

Former Florida doctor hoping for Bush's call

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Author: JOHN HARWOOD

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WASHINGTON - Donald Macdonald has already taken most of the pictures from his office walls and packed up the files he wants to keep. His job lasts just three more days.

But he's not ready to leave the capital - not after 4 1/2 heady years with the Reagan administration, the last two as White House drug adviser. So this week the one-time Clearwater pediatrician looks ahead to George Bush's presidency, and hopes for the call that, so far, hasn't come.

"The difficult thing," Macdonald says, "is the not knowing."

For all the pomp and circumstance of inaugural week, that uneasy feeling makes this a bittersweet time for much of official Washington. As the capital prepares to celebrate the birth of a new administration, veterans of the old one wait and wonder if there's room for them.

It happens every time the White House changes hands. By the count of the Bush transition team, the new president has nearly 5,000 appointments to make, which means a similar number will either depart willingly or angle for a new assignment.

There is an irony in the longing of those Reagan Republicans to hang on. Like the president himself, many came as antagonists of government and what Washington represented. But as Macdonald and his wife, Bobbie, have discovered, living and working inside the Beltway can be intoxicating.

"I have Potomac Fever and so does Mac," she says, acknowledging the disease that commonly infects Washington office-holders.

They were first bitten nearly five years ago. Macdonald, now 57, was practicing pediatrics and speaking out against the dangers of adolescent drug abuse. His son, Andy, had developed a drug problem a few years earlier, and his successful enrollment in the Straight Inc. drug-treatment program made Macdonald a vocal booster of the organization.

His efforts caught Nancy Reagan's eye, and in 1984 Macdonald became director of the Alcohol, Drug Abuse and Mental Health Administration. The following year he began a brief stint as acting assistant secretary of the massive Health and Human Services Department. In 1987 he became Reagan's drug adviser.

Victory in the drug war may not be in sight, but Macdonald counts some successes in his tenure. Against considerable opposition, he pushed for drug tests in the workplace and a policy of "zero tolerance."

The results of the policy have sometimes been lampooned - the Customs Service has seized large boats over tiny quantities of marijuana - but Macdonald points to developments such as a Missouri law that lifts the driver's licenses of teen-agers caught possessing drugs. He believes that society's attitudes toward drugs generally have shifted.

"The major positive changes are an awareness that drugs are dangerous," Macdonald says, noting that not too many years ago some believed cocaine offered glamorous, non-addictive recreation.

At one point, Macdonald cherished the hope that Bush might name him drug "czar," a new post that Congress created last year. (In the process lawmakers abolished the job of White House drug adviser.) But last week, the president-elect selected William Bennett, Reagan's outspoken former education secretary, for the job.

Now Macdonald faces the possibility that the drug war will go on without him. If his present \$85,000-a-year job can't

match the six-figure salaries and job security of medical practice, departing still is not a pleasant prospect.

"You really do have a chance to make an impact," he explains.

Bobbie Macdonald, for her part, has fallen in love with the accoutrements of Washington life: the change of seasons, the museums, proximity to the powerful.

"When you go to the White House for a party ... I'm impressed," admits Mrs. Macdonald, who once was active in Pinellas County Republican politics and served on the Indian Rocks Beach City Commission. In recent days, she says, she had dinner with the ambassador from Thailand and attended a formal reception at the National Art Gallery.

"This is something I'm not invited to in Indian Rocks Beach," she observes. "This has just been fun."

The Macdonalds once viewed administration service as a one-year sabbatical. Now they have few Florida ties left. They sold their Indian Rocks Beach home and the medical practice. One son, Ian, lives with them in their new residence in suburban Maryland. A daughter, Sally, works on Capitol Hill for Rep. Michael Bilirakis, R-Fla. Their other two children, Jane and Andy, live in Virginia Beach and Atlanta, respectively.

"I don't know what I'd do if I went back (to Florida)," says Macdonald, recalling that he had grown bored by his practice. "I'm a different person than I was when I came here. I've seen a new world."

Macdonald is an open, earnest man whose style ingratiated him with the press and even administration critics in Congress. But those qualities don't always win Washington political games. Bobbie Macdonald says she had to goad her husband to lobby for a job in the Bush administration.

This week, having just returned home from meetings with government officials in Colombia, he'll step up those efforts.

"My plans are to meet with Bennett and (HHS nominee Louis) Sullivan, if I can get in to see them," he says. "I'm looking at options ... in the drug business or something in the general health area."

Macdonald has been mentioned as a possible deputy to either Bennett or Sullivan and has "good support," notes Charles Black, a GOP political consultant with ties to the Bush transition team. But Black adds that "there's a lot of competition for all those jobs."

For many, preparing for the power shift has not been easy. The White House felt obliged to remind Reagan appointees twice to submit their resignations and plan to leave when Bush is inaugurated.

"Most people who are here in (the administration) will not be here the next four years," Macdonald says. "In an intellectual sense you know that's true."

But "in an emotional sense," he adds, "you think that it's not going to happen." His staff took it hard recently when Macdonald decided it was time to pack up his office on the second floor of the Old Executive Office Building, next door to the White House.

Macdonald at least has a fallback. As an officer of the Public Health Service, he is entitled to stay on under Surgeon General C. Everett Koop even without a presidential appointment.

"I wouldn't want to be sitting around shuffling papers," he says. He insists he isn't worrying much about it, though, because "I've always believed I'm where I'm supposed to be."

"I haven't lost a bit of sleep," adds Bobbie Macdonald. "We know that come Friday afternoon you're no longer anyone important - it's over with."

But she adds hopefully, "I hope it starts again."

[Illustration]

BLACK AND WHITE PHOTO; Caption: Dr. Donald Macdonald

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Abstract (Document Summary)

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