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UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION

PUBLIC AFFAIRS CONFERENCE

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CHICAGO, ILLINOIS

"WHITE HOUSE POLICY ON PUBLIC INFORMATION"

BY

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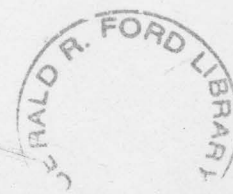


I KNOW YOU HOPED FOR A MAJOR ADMINISTRATION SPOKESMAN THIS AFTERNOON. BUT HERB KLEIN COULDN'T MAKE IT, VICE PRESIDENT AGNEW HAD A COMMITMENT, AND MARTHA MITCHELL HAD GRACIOUSLY ACCEPTED A PREVIOUS ENGAGEMENT. SO, AS THE WELL-KNOWN COMEDIAN FLIP WILSON WOULD SAY: "WHAT YOU SEE..IS WHAT YOU GET." I DO WONDER, HOWEVER, WHY I WAS NOT INTRODUCED AS A MAN WHO NEEDS NO INTRODUCTION. I GUESS THE MASTER OF CEREMONIES IS KIND OF LIKE MY WIFE...WHO HAPPENS TO BE MY MOST SEVERE CRITIC...SHE FEELS THAT I NEED ALL OF THE INTRODUCTION I CAN GET. YOUR LETTER TO HERB KLEIN ASKED THAT HE DISCUSS THE ADMINISTRATION AND ITS PUBLIC INFORMATION PROGRAM FROM THE VANTAGE POINT OF THE DIRECTOR OF COMMUNICATIONS.

Columnist William Vance recently related the following story in the Philadelphia Inquirer:

Former Minnesota Congressman Clark MacGregor, who now toils to keep the White House and Capitol Hill from severing relations, was chatting with President Nixon in the Oval office the other day when the phone rang.

As MacGregor tells it, the President spent 10 minutes in deep and serious conversation about the economy of Brazil, its



government and the Organization of American States.

The White House congressional liaison man could hardly help overhearing the conversation, but since it seemed of such a technical nature he was hardly embarrassed. He waited out the interruption. "Assistant Secretary of State for Brazilian affairs?" asked MacGregor when Nixon hung up. "No" said Nixon with a grin, "that was Tricia. She's entertaining some brazilian students today."

Did you catch the lesson in Communications while you chuckled? It is most fortunate that Clark MacGregor took the initiative to inquire as to whom the President was speaking -- otherwise he may have left the Oval Office assuming a high-level discussion had ensued.

Communications is a two-way street. We must be conscious of what the public wants to know, and indeed - has a right to know. So we listen. But then the Administration has the responsibility

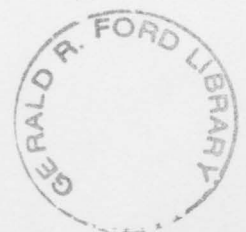


of informing the public of its goals and programs. That's public information.

One doesn't have to read McLuhan to realize the importance of communications media today. We learn of the events of the day from our newspapers, magazines, television and radio. The concerned public is augmented by the ever present curious and probing reporters from all media and every corner of the United States and indeed, the world.

President Nixon, realizing this, responded by creating the Office of the Director of Communications, occupied by Herb Klein. As Herb stated on "Meet The Press" in December 1968, "The test of my job is going to be whether more information or less comes out."

One cannot trace this Office historically -- it's one of a kind! Until Richard Nixon assumed the Presidency our Chief Executives





had depended upon a single press secretary. But when one looks at the taxing responsibility of dealing with hundreds of newspaper, magazine, television and radio reporters -- well, it's no wonder Lyndon Johnson went through five press secretaries in five years!

President Nixon felt that by creating an Office of the Director of Communications that both the public and Government would be better served. Ron Ziegler, the President's press secretary, is directly responsible for reporting on the "day-to-day happenings" of the President. He is also responsible to the President as his personal spokesman.

But the unprecedented Office of the Director of Communications has the broader task of dealing with all media on behalf of the Executive Branch. I'm talking about the flow of information from Federal Agencies as well as Cabinet departments. No, I don't mean



we're considering cutting the budget by abolishing the jobs of the some five thousand Federal employees involved in public information. Our responsibility is both to deal directly with the media - and support each agency in its relationships with the media and the public.

