



IN THE EXECUTIVE BRANCH

How Does the Governor Organize His Power and Staff?

by Anne Jackson

This regular Insight feature focuses on how the executive branch of state government goes about making public policy. In this article, Insight focuses on how Gov. James G. Martin has organized the Office of the Governor, and how that office handles various policy decisions.

Jim Martin had been Governor less than six months when the 12 Republicans in the N.C. Senate asked to meet with him. The 1985 General Assembly was in full swing, and things weren't going well for Martin's "12 disciples," as the GOP senators called themselves.

Seated around the Governor's blue-carpeted, walnut-paneled office in the Administration Building, the legislators aired their complaints:

- Legislative liaison Beverly Lake Jr. had too many responsibilities, they said. Non-legislative duties left him only three or four hours a day for lobbying — not enough time to do the job.

- Lack of communication between the Governor's office and the Republican delegation meant the GOP legislators frequently learned about Martin's policy initiatives from newspaper stories. They did not receive position papers or copies of speeches, and they often were not told when the Governor planned to visit their districts.

- Republicans felt left out in behind-the-scenes negotiations between their Governor and Democratic legislative leaders. In general, they were unhappy with the way things were being run, especially by the Governor's top staff.

At the end of the session, Sen. Jim Johnson (R-Cabarrus) spoke up. What Martin needed, he said, was a chief of staff. "I just adamantly said, 'You were elected to be Governor, not the damn first

sergeant. Get yourself one and take names and kick ass,'" Johnson recalled recently. Martin did not like the idea. "He resisted it. He resisted any advice along those lines," said Johnson.

The Governor had his reasons. A Congressman for 12 years and a college chemistry professor before that, Martin had never worked in state government. He had always run his own shop — whether it was a congressional office in Washington or his academic office at Davidson College. The Governor wanted to know how agencies operated, what made them tick, and he thought the best way to do that was to supervise many of the day-to-day operations of the \$8 billion-a-year state bureaucracy himself.

"I knew that even with a chief of staff, many questions were still going to come to me," Martin explained in a recent interview. "And I felt that if I chaired a group of executive assistants ... but maintained that central responsibility myself, it would compel me to learn very quickly about state government and all the different kinds of programs that we have, and it would keep me better informed about what was going on."

So the Governor — a quick learner whom aide Alan Pugh describes as an "information sponge" — set up shop in the Administration Building, closer to the hub of the bureaucracy than the historic office in the state Capitol where his predecessor, Democrat Jim Hunt, had worked.

Four top advisers — Budget Director C.C.

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Cameron, General Counsel James R. Trotter, then-Special Assistant for Policy R. Jack Hawke Jr., and long-time aide James S. Lofton, who held the title of Staff Director—formed the inner circle. These four, along with other close associates from Charlotte—political consultant Brad Hays, former state GOP Chairman Robert W. Bradshaw, and Martin's brother Joe, a senior vice president at NCNB—helped the Governor mold his fledgling administration, only the second of this century to be elected with Republicans in control.

For two years (1985 and 1986), Martin acted as his own chief of staff, overseeing some 20 of the 85 employees who work in the state's Washington, D.C. office, in the Western Governor's Office in Asheville, the Eastern Governor's Office in New Bern, and in the Governor's Office in Raleigh, and supervising a \$4 million office budget. Martin now admits there were problems with that system, but he believes his initial hands-on approach paid dividends. "I think in retrospect if I had decided to turn all that over to a chief of staff to figure out that organization and had put everybody subservient to a chief of staff, we would have had a different and probably more cumbersome organization than we have now," the Governor said.

But none of his closest allies had ever worked in state government, which complicated Martin's dealings with the Democrat-dominated legislature that came to town only a month after he took office. Not all of his allies were politically astute, and Martin acknowledges that he had "far too many" people reporting to him in decisions that subordinates easily could have made. To give himself some breathing room, Martin moved out of the Administration Building in 1986 and back to the state Capitol, where every North Carolina Governor except Bob Scott and Jim Holshouser has had his office since it was built in 1840. (Scott had moved out while the Capitol was being renovated; Holshouser used the Capitol only as a ceremonial office).

Insiders say Martin at first had too many workers from his political campaign on his office payroll, and they cared less about making state government work than maintaining political strength. And they say Martin relied heavily on two top advisers—Cameron and former Secretary of Commerce Howard Haworth, both wealthy businessmen who were unfamiliar with the intricacies of running a state government.

