



Center for a
New American
Security

BIG ENERGY MAP

INTERVIEW WITH

MARCUS DUBOIS KING

Research Analyst
Environment and Energy Team
CNA

April 2, 2009

CHRISTINE PARTHEMORE: So, our report put out that an existing office within the Executive Office of the President, or a newly created office, could be empowered to carry out the job of sort of coordinating the all the different agencies, and making sure the President's energy strategy, whatever that strategy happens to be, gets implemented across all the different agencies, or you could establish a new office. Since then, they put Carol Browner in that position as energy and climate czar. Our recommendation was a national energy security council, but there's still a little bit of overlap. But it's still a little bit unclear how exactly the Executive Office of the President is going to be arranged or re-arranged to manage these issues. Sort of an ongoing analysis of what they're going to do, I think. So, in your previous work at DoE and DoD, how would you characterize your interactions with the Executive Office of the President? How did you receive policy direction from them? And, were people making sure it was implemented from the EOP, et cetera?

MARCUS DUBOIS KING: Well, first of all, I understand that the position that Carol Browner is in, she will be sort of the Climate Czar, but her position will be mostly limited to domestic affairs. If that's the case, it would be very necessary to also have somebody who has both domestic and international responsibility, hopefully housed in the same area.

PARTHEMORE: And, from your experience at either DoE or DoD or both, did you have one person in charge of coordinating down and making sure that energy policies were implemented through the offices that you worked in? Or how did that work?

KING: Well, first I wanted to say that, during the time of the Clinton administration - I served from 1994 to 2001 - I was available for most of both Clinton administrations as a political appointee. So this was a very long time ago, but also I was much younger. So, at that time, my responsibility was in the office of the Secretary of Energy, was to compile a weekly report of what the main accomplishments were within the department, and also things that might be of interest to the White House specifically. So, at that time, we fed all of our reports into Thurgood Marshall, Jr., who was the cabinet secretary at the time. He would then pull our weekly reports and roll it up into a larger document of about 20 or 30 pages that President Clinton would look at. Then we received feedback, directly through the cabinet secretary—this was the Office of Intergovernmental Affairs, back to the Cabinet agencies, and we would receive comments or accolades or criticisms of what we did put together. From that point, we would then relay that information back to our program offices, who would react to that. So, essentially, the central group, as far as I could tell, of coordination within the White House was really the Office of Cabinet Affairs or Intergovernmental.

PARTHEMORE: OK, great. Based on your experience with that, do you think that the new czar in her position, or, if they do at some point, morph that into a fuller council, like a coordinating council similar to the NSC or the NEC, what would you think might be the biggest challenges that they would face in their coordinating function with the agencies?

KING: Well, I think the first challenge might be that such an office would need some budget authority. In other words, to pull it together fast enough and to have an effective coordinating function, they would need to get some staff on board very quickly, and they would need the budget to be able to do that.

PARTHEMORE: Some of the participants in the workshop that we held earlier labeled the different agencies and groups within agencies as “tribal” in their behavior with one another, very territorial, and very focused on their own issues—in a narrow way, at times. Do you think that the agencies—your current observations of how things stand now, or based on your own experience, whichever you want to say. Do you think any of the agencies will tend to reject too much interagency coordination, or have trouble with it? Or, do you think that, in the current environment, the agencies are eager to work together?

KING: Well, I think you hit it on the latter point. I think energy security is so important now that, even if the agencies might define it in a different way, that they are very willing to get together and they are very hungry for guidance. So I think in this situation there is tribalism, and you always have that in government, but I think the spirit of cooperation and the urgency of the issue will bring them together in a way we haven’t seen around other issues.

PARTHEMORE: Excellent. On to federal agency infrastructure. We had several recommendations in our report for many different agencies. One was that they find a distinct home for cap and trade—that’s the EPA or otherwise it needs some study on how the revenue stream is going to function and whatnot-- that all agencies have a central coordinating council or office to be sort of a hub for people to go to, to seek information on what they’re doing – that they should establish a national climate service – some of the recommendations for DoD and DoE and whatnot. As far as the major reorganization or new offices or whatnot, do you think it’s appropriately or overly ambitious in the near term to try and implement a lot of major changes? Or do you think it would be more prudent right now to sort of wrest control of what’s there right now? Or a combination of both?

KING: Well, I think the idea of what’s occurring in the near term has really changed. We’ve seen the price of energy go down; it’s only about two dollars a gallon now for gasoline. And, given the fact that the energy crisis doesn’t seem as important in some ways as it did before, along with the idea that we’re now in a very difficult financial situation, I really think that the White House is more absorbed with solving the economic crisis at this time, so it would be very difficult to put together this sort of entity, in the short term, as you said.

PARTHEMORE: So for major changes, you kind of need an impetus, or sort of a crisis situation, or for that to just be sort of just be the biggest problem going on to be able to get the political capital to do that? Like, to create major agency changes?

KING: Yeah, for instance I think that one of the ideas was to use the funding from cap and trade for things like climate change adaptation, and now that’s been opposed on Capitol Hill due to the financial situation.

