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THE WHITE HOUSE

WASHINGTON

January 12, 1976

MEMORANDUM FOR: THE PRESIDENT

THROUGH: THE STAFF SECRETARY

FROM: ROLAND L. ELLIOTT

SUBJECT: 1975 PRESIDENTIAL CORRESPONDENCE

Incoming Presidential mail for 1975 totaled 1,856,639. It covered a multitude of subjects and controversies, both foreign and domestic. Yet whatever the topic or issue at hand, certain fundamental themes prevailed throughout the year. I have tried to assess the concerns and sentiments that were most consistently expressed by those citizens writing to their President. For the purpose of this report I have divided the mail into three broad categories: Domestic Policy, Foreign Policy, and General Non-Issue.

I. DOMESTIC POLICY

Virtually all the mail you received in 1975 on domestic subjects can be roughly divided under two general themes:

- 1) The state of the economy - of which energy policy was an integral part;
- 2) The role of Government in citizens' lives

These two concerns cut across geographic and socio-economic lines. There was general agreement that, while most Americans continued to maintain an acceptable standard of living, this was becoming far more difficult and fear of "slippage" was growing. There was similar agreement that Government intrudes far too much into citizens' lives. Writers did differ in their beliefs as to how best to meet these two problems, and their differing beliefs clearly reflected socio-economic levels.

Beginning with your State of the Union Address, economic concern has been expressed steadily (46,500 pieces) throughout the year. Concern over Administration energy policy, which was seen as a major economic determinant, was also steady (40,000 pieces).

Middle- to lower-income writers were principally concerned with costs of living and fuel, and of social program tax burdens. Overall, this group formed the early core opposition to energy decontrol proposals, fearing rising fuel costs. Most vocal during the winter months, they gradually lost interest and virtually ceased to write as the year wore on -- and warmed up. Evidently they resigned themselves to higher fuel prices -- if such can be concluded from their lack of support (83 pieces) for the recent Congressional Energy Bill, with its price roll-back provisions.

In contrast, upper middle-income persons strongly supported Administration efforts to decontrol fuel prices and to deregulate the private economic sector. They supported your State of the Union Address (3,177); and most recently, they urged a veto of the Energy Bill (14,863) and backed efforts to match Federal tax cuts with equal reductions in the growth of Federal spending (1,758). Also, in keeping with their views on decontrol, they opposed the proposal for an Energy Independence Authority by a margin of 8 to 1.

Overall, higher-income individuals see the Federal government as ponderous and intrusive, isolated, authoritarian, and wasteful. Accordingly, they opposed not only economic controls, but also new Federal agencies, such as the Agency for Consumer Advocacy (3,353), Federal export monitoring (924), and Federal regulation generally. Areas coming under particular attack were EPA, OSHA, ERISA, FAA, SEC, and EEOC.

Concern about the proper role of the Federal government is not, however, limited to upper-income groups. It is an issue that cuts across economic lines. But the kinds of intervention that most bother people do reflect social class levels.

Middle- to upper-income writers expressed greatest concern over economic interference by the Government. Complaints focused on regulatory policies, Federal reporting (paperwork) requirements, deficit spending, and an ever-expanding bureaucracy.

In contrast, middle- to lower-income families were most concerned over the social impact of Government on their lives. They objected strenuously to busing (20,244) and to Federal gun controls (65,050). "Liberal judges" -- a group largely blamed for busing -- were also seen as largely responsible for "soaring" crime rates. Gun control was viewed as an inappropriate and inadequate solution to the crime problem. Strict law enforcement and swift, effective punishment would resolve the crime problem, while "law-abiding" citizens would continue to exercise their "Constitutional" right to hold arms.

In addition to public concern over the power of the Federal government, there appeared to be a similar strong concern over the power of labor unions to control and alter American life patterns. This showed up most clearly in Common Situs mail, the heaviest subject mail of the year:

PRO: Letters: 7,179; Forms: 200;

CON: Letters: 47,459; Forms: 598,693.

This same concern over union power was dominant in mail opposing any changes to the Hatch Act (9,413), and in mail opposing the longshoremen's boycott of Soviet grain shipments (6,496). In addition, it was expressed as a strong secondary concern in mail about NYC: unions were frequently blamed for contributing to the city's plight through their "exorbitant" wage and benefit demands.

