

THE WHITE HOUSE

WASHINGTON

November 29, 1972

MEMORANDUM FOR THE FILE - H. R. HALDEMAN

FROM THE PRESIDENT

With further reflection on the memorandum I wrote you a week or so ago on the problem of getting over more adequately some of the more personal aspects of the Presidency, I think it would be well for you and whoever else works on this, to review what we have done just before and since the election and the effect of those activities.

Our nationwide television on Thursday night, in my opinion, was pretty much of a dud. I know that you got a good reaction from people like Bill Rogers and I am sure that as far as the press is concerned, and incidentally what I now say about the press is virtually true of all the other items I'm going to be mentioning, there was not much of a negative reaction. Basically, that appearance was highly Presidential, philosophical, and for the average person, dull. My guess is that the average person who tuned it in either went to sleep or turned to whatever movie or other item was on some other channel in order to get away from it-- and frankly, I think I would have done the same thing if I had been listening.

The same was true of the five minutes I did the night before election. Mercifully it was short and therefore not many tuned it on. Again, it was one of those items that did no harm, but certainly did precious little good. I can sense that this is the case from the way I have been able to check my own personal context, but also from the fact that I have yet to find anyone who has mentioned either appearance either before or since the election and I have checked and found that there was scarcely any mail reaction at all, which is some indication that no responsive cords were struck in the public.

I realize that the answer of Ray Price and the "Presidential" group will be that that's exactly what we wanted to do - to put the people to sleep rather than to excite them. On the other hand, a certain

price is paid for that and this is what we must watch as we move through the second term. If we continue to be pompous and dull and give no enthusiasm, no lift, no excitement to what we are doing, we are going inevitably to fail in achieving our significant goals in the second term.

I cannot emphasize too strongly that once Vietnam is concluded, the so-called "wall-bangers" which Ziegler loves so much, simply aren't going to be around. We are not going to have big plays. I know that Ziegler feels it's really big stuff that we are announcing reorganization of the government and new Cabinet appointments. It is a big story in Washington. When I talked to Ehrlichman about this he disagreed when I said that I didn't think most of the people in the country really gave a damn about it. However, I am totally right on this and Ehrlichman is wrong. You will recall when we set up the OMB and put Shultz into the job, it was a big story in the New York Times and the Washington Post, but out through the country, if you had taken a poll, I don't think more than 1 or 2% of the people would have known who George Shultz was and they would have thought that OMB was some kind of new Civil Rights' organization or some kind of a mysterious foundation.

On reflection, while at the time I thought it was the right thing to do, and thought it was the right thing to do immediately thereafter, I think what we did election eve, again fell under the same error. Sitting in the Oval Office talking quietly to the nation, but with no sense of lift or excitement, didn't get across or didn't tap the real underlying feeling of elation that exists across the country among the 60% of the people that voted for us. By the time we got to the Shoreham, I had already, in effect, taken the cream off and what I said there was so anti-climatic that the fact that it was a rather exciting crowd, made very little difference because I could do very little at that point to change the mood from the one that had been set in the Oval Office and to give not only that crowd a lift, but to give the millions listening on television somewhat of a feeling of victory and a feeling of lift.

If you checked this out among our own staff, you will find the fatal weakness in our staff that I am constantly trying to get across to you - they'll all think that we did exactly the right thing - that this was Presidential - that there should have been no excitement election night - that we should not have tried to raise the spirits of people in the last week of the campaign for fear that we would get some criticism from the press for either campaigning too hard or trying to demagogue or what have you. The reason all of our staff people would say that is that this is exactly the kind of thing that appeals to them as rational, intelligent, intellectual-types. What we have done in other words is to have fallen into the error of the Price approach in spades, due to the fact that we had a run-away election on our hands and didn't want

to do anything to jeopardize our lead. In other words, we fell into the error that I had always feared of backing into the victory, whereas we probably should have tried to, even with the demonstrators and all the rest, tried to put a little more excitement into the last three weeks. It is true that the motorcades served a useful purpose and that the very unexpected turnout of people across the runway in Greensboro changed the mood of it, and of course, the final rally in Los Angeles was one of the best. The difficulty was that as far as the last rally was concerned, it came too late to have any effect.

Now we are on the same treadmill. What we do is very exciting to those who have a doctor's degree in political science. What we are doing now is not exciting at all as far as the average person is concerned. What we are saying about what we are doing cannot really make it that much more exciting because it just isn't there. I know that John Ehrlichman would suggest that if I would just go out to a junior high school and make the announcements there, or possibly drop into a super market on a Saturday afternoon and do it, that this would change the whole situation. It would not. You cannot take what is basically a dull story and make it an exciting story. All that you can do is to take a good story and make it a very good story and a very exciting story, and this transition period is dull, not good.