PARTHEMORE: Gotcha. Excellent. Okay, on to the Department of Defense. Do you think, based on your time there, and experience in your current position working with DoD, that DoD should have a stronger voice in developing energy and climate policy? And do you think that folks at DoD will be comfortable with that? Right now, they’re mainly a consumer agency, and they have regulations and policies that they have to abide by--- which they’re always happy to

do, of course, but we suggested that DoD have a stronger voice in the policy creation phase. So, any thoughts about that and how it would go over there?

KING: Well, I do think DoD would be very comfortable with that role today, based on the guidance that they'll have from the White House—knowing that the White House is very comfortable and most likely, there's a very wide umbrella of the agencies that could be involved. A reason why I think it's very important for DoD to be involved is just what you said. They are a consumer, but they happen to be the largest consumer of energy in the United States. So, as the largest consumer of energy, they should be at the table. But also for another reason and that's that there are national security implications of climate change. In fact, there are some security dimensions of even the strategies for mitigating climate change, depending on what they do to the economy, and also their effect, potentially, on military operations. DoD is also important in greenhouse gas mitigation strategies because they can act as a seeding bed for technologies that can be spun on. So the types of technologies in energy efficiency and renewable energy that might be part of the solution to climate, could actually be developed within the defense complex. So these are a few of the reasons why I think the Department of Defense should definitely have a seat at the table.

PARTHEMORE: Excellent. We do, too. And, in your time at DoD you had some coordination with the State Department, I believe? Can you just sort of describe how you operated with them and coordinated with them at all?

KING: Sure. The way that I would characterize this—while still trying to be careful, of course—is there is a culture clash between the Defense Department and the Department of State. One joke we had was that whenever we had a meeting over at the State Department, it led to another meeting. But, when we had a meeting at the Pentagon, we decided that a meeting then resulted in assignments. So there was a very different culture at the time. And I think this culture's been borne out recently where you've seen the Department of Defense conducting foreign policy in a lot of areas, where the Department of State would normally think that they had jurisdiction, or would normally, perhaps, probably have jurisdiction. But in terms of our interaction with the State Department, I did work on climate treaties, I worked on the Montreal Protocol, and, what we found was that the State Department, in no uncertain terms, had the lead in terms of policy on these treaties and we supported them, more as a technical agency. I found this also during my time at the Department of Energy. So there was no doubt that, in terms of policy, the State Department is on first, but we've had some issues with integration.

PARTHEMORE: Okay. Excellent. And how are policies related to environmental agreements implemented within DoD—Montreal Protocol and Kyoto and anything that the United States was party to?

KING: Right. Well, within the Department of Defense, we had ad-hoc committees, which were called IPTs, or Integrated Product Teams. And what we did was bring together representatives of all the military agencies and get input from them on how to then implement these changes. A lot of OSD's role, as you probably know, is coordinative within the Department of Defense. And so, a lot of what we did was education about what the rules were, and then do some give and take and studies to figure out how to implement those policies within the defense military agencies.

And we actually found that they were pretty receptive, once we were able to work with them – to find ways that didn't have an adverse impact on military operations.

PARTHEMORE: Excellent. On to Department of Energy, your home before DoD. So our report at CNAS, we had a couple of suggestions for DoE—that they elevate a strategy office, that they have a BRAC-type process for the national labs, et cetera. We've gotten a fair bit of push-back on our own recommendations.

KING: Have you really?

PARTHEMORE: Yes, we have. It's been interesting. All very good responses, though, good criticisms and critiques, very helpful. But, do you have any thoughts on restructuring DoE or, if that were to happen sometime in the future, depending on what the nation's priorities are, what would be some of the most important things to consider, given both its responsibilities, and how its responsibilities are split, and how it functions internally?

KING: Yeah well, that's a big – a lot to think about. But I would say, I was there in 1994, during an attempt, led by Newt Gingrich, to dismantle the Department of Energy. And the lines under which they wanted to dismantle it was to separate the weapons functions out from the energy functions. As I understand it, the budget today is about \$25 billion, so well over half of that budget relates to nuclear weapons stockpile stewardship, non-proliferation programs, and the environmental management program, which is cleaning up after the legacy of nuclear weapons. So, it really is a weapons agency. And, I think resulting from the idea back in 1994 to separate out that function, the NNSA was then founded. And so, the NNSA does take all of the weapons functions under one path—the Nuclear Security Administration. So, going from there, I think that the idea of separating out the energy function is positive, because what you have left is predominantly an energy research agency, and it oversees the national labs. But the DoE Office of Science really takes the lead for energy research. So I wouldn't be adverse to taking out that part, making the Secretary of Energy the chief science officer related to climate change and these other issues, and leaving it at that for there. But another essential part of this is the role of the national labs, which I think you alluded to in terms of a BRAC commission for the national labs. The national labs, as you know, were related to the Manhattan project; there is a lot of redundancy built into the complex, and that was because the spirit of cooperation between two different laboratories, the rivalry would actually speed up the production of nuclear weapons, which was important at that time. But the rivalry would also encourage each lab to have an even higher quality of standards. So we're not in that time period anymore, so I do think there are some redundancies within the labs, and that should really be looked at, and maybe reorganized.