Little glitches occurred repeatedly. Bills submitted to the General Assembly arrived with misspelled words or missing pages. The Governor's

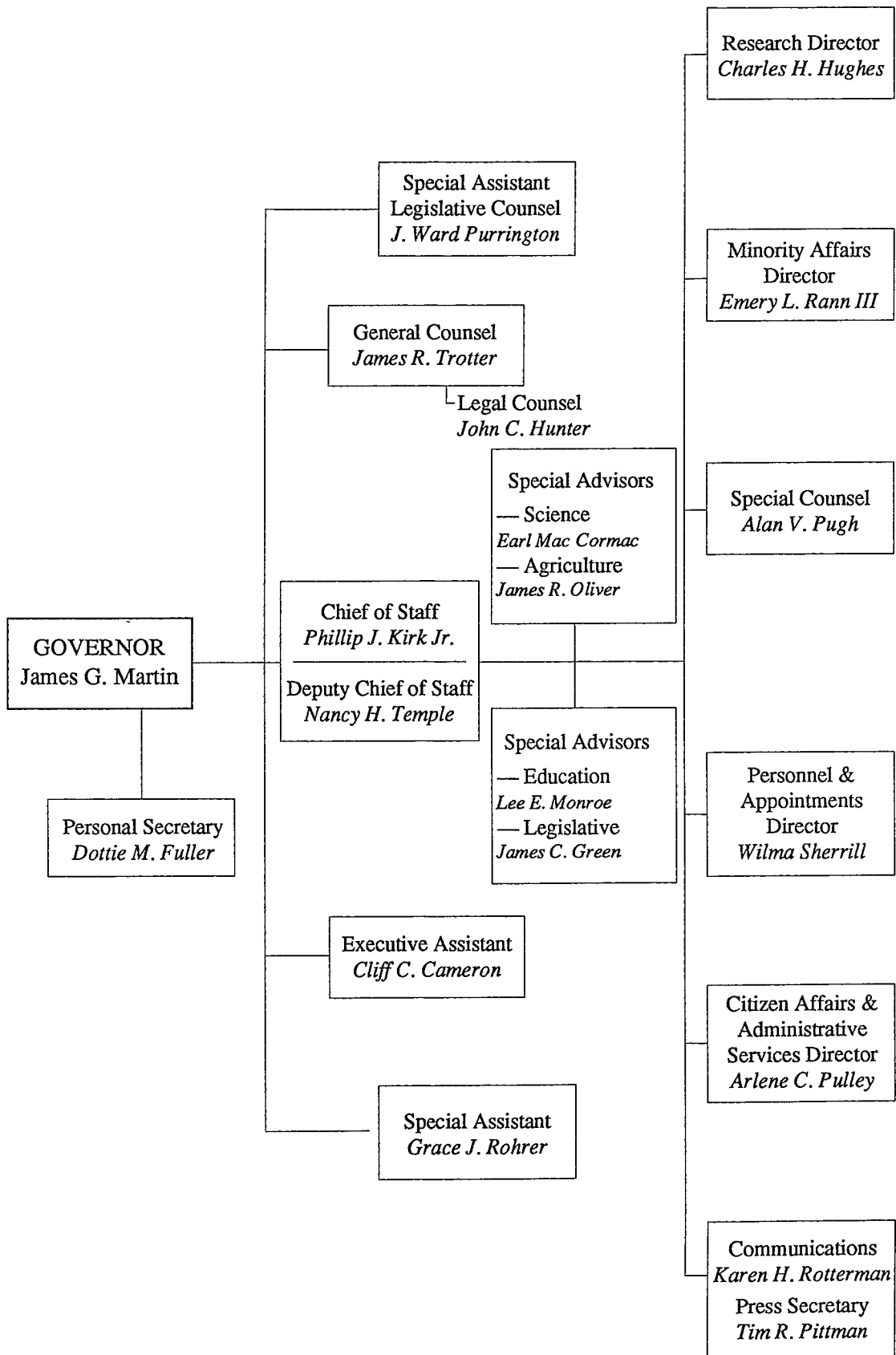
office declined an invitation for him to speak to the state National Guard convention—although the Governor is the state commander-in-chief, and the politically influential audience would have numbered in the hundreds. Organization and communication problems festered, particularly among GOP legislators. "When [Martin] went charging off into battle and looked over his shoulder, he often didn't have all the Republican troops behind him, and he couldn't understand that," says Johnson. "He had sort of a commanding, demanding attitude when he first took over. Now, it's more of a partnership attitude."