I think what made us gun-shy, and understandably so, was Connally's very frank criticism after the 1970 Campaign of our style in that campaign. Again, Connally was affected by the enormous press that was given to the San Jose incident and the Phoenix broadcast.

On the other hand, as we coldly analyzed that campaign and as Colson reports from an individual who does have somewhat of a gut feeling about the country, Al Capp. What we did throughout the campaign before the Phoenix speech was broadcast nationally and had a very good effect on the country. It avoided any erosion in our support, it actually gave people a lift and as Capp said, you ought to go back and read his letter that he wrote at that time, it was probably after the election that he wrote it - this was one of the few times that he felt people generally related to Nixon as they had related previously to a fellow like Harry Truman.

Another example of our approach is what happened in New York the other day. The big story, at least from any kind of a national impact, was the walk that I took through Rockefeller Center where I met the Israeli and the Egyptian and had them shake hands and then made a little talk to the television cameras.

Ziegler opposed my going on the walk that day. I do not blame him for that, he was simply playing it safe because playing it safe has brought us pretty far. He said that after all I'd had a pretty good

reception down on Wall Street the day before and that we didn't "need" it and that I might as well sit in the hotel room and let Henry's visit that night be the story. He also was fearful that there might be some demonstrators and this and that. I decided on impulse to go. It turned out to be a good idea. What we have to understand, again, is that most of the members of our staff have no feeling for political chemistry or the excitement and the reaction of people. I go back to the time that I went and spoke to the POW wives. Ehrlichman's reaction is typical of the reaction of our entire staff concerning matters of that sort. To Ehrlichman the big story was that by going there, regardless of what kind of a reception I got and regardless of what I said, it would be a good "gimmick story to get us on the news that night and keep a more negative story at a lower level. On the other hand, the reason that-that was a good story was because of what happened there - not what I said so much - as the excitement of the crowd, etc. What we have to realize too, is that the "Presidential" advisers are constantly pushing me out of character. If sometimes I feel like walking among people or making a speech like the one to the Junior Chamber of Commerce and so forth, I should do so because that is the way I am. I will never do anything really crude or stupid, but on the other hand, I have to do the things that do not appear to be so contrived and so planned, and so well ordered, and also which appear to be ones in which we are simply avoiding risks and negatives rather than taking chances to make positives.

We are taking chances to make positives in the foreign policy area. What we need to do is to take some chances to make positives in the PR area without going to the Ehrlichman/Safire-type of gimmickry.

Even the acceptance speech is a case in point. This actually, from a standpoint of a political science exercise, was I agree, a very effective presentation. On the other hand, I had it beaten into me so much by everybody around me that I should talk only to the television audience I deliberately kept the crowd subdued by trying to shut off applause throughout the evening, and consequently, but the time the speech was finished, we had lost that excitement, that feel of exhilaration, that feel of lift that can only come from a total event, rather than from one line or one in incidence.

What happened the night before, and on this one I give total credit to the staff for suggesting it, was quite different. Here again, of course, the staff had prepared some remarks for me to read which perhaps would have been much better than what I said. On the other hand what made that event was the spontaneity, and frankly, some would say even a bit of non-Presidential demagoguery, although I did not intend it to be demagoguery. For example, the praise of Sammy Davis, etc., although most of our speech writers would have vomited if they thought I was going to be so personal as to

say that both of us had started at a very low base and had come a long way, or whatever it was.

Related to all this, of course, is to get somebody more effective in the PR and planning than we presently have. Related to it also, is the selection of whoever is going to bring people into my office at times in the future. One of the reasons I like Bull is not only that he's good for me, but that he's very nice to people. I think it would be a mistake to have Alex bring people in unless it is somebody we employ who doesn't care whether or not somebody smiles at him when he comes in and passes the time of day. What I want, basically, is a very bright John Nidecker-type, who will make whatever individual is coming into that office, feel warm inside, before he comes in. Dorothy Cox had that ability when she was with me in my early Congressional days. Pete Provincio, that poor ignorant Italian who handled my formal office in the White House, probably received more notes of commendation from people all over the country than any member of my staff during the time I was Vice President, because he simply had a warm heart and was nice to people. He liked people and he let them know that he liked them. Rose, in earlier days, when she did not have the responsibility she presently has, was very good at giving the individual who came into the office the feeling of warmth, so that by the time that I got to them, they weren't so frightened or so spellbound that I had to spend three or four minutes to get them up to the point where they could talk in any kind of intelligent fashion. For example, immediately after my remarks at the Shoreham, we probably should have shaken hands for an hour or so. What I am suggesting is that we have to find ways for the real excitement and warmth of the Presidential Family to come across to the public. The press, for the wrong reason, may be perceptively right, the President is too much a prisoner in the White House.