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September 14, 1976

MEMORANDUM FOR RICHARD CHENEY

FROM: ROBERT GOLDWIN *RG*



Seymour Martin Lipset, former Harvard Professor now at Stanford University and the Hoover Institution, came to my office last week. What follows is a memorandum of our conversation.

Lipset thinks that the President has a clear potential advantage in the coming debates. Carter is viewed as a leader, primarily because he ran an effective campaign, but people are not sure what he stands for and there is a persisting fear of a strong leader who is not known to be fully trustworthy. Surveys show that President Ford, on the other hand, is viewed as lacking in leadership qualities. Lipset concludes that the chief objective for President Ford in the debates is to demonstrate his leadership, to counter the impression that some of the public has that he is lacking in Presidential qualities. His objective should be to show the same forcefulness that he demonstrated in the acceptance speech and also to show his grasp of facts and issues.

Carter's task will be much harder because he has to try to break down the sense of mistrust, the sense that he might be dangerous in the Presidency. If President Ford comes across as a leader who is strong and competent, that will surprise many people; if Carter comes across as bright and articulate, that is all expected and will not gain anything for him.

Lipset said that in his professorial view, Carter is like a bright student who gets As without studying because he is glib and quick, and the President is like a student who studies hard, not as quick, who gets As by persistence and hard study. Most people do not like the student who gets As without working and they usually suspect him of being superficial and not above tricks. If Carter tries to show how smart he is and if he tries to win debaters points, it will probably work against his interest in making a good impression on the general public. If, on the other hand, President Ford shows the assurance of the acceptance speech or the grasp of his briefing of the press on the budget, he will make the general public feel they have been misled in being told that he lacks leadership or competence.

Getting away from the matter of personal qualities, Lipset said that the President also has an advantage on the issues because surveys show that people do not want changes now, especially on domestic issues. The general impression

is "reforms don't work." The majority position is the same as the President's, that the results have not been as promised and that the failure of multi-billion dollar programs is the best explanation of the general distrust of government. Since Carter and all Democrats tend to promise bigger and bigger programs, the President has the advantage in such an exchange.

Lipset says that Caddell is worried about the Catholic vote, not so much on the abortion issue (although that may change) and not so much for religious reasons. The big trouble with the Catholics and Carter is a cultural difference. A matter of style. The same can be said about the Jewish vote. Catholics are conservative in their social and cultural views and Jews are liberal, but Carter doesn't fit the style of Jews or Catholics. Carter's association with counter-culture musicians and movie people bothers Catholics. Even when Carter tries to agree with Jews, for instance on Israel, he is likely to make serious mistakes; for example, he spoke about Israel as the "fulfillment of a Biblical prophecy," which has a worrisome Southern Baptist ring to it in the ears of most secular-minded Jews who are pro-Israeli.

Lipset said that he thinks Kissinger may be the President's "secret weapon." He suggested that we check to confirm his information that all the polls show that Kissinger stands very high in public esteem. He says that the media are against Kissinger, extreme liberals and extreme conservatives are against him, those who are strongly pro-detente and anti-detente are against him, everyone is against him "but the people." If available polls show what Lipset thinks they show, it would be wise for the President to associate closely with Kissinger during the campaign.

Lipset returned to the uneasiness about Carter's personality and character. He sometimes shows excessive hardness, he is said to be inconsiderate, and he can even get nasty. If any of these characteristics are revealed by Carter on television, for instance in the debates, it will be harmful to him. Things that seem to annoy him and bring out the worst in him are any questioning of his integrity, his consistency, his honesty, and even whether he is too liberal. Questions that might annoy him sufficiently are why he wrote an approving introduction to a book favoring abortion, and whether he has been consistent and completely open on his support or lack of support of the Humphrey-Hawkins Bill. He has shown annoyance when attacked as a Liberal, a big-spender, or one who wants to cut the defense budget.



Lipset said that it would be advantageous for the President to show compassion because there is a widespread impression that the big trouble with conservative minded political leaders is that they lack compassion and concern for ordinary people. Carter seems to be aware of this and is working on that theme. Lipset recommended that the President have handy in the debates the budget facts on the great increase in social spending in recent years and the decrease in spending to show that the general impression is wrong that we have been neglecting social spending for the sake of the military.