Observers believe Phillip J. Kirk deserves credit for smoothing the course of Martin's ship of state. To the relief of many supporters, Martin appointed a chief of staff in February 1987. Kirk, the man he tapped for the sensitive job, had been Martin's secretary of human resources, overseeing the largest department in state government. Before that, the 43-year-old Salisbury native had worked as administrative assistant to former Republican U.S. Rep. James T. Broyhill, as administrative assistant to then-Gov. James E. Holshouser Jr., as Holshouser's secretary of human resources, and as a one-term member of the state Senate himself. Thus, Kirk brought four strengths to the new post: He had worked on Capitol Hill, he had experience in the governor's office, he had run a large state agency, and he had both served in and worked with the legislature. Kirk had experience that Martin lacked, especially with competing institutions like the General Assembly.

"It's almost like Phil has had a graduate degree in running someone else's office," notes Sen. Robert V. Somers (R-Rowan), a former political adversary of Kirk's. "If I were in such a position I could do no better than getting Phil Kirk to run it for me."

The boyish-looking Kirk oversees day-to-day operations of the Governor's office and its staff. He acts as gatekeeper to Martin's inner office. With Trotter and Cameron, Kirk forms the newly-constituted inner circle known as "the troika." But even Trotter and Cameron usually go through Kirk to see Martin. Hawke has left the Governor's office to become state GOP chairman; Lofton has been shifted to a cabinet post.

Throughout the Governor's office, staffers have learned to recognize the handwritten memos Kirk scatters on desktops, inquiring about the status of a project or giving directions. "They're like leaflets dropped from a bomber," quipped one aide. Kirk goes through Martin's mail, assists in scheduling, helps shape policy. But he also takes time for



personal gestures. He telephones employees on their birthdays and plays on the office softball team. He instituted a monthly employee newsletter, and invites five staffers a week for a brown bag lunch in his office in the Capitol across the hall from the Governor. "Trying to improve teamwork and communication were two of the biggest challenges I faced when I came," says Kirk.

Helping Kirk is Nancy Temple, his former assistant secretary at the Department of Human Resources, as deputy chief of staff. But Kirk is never too busy for some things. In the middle of an interview, Kirk stopped to take a call from House Minority Whip Ray Warren (R-Mecklenburg), explaining, "Another policy I've instituted is any time a legislator calls, I'm interrupted."

Lawmakers appreciate the effort. While members have always received copies of the Governor's weekly public schedule and press releases, they now receive copies of his major speeches as well. "You can call over there now and get an answer almost immediately," says Senate GOP Whip Paul Smith (R-Rowan). "I'm still waiting on some answers from last year" [before the changes were made].

Martin made other changes when he brought in Kirk. He appointed Lofton secretary of administration, and named Hawke chairman of the state GOP when Bradshaw stepped down. The Governor brought in Grace Rohrer, his former secretary of administration, as his special assistant for policy.

A year earlier, Martin hired Ward Purrington, a former two-term state legislator, to succeed Lake as his legislative lobbyist after Martin named Lake to a Superior Court judgeship. Both Purrington and Rohrer enjoy cabinet status and easy access to Martin's office. In fact, they are among the few who may bypass Kirk to see the Governor.

Martin receives recommendations from a variety of committees inside his office. "We're trying to get issues better defined and refined," says Kirk. Rohrer is developing "cabinet clusters" to examine such issues as the family, education, economic development, infrastructure and public safety, and a "policy council" to make policy recommendations to Martin. Pugh, the Governor's special counsel, sits on committees that examine scheduling, judicial appointments, nominations for boards and commissions, and pending legislation. The groups usually are small — four to six people — and send their recommendations up the line toward the Governor's office.

The chief executive meets regularly with staff and, during the legislation sessions, with Republican

lawmakers to discuss timely topics. Tuesdays and Thursdays he meets at 8:30 a.m. with Kirk, Trotter and Cameron. Topics range from legislation to lawsuits involving the state to politics. But unlike his predecessor, Martin does not have regular meetings with the Speaker of the House and the Lieutenant Governor. While the legislature is in session, Martin meets most Monday afternoons with the five top GOP lawmakers: Sen. Laurence Cobb (R-Mecklenburg) and Rep. Betsy Cochrane (R-Davie), the minority leaders in their respective chambers; Rep. Coy Privette, the GOP Caucus leader; and Minority Whips Warren and Smith. Purrington and Kirk also attend. A weekly breakfast on Thursdays brings together that same group, plus Trotter and Cameron.

After hearing advice from these sources — as well as from his special advisers on agriculture (Jim Oliver), education (Lee Monroe), science (Earl MacCormac), and legislation (former Lt. Gov. James C. Green) — Martin says he calls the shots on tough policy questions. "I can tell you that generally I make those decisions," the Governor says. "Everybody else gets a chance to have their say."