In other words, we don't control or pull strings on all information dissemination. Rather, I would suggest a major role of the Director and we on his staff is to aid you in whatever way possible.

Let's draw an analogy with a play setting. The marquee has an exciting title - THE DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION. That's a real grabber!

The theme - the plight of the American as the most mobile person on earth.

The players are the 68,000 employees of the Department of Transportation, and the audience, the American public. That



public may or may not realize that the sheer quantity of transportation available does not necessarily reflect the ability of each citizen to move from one point to another cheaply, quickly, comfortably or conveniently, or at minimal cost to the environment.

In our production, the villain is the automobile. The private motor car gives the individual virtually unrestrained and unlimited access to all parts of this country. Why cast it in the villain's role?

Any attempts to control car or driver (which the car makes possible!) -- even to protect the motorist against himself -- meet with resistance, almost as if freedom to drive had become America's Fifth Freedom. This over-dependence on the auto has reached the point where we now have almost as many vehicles as people. We have one car for every 50 yards of highway; one mile of highway for every square mile of land. American motorists drive a trillion miles a year. And last year, 53,830 of our citizens drove themselves





to destruction (to the Great Highway Beyond - one helluva way to go!)

The heroes of our play - the fifty or so Public Information Officers seated before me. I chose the car, but could just as easily have selected most any other mode of transportation. Your role is making the public and media aware of the pitfalls and promises of our transportation system.

The salvation of our transportation dilemma lies in the success of the policies advocated by President Nixon, calling for upgrading of every mode. More important, they emphasize the attainment of a balanced system, promising convenient and comfortable transportation for all the people under all circumstances. By affording the traveler a choice among several alternatives, we will distribute the total transportation load more evenly. More people will be served, fewer facilities needed, and the Nation will realize



a higher return on its transportation dollar.

The director of our play, the Secretary of Transportation, must put all the pieces together -- identifying the problems and managing the means to their resolution. The cast -- the members of the Department -- should be inspired to work together demonstrating that the tools and resources needed to cope with the problems are available and being utilized. But our heroes -- you, the Public Information Officers, are the Greek Chorus explaining to the audience the actions of the cast.

Every play needs a producer -- usually a man behind the scenes, but always there when needed. President Nixon has provided such a producer in the guise of the Director of Communications. The Director knows this play, and similar ones providing the message of other Government Departments and Agencies, will be successful



if . . . . if he is certain the cast and director have the best script and setting for their story. He helps to insure this by providing timely and comprehensive information. You heroes provide continuity, and the critical reaction of press and public will reveal our success. To paraphrase Will Rogers, the best way to judge a good play is by how long it will last and have people talk about it.

People should talk a long time about scenes such as these --

The Department of Transportation recently consigned one lane of the busy Shirley Highway, which brings people into Washington from nearby Virginia, to the exclusive use of buses during the rush hours. Prior to beginning this express service, the bus company had been carrying about 1,900 passengers into metropolitan Washington over the Shirley Highway route. That figure more than doubled when the bus lanes went into operation. Travel time was cut in half. Rush hour bus capacity is expected to exceed



5,000 passengers. That's equivalent to 3,500 cars in the traffic stream, or about the same number of vehicles that would be carried over two freeway lanes in an average hour of peak traffic time.

In San Francisco, the Bay Area Rapid Transit System is moving toward completion. When finished, the system will carry 200,000 passengers a day in clean, fast, air conditioned comfort -- freeing the city of thousand of cars and getting more people to work on time.

There are high hopes for the Tracked Air Cushion Vehicle as the public transportation system of the future. There have been four major transportation improvement bills proposed by the President, and passed by Congress. These pieces of legislation provide for aggressive programs affecting aviation, public transit, railroads and highways.