Lipset's final point was that Carter may be a negative campaigner, that is, that the more he campaigns the lower he goes in public standing. Carter started very early everywhere in the primaries, but he lost ground in just about every state by his campaigning. Where he won, he won by a smaller margin than the polls indicated weeks before, and his vote was always lower than the ~~biggest~~ <sup>biggest</sup> poll by 3 to 6%. Unless something happens to alter the basic situation, we should do nothing to discourage his efforts to get campaign exposure because, if he runs true to form, the more people see and hear him, the less likely they are to vote for him.



THE WHITE HOUSE

WASHINGTON

September 18, 1976

*file*



MEMORANDUM FOR:

DICK CHENEY  
MIKE DUVAL

FROM:

DAVE GERGEN *DG*

SUBJECT:

DEBATE STRATEGIES

HIGHLY CONFIDENTIAL

In our recent discussions, it was suggested that one debate strategy is for the President to be highly Presidential and to practically ignore Mr. Carter and Mr. Carter's arguments. To illustrate: it was said that if one end of the spectrum were represented by a complete brawl and the other end by the President treating Carter as a lighting technician, that we would go 80 percent of the way toward the position of lighting technician.

On that basis, it was further argued, the President would:

- Minimize mention of Mr. Carter by name;
- Not discuss the enormous costs of Mr.

Carter's programs;





-- Not discuss the Democratic platform or the record of the Democratic Congresses over the last 40 years;

-- Not discuss precisely where the President diverges from the liberal approach to government and why;

-- And not discuss Mr. Carter's record of raising Georgia spending by 50%, increasing Georgia state employment by 25%, and practically doubling the Georgia state debt.

Instead, it is argued, the President should be above the battle and stick to his achievements and very generalized theories of government.

I want to make it plain that I totally disagree with this approach to the debates.

I do fully support the idea of the President being Presidential and not engaging in a knock down-drag out with Carter. He must deal with him deftly and with neat strokes that keep him out of a verbal wrestling match. But that is a matter of style -- how he acts toward Carter, his general demeanor, his grace and good humor. I am perfectly confident that the President will be exceptionally

good on the stylistic question. As long as no one tries to overprogram him and make him self-conscious, his natural sincerity, honesty and charm will come through to the viewer.

But we must be extremely careful to distinguish between style and substance. If the President avoids dealing intelligently and in a very thoughtful way with the substance -- and personally, I think his instincts<sup>run</sup> toward strong, reasoned arguments -- he could create so many problems for himself that he runs a high risk of losing the debate.

Perhaps I am misstating what is being argued; if so, I'll be very relieved. But if not, let me tell you what I find so objectionable about an "above-the-battle" approach, or what could be called the "non-debate" strategy;

-- Substance does matter. It was frequently said yesterday that no one will remember what either man says, only how well they appear. That is a simplification that can be very misleading. Many, many people do care about substance. Issues do matter. And to a great many more people, the intelligence and reason that a man applies to a



question says volumes about his qualifications to be President. Yes, JFK won the first debate because he was more poised and confident than Nixon; but JFK would have lost that debate if his poise had not also been accompanied by very sharp, very well-honed arguments.

-- The non-debate strategy seriously underestimates Carter. Carter has made a number of gaffes by attacking the President so harshly in the last two weeks, so there is a tendency to believe that he will make the same mistake in the debates. We must not fall into the trap of underestimating the man. He is one of the shrewdest politicians in America today, and he has a very precise understanding of the English language. I have read a number of his speeches in the last few days, and I am convinced that Carter has the capacity to put the President's record in the worst possible light -- while being totally respectful -- and also presenting a very positive, very concrete, (and very phoney) program of his own. We cannot give him a free ride.

-- The President should not be on the defensive all night. Carter will continually be needling the President about what increases in unemployment,





vetoed, Nixon-Ford, medicaid abuses, etc., etc. For the President to simply stand on his record and not draw the distinction between his own approach to the problems and those represented by Mr. Carter will leave him always on the defensive. He must turn the arguments around on Carter so that Carter is defending what many people have now come to believe is a bankrupt approach to government.

-- A non-debate strategy will reinforce the President's worst attributes: The public questions whether the President is competent enough to run the country. We know better, but many Americans don't. If the President stands there and responds with fluffy platitudes instead of hard, concise arguments, he will come across as a dummy.

-- The non-debate strategy ignores the President's hidden strengths: Two of the most successful events of the last 12 months have been the President's acceptance address and his budget briefing. They were successful for much the same reason: he was forceful, extremely articulate and extremely well prepared. He was commanding because he handled it so well. And people were surprised. If he comes into these debates with



sharp, very precise arguments -- arguments that slice through the Carter fogbank -- he will be an enormous success.

