

THE WHITE HOUSE
WASHINGTON

April 12, 1972

MEMORANDUM FOR RAY PRICE

Copies for: Bob Haldeman
John Ehrlichman
Henry Kissinger

FROM THE PRESIDENT 

As I have been working on the Canadian Parliament speech, and also looking back on the speech I made at Philadelphia, I come again to the weakness in our speech writing -- a weakness that will be particularly harmful as we go into the campaign months. The speeches I make are to the great credit of the speech writing team generally highly literate, highly responsible and almost invariably dull. This means that though they may for the moment get a reasonably good audience reaction by trying to put some ad lib in which will make them go over on delivery, that they seldom leave anything memorable in the minds of the vast majority of our listeners which they can take away with them.

This brings me back again to my harping on the need for illustration, anecdote and colorful words which would inevitably be remembered. I am not talking about gimmicks. I abhor gimmicks and the clever tricks which are fine for Governors, Mayors, Senators, but simply not up to Presidential standards. What I am referring to is a greater use of illustration, parable and striking colorful language which will grab attention and keep it. I realize that all illustrations and analogies have great dangers, because any clever critic, and almost everybody in the press of course is an antagonistic critic to our efforts, will point out why the illustration doesn't fit. On the other hand, this means that we at least get the attention of the critic and through what the critic writes or says perhaps the attention of the listener and those who read about the speech.

This was brought home to me when I was scanning the biography of "Jennie" last night and read of the fascinating relationship between young Winston Churchill and the great American orator Burt Cochran. Incidentally, ask Mr. Berman to check to see if anybody has written a decent biography of Cochran. If no one has one of our bright young men should undertake that responsibility and he might come up with a best seller because the man was so interesting. If someone has written a good biography send it around to me because I would like to read it.

But getting back to my original theme from which I have digressed -- Cochran, Churchill says, was his model as a speaker and also gave him great guidance in his early years on speech writing. Now I don't mean to suggest that I should write or sound like Churchill. He is one of those rare birds where God broke the mold when he died. On the other hand, we can at least learn from him and if it would be too arrogant to do so from him at least we ought to be able to learn from Burt Cochran who despite his many gifts never went to the top of the greasy pole in the United States.

On page 70 of the second volume of "Jennie", Churchill makes a very interesting observation about Cochran's speech writing advice. I would commend the first paragraph at the top of page 70 to all of our speech writers to read as a pretty good way to find a means to put more life, meaning and above all more memorable phrases in the speeches that we write. After pointing out the necessity for reading very broadly on the subject and then getting down to the writing he says Cochran told Churchill, "try to simplify the most abstruse questions with familiar, easily understandable illustrations."

That was the secret of Churchill's better speeches and frankly the secret of most of the better speeches made by the better speakers in the English-American tradition.

It isn't, I know, what is fashionably taught in our modern institutions of higher learning because it will be criticized as "overblown", "simplistic", etc. But the difficulty with the modern so-called experts on speeches in our educational

institutions is that they fail to realize that the major point to get across in a speech is not substance but to make it somewhat memorable and if possible somewhat exciting. Anyone can take enormously potent substance and make a successful speech. The November 3rd speech, the so-called Checkers speech, the announcement of the trip to China were such great events that the substance itself became memorable and how it was said may have helped a bit, but really didn't matter all that much. On the other hand, we don't have many block busters like that left. What we have to take is a minimum of substance and get a maximum of mileage out of it. The only way we can do this is to improve the quality of our speech writing and the best way to improve the quality is to follow Cochran's advice to Churchill -- more easily understandable familiar illustrations and whenever possible a colorful phrase or two that will stick in the minds of the hearer.

As all of you know, Churchill did not invent the phrase "iron curtain" which he used at Fulton, Missouri, but the words added enormous bang to the substance. Let us, like Churchill, learn from Cochran without, of course, Cochran's 19th century flamboyance.