PARTHEMORE: I hadn't thought about the benefits of that competition-

KING: And I think there are some other parts to your question, but I-

PARTHEMORE: Oh, yeah, totally fine. Part of one of your jobs at DoE was to gather information about what was going on everywhere, and compile it, if I'm not mistaken, and sort of communicate the Department's accomplishments outward. Was it challenging to gather information around the department or was it very well-coordinated? And, if so, either way, what

sort of lessons would you suggest from that—things that worked or didn't work for any departments today that are trying to have a function where there's an individual person or office coordinating all the energy and climate change information, to sort of be a one-stop-shop on what they're doing?

KING: Right, well again, my perception was even earlier in my career when I was at the Department of Energy back in the very beginning of the Clinton Administration in 1993-'94. You have to understand the context at that time when we came in, we were perceived—because again, the Department of Energy is really a weapons agency, we were perceived as a group that wanted to dismantle nuclear weapons. And one of the problems we had, communicating with the defense parts of the department was the fact that A, we were seen as an arms control group of people— you know again, the Clinton political appointees – but we were also seen as a group of “greenies” that were moving against sort of the fossil fuel entrenched interests that were both in and outside the department. So for this reason, I don't think we immediately gained the trust of the career people in the program offices. So, it took a while to sort of gain that trust and be able to get to the point where we would collect information from them that we could then reflect out. So, an analogy might be today, the fact that people who would come in as political appointees to the agencies might be seen by the career employees as perhaps overzealous on the idea of climate change. Now, if that is the case, I think there's a certain amount of patience that's warranted, because these issues were not... thinking about these issues wasn't encouraged in the previous administration. So I think it'll take some time for the career people to really develop their ideas, but also to gain that measure of trust with the political leadership that comes in.

PARTHEMORE: Excellent. And the one last, very interesting thing from your career at DoE is that you were part of the U.S.- South African bi-national commission. Could you speak at all about how DoE coordinates with other federal agencies in the areas of foreign policy and diplomacy, or how it was when you were there? Whether or not you know of any changes? And does that kind of coordination on international particular issues, is it mostly at the working levels, or the cabinet levels, or it is pretty much all through the hierarchies?

KING: Sure. Well, in my experience I worked on the U.S.- South African Bi-National Commission. That was one of two commissions, that were better known by the names of the Vice President and the Prime Minister of Russia and South Africa, so it was Gore-Mbeke and Gore-Chernomyrden Commissions at that time. But you can see that the Vice President lent his name to it, but also lent his leadership. So, in this case, the instructions really came from the White House, from the Vice President's office, then were handed down to the State Department in terms of negotiating the agreements. But on the other hand, in terms of implementing the agreements, the implementation fell to different committees, which were taken over by what I would call the technical agencies. So an idea of a technical agency in this example would be the Department of Energy, who could really do things like set up joint projects that would provide assistance or renewable energy to those that were needy in South Africa. So, in terms of implementing the projects, I would say that the technical agencies like DoD had basically free will to operate. But then the political coordination and the negotiation of the arrangements happened more, as you sort of alluded to, at the highest levels.

PARTHEMORE: Okay. Excellent. And then did you have any sort of overarching comments or things that you wanted to talk about with regard to the report or anything like that or did you fit them all in?

KING: Well, one thing I noticed about the report is I haven't visualized the entire Energy Map, but I know that it was suggested; and so one of the things that I noticed about it is there wasn't emphasis on the Department of Homeland Security - if they might have any role in this. I think energy security was defined by the report as the assurance of a reliable supply of energy, and so I just thought it might be helpful that those who protect the energy infrastructure would also be counted within the report. Also, I noticed that the Office of Science and Technology Policy, which has been reconstituted under John Holdren as the science advisor to the President, didn't seem to have much of a role in the report as well, although I might have missed it.

PARTHEMORE: Not in the report body, no. We have it flagged on the Map, so there is a little description there. But actually, no, not very much.

King: One other idea I had, and this probably falls under the Department of Energy, is that it might be helpful to establish someone who really coordinates with the universities in terms of research, because so much of the research on energy efficiency and renewable energy would be done by the private sector, so I hate to be the one to recommend another czar position, because that's been done so many times, but I do think there could be a position within this National Energy Security Council or within the White House body that coordinates energy security that looked specifically at universities, and the role they could play in developing new technologies.

PARTHEMORE: Excellent. Do you know much about the innovation centers thing they're doing? Is that just funneling money out for right now?

KING: I am not sure.

PARTHEMORE: It's a universities' program, but I'm not sure if there is a coordinating function. It might just be a grant-making function. I'm not sure.

KING: ...Department of Energy?

PARTHEMORE: We're trying to figure it out more. The money came through the Stimulus and it's going out. We just don't if there is somebody in DOE actually doing what you said. We're trying to figure that out too.

KING: Right, I think the top priority in terms of establishing an office would be, in a way, to go with what you have right now, because it's very important to give some guidance for how the stimulus money can be spent.

PARTHEMORE: Wonderful. Thank you, thank you.

[END]