-- The non-debate strategy is also inconsistent with the President's highpoints of the last two weeks: One of the reasons that the President has been so successful in the last two weeks is not just the fact that Carter is hurting himself on the stump and the President is at home being Presidential, but that when the President has spoken up, he has very neatly cut Carter up. Three examples: handling Carter so well in the press conference on Kelley, the comments at B'nai B'rith (which were very tough but were said with enough lightness that he got away with it), and the trust lines at Michigan. All of those lines are consistent with a strong debate strategy; they are inconsistent with a non-debate strategy.

-- The American people, and especially the press, have been led to believe that this will be a true debate. The President challenged Carter to the debate and said afterwards that he couldn't wait to pin Carter down on the issues. In fact,



we all want to smoke Carter out on the issues. The way you do that is to make it very clear why his approach will lead American down the road to more inflation, more unemployment, etc. To avoid doing that is going to leave the public wondering why the devil we issued the challenge, and leave the writing press with very negative feelings.

I fully realize that is is unprecedented for a President of the United States to engage in a debate with his opponent. And in doing so, he must be highly Presidential. But we wouldn't be in Philadelphia at all unless there were a reason for it.



What I am urging is not a 180-degree turn off basic strategy. I repeat: I do not support a slug fest or anything which demeans the President. What I do suggest is this:

-- That the President be very well prepared with sharp, well-honed arguments that keep him strong, forceful, and on the offensive -- on his achievements, on his programs, and on his philosophy.

-- That the President be prepared with very sharp arguments that show how different Mr. Carter's approach is and why it won't work. We have to pin

down Carter for what he is: a Yankee liberal in Confederate uniform.

-- That the President never be afraid to bring up the Georgia record where it serves to buttress his arguments. Carter should not be given a free ride on anything.

-- That the President's staff concentrate very hard on helping him develop, polish and sharpen the arguments. I am less interested in stringing a few eloquent words together than in ensuring that he has the major points in his mind and can hit them cleanly.

-- And finally, that the President have an opportunity to fully understand what the arguments are against the Carter positions. I would regard it as a gross dereliction of the staff's responsibility toward him to allow him to enter this struggle without all the weapons he will need at his command. He must not go in with one hand tied behind his back.

I would not have taken your time with such a lengthy memorandum did I not regard this matter with utmost concern.



fib

THE WHITE HOUSE

WASHINGTON

October 17, 1976



MEMORANDUM FOR: MIKE DUVAL

FROM: DAVE GERGEN

SUBJECT: THE THIRD DEBATE

There appears to be a widespread assumption within the staff that in order to prepare for the third debate, the President does not need to spend much time with briefing materials on practice sessions, but only needs to modify a few stylistic points and work on some one-liners. I disagree with that assumption; to win decisively -- as we must -- far more is needed.

The perceived winners in the first two debates shared several characteristics:

- In each case, the winner appeared to be more self confident and more relaxed;

- In each case, the winner went on the offensive at the opening bell and kept his opponent backpedaling most of the time;

- In each case, the winner had at least two or three major points or themes set in his mind before the debate started and kept pushing on them throughout, adorning the central ideas with a blizzard of facts and statistics. Carter was especially effective at this in the second debate, opening and closing with the same thematic points so that that the viewer came away thinking that he had a clearer concept of than the President of what he wanted to achieve. By contrast, the President was much, much better at responding to the questions asked, but his answers did not fit within a sharply defined framework. His answers were very factual but they weren't hung on any pegs or central ideas.

If these conclusions are correct, then it is clear that we ought to be aiming for a Presidential demeanor that is more confident, relaxed, occasionally humorous, and forceful. Very early in the debate, he needs to set forth the major reasons why he, not Carter, should be President. In order to keep Carter on the defensive, he



must surprise Carter with points not made in the first two debates. And it is essential -- a point I want to emphasize -- that in the opening moments he lay out the themes he will not only pursue for the rest of the debate, but on which he will rely for the next two weeks to win the election.

Personally, I think that to accomplish all of this will require not only a great deal of staff time, but also a large chunk of concentration by him -- matching the first debate. As long as he will be staying off the campaign trail for five days (a mistake, in my view), there is nothing more important for him than to find the best way to knock Carter out of the ring on Friday night. The election may be won or lost by the way in which his time is constructively and imaginatively used between now and Friday.