I hope our play analogy has illustrated the relationship between my office and yours. This is the primary responsibility of the Office of the Director of Communications. This Office maintains constant contact with all its public information officers in every department -- keeping them informed and being informed of the day to day happenings which relate to their particular agency. Herb stated in a recent magazine interview "I announced when I took office that I planned to meet periodically with the public-information officers, and we do that. Those sessions are not on a scheduled basis, but are on the basis of probably once every three to four weeks. During those meetings our normal process is to look at their problems, and if someone wants some advice, he gets it. We also discuss the current major Administration programs, and frequently invite the appropriate expert from The White House





staff or department involved to brief them on issues of importance to them." At the height of the SST controversy -- there were several briefings held -- some which involved the public information officers and some which involved the press being briefed by White House and Transportation experts related to this issue. Further, if we know that a major figure within the Department of Transportation or any Agency for that matter is going out into the field we will try to get him to participate in a news conference or a talk show related to the area in which he is speaking. Over 30 Administration and Agency spokesman are booked for local and national exposure every month or one-a-day. Over three hundred telephone queries are answered each day. The majority of the queries are usually from the press. Often times Herb will speak directly to them or the call will be fielded by one of his staff. Many times a reporter will be



referred to the public information officer of a given Agency. In addition to incoming calls there are a large number of outgoing calls which attempt "...to break down barriers to press access..." Herb, makes on the average of seven major addresses a month. The groups are diversified-- Yale Students, Kiwanians, Press Association and the International Association of Political Consultants just to name a few. The majority of speeches are followed by hard-hitting questions and answers. Occasionally Herb finds himself pitted on a panel against such individuals as Ben Bradlee, Robert Novak, Walter Pincus, Tom Jarriel, James J. Kilpatrick or Peter Lisagor. He debates -- the most recent being Tom Wicker of Attica fame. "Meet the Press", "Face the Nation", "Issues and Answers" -- he's done them all. He frequently puts himself on the spot by agreeing to participate in radio talk shows where listeners call in questions of every topic



imaginable. Formats all designed to carry the Administration message to the people.

Earlier I noted that Communications involves listening as well as talking. Our office reviews 25 to 30 newspapers daily, in addition to magazines and constant monitoring of the wire services. Letters--oh yes we receive those also. Between five to seven hundred letters a week are processed and answered. Many of those letters are distributed to the public information officers in the given agencies, for they alone can tell the story to the public in concise and expert terms.

The President is seeking to take the Government to the people, sending more of his Cabinet and their officials out of Washington to communicate with the broad spectrum of the American people. When Herb is out in the field he is not only attempting to explain what



Government is doing but also as he said "coming home with a better understanding and appreciation of what people are thinking through having listened to questions and concerns in the hinterland..."

The President has pledged an "open Administration". For the President, credibility and communications problems stem not only from how the media and the public judge his acts, but from news reports generated from all areas where Government is involved -- ranging from Washington to Laos to the Middle East.

It is notable also that the public frequently lumps all of Government in one and secrecy or confusion in the Congress is sometimes blamed on an Administration. Anyone in the Government information field who is candid would admit that credibility is a constant problem of Government--particularly in an age of increased cynicism. A lack of credibility is sometimes caused by over-enthusiasm



in the promises of those in Government, but I would submit that President Nixon has followed a specific policy of avoiding pledges and promises which cannot be carried out. Factual information which builds public understanding decreases credibility gaps, but over-promising erodes credibility. For Government, the answer to credibility must lie in truth, candidness and facts.

The Office of the Director of Communications has always attempted to deal with truth. We have always strived at being candid. And we place tremendous emphasis on the facts.

It also should be noted that credibility is a problem not only for the Government, but for the press and in a similar way, it should be noted that the press has a right and a duty to examine Government critically and fairly. But, Government officials also have a right to speak openly and without threat in a similar manner.

This leads inevitably to an advisory situation, but it is a process





which is healthy in finding the means of building greater credibility and greater information capacity for both institutions.

Never has it been more important for the American public to be informed and never has it been more important for both the Government and the press to be factual in all aspects of communications.

As the curtain comes down on our production, you the heroes of the play must stand and take your bow. The producer and director can also take a bow. But it is your performance which will determine if the message has come across to the audience and how the review notices will read. In short you our public information officers will determine how long the play will run!

While Adlai Stevenson was campaigning in California, a woman asked him where he got his coat of deep tan. "You've been playing golf?" she accused him. "No," replied Adlai, "I got this tan making



outdoor speeches in Florida." "Well," the woman told him "if you got that brown you talked too long."

Ladies and Gentlemen I have not been in Florida making speeches but I do submit that I am very tan -- so I shall be seated.

