as energy, credit, the stock market, international finance, banking, labor, trade and more.

■ **Commentary.** Lively debate and provocative ideas from George Will, Tom Edsall, Dan Balz and other foremost political thinkers and writers.

■ **Editorials.** Trenchant views edited by Pulitzer Prize-winning *Post* editorial page editor, Meg Greenfield — plus our eye-opening op-ed page and the amusing visual observations of Herblock, the three-time Pulitzer Prize-winning editorial cartoonist.

■ **The Government Pulse.** Stay on top of new directions in law, health care, defense and the environment. For example: AIDS prevention campaigns and federal funding. Global warming's price tag. The potential for postwar terrorism. The perils of mandatory retirement. And more.

■ **Book World.** The most important new books are subjected to candid, stimulating reviews by well-known scholars, opinion leaders and best-selling authors themselves.

■ **What Americans Think.** Enjoy fascinating poll results on timely topics: Presidential approval ratings, civil rights trends, military matters, lifestyle habits and more.

■ **Science Lab.** Study the outcome of revealing reports, special research experiments and bold, new discoveries in such fields as psychology, medicine and conservation.

Indeed, The Washington Post National Weekly Edition imparts a wealth of knowledge on politics, government, the economy, international affairs, business and industry. Go ahead. Read it for information. And use it to make decisions.

Subscribe now and save 62% off the cover price. Complete and return the coupon below — today.

**Save
62%**

(Complete, clip and mail coupon today.)

NATIONAL WEEKLY EDITION

The Washington Post

Subscription Savings Form

WM9701

☒ **YES!** Start my one-year subscription (52 issues) to *The Washington Post National Weekly Edition* for only \$39. That's a savings of \$9.00 off the basic subscription rate and \$62.40 off the newsstand price.

☐ Payment enclosed.
☐ Bill me later.

Complete and mail to:
**The Washington Post
National Weekly Edition**
P.O. Box 11331
Des Moines, IA 50340-1331

Name _____

Address _____

City _____

State _____

Zip _____

Satisfaction Guaranteed or your money back on all unmailed issues.

Allow 4-6 weeks for first issue to arrive

ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

In Congress's quest to balance the budget, the issue of tax cuts has, not surprisingly, emerged at the forefront of the debate. But as the following two articles show, not all tax cuts are created equal. Unfortunately, the reductions that politicians seem most interested in are not the ones that would provide the greatest benefit to either

the economy or the majority of taxpayers. Once again, monied interests and the politicians who do their bidding have skewed the debate. Unless the public starts paying more attention to the policies that their representatives are promoting, we could all wind up as losers in the budget deal.

The Real Class War

When it comes to taxes, it's the rich against the rest of us

BY MICHELLE COTTLE

APRIL 21, 1997, IS A DATE THAT WILL loom large in the memory of Deputy Treasury Secretary Lawrence H. Summers. Opening his mouth to comment on the ongoing budget negotiations, Summers promptly inserted his wingtip, remarking that the interests pushing for a cut in the estate tax were motivated by "selfishness." The deputy secretary went on to stress that "the overall tax package has to have as its thrust helping middle-class America." At the time, Summers probably assumed he was making a straightforward, albeit critical, observation about an economic policy debate. Turns out, he was fomenting class warfare.

Republican congressmen were the first to come out swinging: Within two days of Summers's remarks, Sen. Larry Craig (R-Id.) had whipped off a press release titled "Administration Says the Dead are Selfish." Newt Gingrich asserted that Summers "owes every American taxpayer an explanation for his unfair and irrational accusation." And the architect of the GOP tax plan, House Ways and Means Committee Chairman Bill Archer, decried: "It sounds like a comment that people who believe in socialism would make." Business and farm groups joined in the attack, with the head of the National Federation of Independent Business bashing Summers's remark as "pure ignorance." Just two days after his statement, Summers was forced to issue a public apology.

No matter. The fallout continued. The following

week, pundit James Glassman suggested that a more accurate definition of selfishness might be "the powerful urge that compels bureaucrats to demand more and more of other people's hard-earned money." A seniors association submitted a letter to *The Washington Times*, calling for Summers to be fired for promoting "class warfare" and the tenets "of the Communist Manifesto." GOP strategist and former Reagan speechwriter Ken Khachigian lambasted Summers for displaying "a predominant view of liberals who wallow eagerly in the rhetoric of class warfare and view with socialist passion the opportunity to confiscate another's wealth."

The beating Summers took at the hands of the right isn't surprising. Conservatives love to fling around terms like "socialist" and "class warmonger" whenever someone suggests that policy makers tend to favor rich, influential special interests. And, considering President Clinton's terror of rocking the bipartisan boat, it's no shock that Summers was encouraged to endure the humiliation of a public apology. (Particularly after Senate Majority Leader Trent Lott ominously noted that he hoped Summers hadn't damaged bipartisan efforts to reach a budget agreement.) Still, from the uproar spawned by Summers's comment, you'd have thought the deputy secretary had accused the House leadership of trafficking in child pornography.

It seems, however, that Lawrence Summers violated an even more sacred taboo. By suggesting that a