#### What Must Be Done

1. Thematic Materials. We need to settle now upon 3-4 major themes and then develop the following:

-- An opening and closing statement that builds on these themes.

-- Factual and statistical papers that back up these central ideas.

-- The most devastating possible attack points on Carter within each of these areas.

-- Memorable one-liners that highlight the themes.

What themes should be pursued? Clearly, Teeter, Spencer and others need to be consulted, but let me put forth some ideas. In my view, we must make Carter the issue for the next two weeks. We cannot change the perception of Mr. Ford, but we can change the perception of Mr. Carter. Here are the key issues, in my view:

A At home, we are at a fork in the road. For the past 15 years, we have gone down the road toward bigger and bigger government, more and more spending, more and more taxes, and the result has been raging inflation, more unemployment and ultimately less freedom. Carter speaks of compassion, but his sort of compassion is precisely what has caused so much distress for people. Ford represents a turning away from that road -- and

his record proves that it will work. But Carter represents the same old road, a road that leads ultimately to social chaos. Within this general theme, we can work the arguments about taxes, inflation, etc. We should also run hard against the chaos of the 1960s -- much harder. The Democrats ran against Hoover for years, and we should do the same about the '60s. Also, we need to have a focus for the social frustrations that exist today, and that focus should be the excesses that started in the 1960s, not the policies of GRF.

B. Abroad, the peace that we have today is possible only because we are strong and ably represented at the bargaining table. We have to demand that Carter tell us exactly how he intends to cut the defense budget and highlight the contradiction between trying to be tougher with the Soviets while also being weaker in our defenses. Also, Dole very effectively brought out the peace themes in his debate; the President needs to push that point.

C. As to a vision of the future, I think we ought to abandon attempts to enunciate some clear sense of the future that is sharply different from Carter's. Both candidates stand for essentially the same thing: less inflation, more jobs, more housing, better transportation, etc. The real difference lies in the methods and in the underlying commitment to personal freedom represented by the President. We ought to sketch out a vision of the future, but let's back that up with a hard-hitting argument about experience and reliability in the Oval Office. One of the best ways that point can be made is to talk very precisely about the major decisions that the President, whoever he is, must make in the next four years: the SALT treaty runs out in 1977, negotiations in South Africa and in the Middle East are both in a delicate stage, a decision must be made on the B-1, major decisions must be made about energy, etc. Do you want those decisions made by someone with 25 years of experience in domestic and foreign affairs, or by a man that you never heard of a year ago?

2. Focus of Preparation: An excessive amount of attention has been given in the last two debates to the mechanical aspects -- how to look into the camera, taking





notes, etc. This time we should minimize those concerns and concentrate far more on practicing ways to present themes, one-liners, and cross-jabs at Carter.

3. Putting Carter on the Defensive: Each time we have talked about ways of using the days before the debate to put Carter on the defensive during the debate. Each time, in my view, we have failed to do that. We need to succeed this time. An idea that I am pushing is to have Reagan, Connally and Rockefeller here together this week and put them on for half an hour at 7:30 p.m. -- time bought by us -- for either a press conference or a three-way presentation that attacks the opposition and presents the case for the President. Your assistance on such a project would, of course, be very helpful.

4. Immediate Staff Projects: There are several projects which, in my view, should be parceled out to the staff as soon as possible:

-- Each member of the speechwriting staff should be tasked to come up with 2-3 pages apiece of one-liners and short zingers that might be considered for the debate and/or subsequent campaigning.

-- Substantive people should be tasked with reviewing Carter's arguments in the first two debates and the points that the President made in response; then they should figure out ways that our responses can be sharpened up. It is likely that Carter will make many of the same points again and we could be better prepared for him.

-- Someone should be assigned to look through the first two debates, the Dole-Mondale debate, and the news stories since the first debate to see what additional points have arisen since the original debate books were prepared. For instance, Mondale on three occasions now has criticized the fact that Ford Motor Company earned enormous profits but paid no taxes; I'll bet that's a phoney, but I don't the facts nor do most other viewers. We should check it out along with several other fresh issues.



5. Working with the President: In preparing for first debate, many different people had personal access to the President and had an ability to work on improving his answers, both politically and substantively. In the second debate, access was extraordinary restrictive. A wall was placed around the President. We won the first debate; we lost the second. In my view, there is no more convincing evidence of the insanity of preparing for the third debate in the same way we prepared for the second. This time, let's put a team together and stick with it and not get hung up in cloak and dagger games.

cc: Bill Carruthers  
Dick Cheney

