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Ex-Aide Insists White House Puts Politics Ahead of Policy

WASHINGTON, Dec. 1 — A former member of the Bush administration says in a magazine interview that the White House values politics over domestic policy, lacking both policy experts and an apparatus to support them, and has failed to achieve a "compassionate conservative" agenda.

John J. Dilulio Jr., a domestic affairs expert and professor at the University of Pennsylvania, was appointed by President Bush to lead the White House Office of Faith-Based and Community Initiatives in the second week of the new administration. He quit in August 2001 amid struggles with Congress and Christian conservatives over the direction of the president's plan to give more federal money to religious charities.

In an interview with Esquire magazine, Mr. Dilulio said: "There is no precedent in any modern White House for what is going on in this one: a complete lack of a policy apparatus. What you've got is everything, and I mean everything, being run by the political arm. It's the reign of the Mayberry Machiavellis."

"Mayberry Machiavellis" is Mr. Dilulio's term for the political staff and most particularly Karl Rove, Mr. Bush's chief adviser. He describes Mr. Rove as "enormously powerful, maybe the single most powerful person in the modern, post-Hoover era ever to occupy a political-adviser post near the Oval Office."

Mr. Dilulio says the religious right and libertarians trust Mr. Rove "to keep Bush 43 from behaving like Bush 41 and moving too far to the center or inching at all center-left."

As a result, Mr. Dilulio says, the administration has accomplished almost nothing domestically except Mr. Bush's tax cut and an education bill, which Mr. Dilulio describes as "really a Ted Kennedy bill."

"There is a virtual absence as yet of any policy accomplishments that might, to a fair-minded nonpartisan, count as the flesh on the bones of so-called compassionate conservatism," he says. What there is, he says, is "on-the-fly policy-making by speechmaking."

Mr. Dilulio, a Democrat, did not directly criticize Mr. Bush in the article. A White House spokeswoman said White House advisers had not seen the article and would not comment on it.

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