Martin, of course, runs his governorship differently from Hunt; he doesn't rely as closely upon his secretary of administration as Hunt did, nor has he come as close to assuming the reins in the budget office, as Hunt did. But Martin does seek expert information when making a decision, and he rarely second-guesses his decisions, those who know him say. As Senator Johnson describes Martin, "He is strong-minded, strong-willed, totally confident in his decision-making processes, willing but reluctant to change his course once he's got his mind made up, but more flexible than he was two years ago."

Here is a rundown of Martin's top aides and advisers:¹

Chief of Staff: Phil Kirk (salary of \$66,048) got a raise when he moved to the Governor's Office in February 1987. He now makes more than cabinet secretaries, who are paid \$64,096. He got to keep his state-owned car, a Chevrolet Caprice for which he pays \$3 a day, according to the state budget office. Kirk's top assistant, Nancy Temple, earns \$47,256.

General Counsel: Jim Trotter (\$64,500) practiced law in Rocky Mount for more than three decades. Deliberative and thoughtful, Trotter won Martin's respect during the 1984 campaign, when Trotter headed Martin's Nash County bid.

Executive Assistant and Budget Officer: C.C. Cameron (Cameron declines a state salary, but the state pays the \$1,020-per-month rent on his Raleigh apartment) is a Democrat and the retired chairman of

First Union National Bank.

Legislative Liaison: Ward Purrington (\$69,600 plus expenses) was deputy secretary of revenue until Martin appointed him to succeed I. Beverly Lake Jr. Purrington says his salary is higher than other key Martin aides because he is paid on a contract basis that does not provide health insurance or other benefits.

Legislative Adviser: Former Lt. Gov. Jimmy Green, a Democrat, also has a contract, one paying him \$250 per day while the legislature is in session, plus \$79 per day for expenses. Green has been paid for some months even when the legislature is not in session. Total compensation to Green in 1985 was \$75,823, and in 1986, it was \$61,452.

Science Adviser: Earl Mac Cormac (\$69,204) is a former philosophy professor at Davidson College, where Martin once taught. The gregarious — some say flamboyant — Mac Cormac also heads the N.C. Board of Science and Technology.

Special Assistant for Policy: Grace Rohrer (\$64,104) receives her salary through the Department of Administration, where she heads up policy planning, the state Council on the Status of Women and Women in the Economy, and the Policy Council.

Special Counsel: Alan Pugh (\$58,692) handles patronage and political contacts for Martin, special projects, and advance work for special events. Pugh also oversees the Governor's western office in Asheville and the eastern office in New Bern.

Research Director: Former state Rep. Charles Hughes (\$57,660) researches issues for Martin. Before taking his current post in 1985, Hughes represented Henderson County in the N.C. House from 1981-1985.

Communications Director: Karen Hayes Rotterman (\$54,096) oversees the Governor's press office. She worked in the public liaison office of the U.S. Department of Agriculture before joining the Martin campaign in 1984. Press Secretary Tim Pittman (\$37,656) is a former Raleigh correspondent for the *Greensboro News & Record*. Neither Rotterman nor Pittman performs the same top policy advisory role that Press Secretary J. Gary Pearce performed under Hunt.²

Education Adviser: Lee Monroe (\$54,096) is a former administrator at Shaw University in Raleigh.


Director of Personnel and Appointments: Wilma Sherrill (\$53,580) oversees job placement within the administration and the Governor's appointments to boards and commissions.

Director of Citizen Affairs and Administrative Services: Arlene Pulley (\$48,300) is in charge

of citizen affairs, acting as an ombudsman, coordinating the volunteer program, and managing correspondence. She worked for Green when he was lieutenant governor.

Agriculture Adviser: Jim Oliver (\$34,776) is paid through the Department of Commerce. He formerly was Master of the North Carolina State Grange.

Administrative Assistant: Dottie Fuller (\$30,552) works as the Governor's personal secretary. Her car — parked daily in the Capitol driveway — bears a plate emblazoned with "First Secretary."

Director of Minority Affairs: Emery Rann (\$29,304) once worked as an intern in Martin's congressional office. 

FOOTNOTES

¹Also under the Governor is the Cabinet, which includes the nine Departments of Administration, Commerce, Correction, Crime Control and Public Safety, Cultural Resources, Human Resources, Natural Resources and Community Development, Revenue, and Transportation. The Office of the Governor itself was created in 1971. The nine other departments, known as the Council of State, are under the control of individually-elected officials. They are the Office of Lieutenant Governor and the Departments of Secretary of State, State Auditor, State Treasurer, Justice, Agriculture, Labor, Insurance and Public Instruction. These 19 departments comprise the Executive Cabinet.

²See Bob Dozier, "At the Top of the Heap," *N.C. Insight*, Vol. 1, No. 3, p. 12-15, for a description of how Gov. Jim Hunt organized his staff.

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