A variety of Federal social programs drew brief attention over the year. Each clearly had a limited but dedicated constituency who wrote in support of the individual program. Overall, however, there was considerable general dissatisfaction with the costs and the abuses of Federal social programs. This concern was particularly strong on the part of "middle class" writers who saw their own standard of living squeezed by inflation on the one hand and ever-higher taxes to fund Federal welfare and assistance programs on the other.

The Federal Executive pay raise was overwhelmingly opposed by writers (pro: 42; con: 5,186). Anger was particularly directed at the inclusion of Congress in the raise. Writers were also upset over abuses in social welfare programs and about official and bureaucratic "high living" at their expense.

In this latter connection there was limited but consistent criticism of Presidential travel (994 pieces). The costs to the taxpayer and the energy consumption involved were the major objections.

II. FOREIGN POLICY

Doubts about America's proper world role, suspicion of detente, and opposition to foreign aid were the principal attitudes expressed. These reflected, in turn, the prevalent domestic attitude of cautious, belt-tightening self-interest. People seemed more and more to feel that we must take care of ourselves and that the rest of the world could, and would have to, survive largely without U.S. assistance.

The collapse of South Vietnam provided the first solid indication of this attitude. A majority did not want to extend additional American aid to "save" South Vietnam (pro aid: 7,998; con aid: 28,602).

Further, as the country's fall became inevitable, the question of refugees drew a sharply divided response (pro: 8,341; con: 10,215). Here the concern was almost exclusively economic. Opponents expressed fear that a tight U.S. job market could not absorb the refugees, and they protested the costs of refugee settlement and education to American taxpayers.

At the same time, however, there was an increased hardening toward those who would challenge our world position. Response to the MAYAGUEZ incident was instantaneous and overwhelmingly in favor of rescue. This very high level of support for the exercise of U.S. authority remained constant throughout the incident:

PRO: 28,745

CON: 2,662

Similarly, with regard to the American position in the Panama Canal Zone, mail has been solidly in support of retention of all U.S. rights and privileges over the Canal (1,747).

In contrast, the Helsinki Conference drew critical response (pro: 68; con: 1,069) because it was seen as a weakening of American resolve and commitment to freedom. Writers saw Helsinki as conferring on the Soviet Union a legitimacy in its control of the "captive nations" which it had hitherto been unable to gain.

In addition, there were approximately 10,000 pieces of mail specifically requesting that the U.S. recognize no change in the status or territorial integrity of the Baltic States.

At this mid-summer point -- with the Helsinki Conference, the Panama Canal negotiations, and the U.S. visit of Alexander Solzhenitsyn -- the first mail specifically directed against detente began to appear. These three issues, particularly the Solzhenitsyn affair, caused a definite hardening toward the Soviet Union. Writers began to suggest that detente was one-sided and not in the best interests of the U.S.

Besides the above issues, questions about enforcement of the SALT treaty and about the "advantages" of U.S.-Soviet grain sales began to be raised. And again, detente, it was argued, was working heavily to the benefit of the Soviets.

Mixed with the growing criticism of detente was similar criticism of Secretary Kissinger who was seen as its author and principal proponent. This criticism climaxed with the firing of Secretary Schlesinger in November (pro: 246; con: 2,190). The con mail argued that Schlesinger was the one effective counter to Kissinger, and that Schlesinger's ability and willingness to challenge on foreign policy and defense preparedness were vital to American security.

A growing desire to withdraw from global responsibility, seen earlier in Vietnam mail, was again seen in mail concerning the Egyptian-Israeli interim peace agreement (pro: 1,967; con: 2,030). Objections were voiced both to the stationing of American observers in the Sinai -- "another Vietnam" -- and to the provisions for extensive U.S. aid to Israel. Moreover, the opposition mail came fast and heavy from across the country. As these one-sided figures became publicized, an inspired mail campaign was launched by the pro-Israel lobby which ultimately came close to balancing the pro-con ratio.

Opposition to U.S. financial assistance to foreign countries, which surfaced concerning Vietnam and Israel, was also strongly reflected in mail arguing in support of aid to New York City. Repeatedly, writers pointed out how much was requested for foreign aid -- the request for Zaire being particularly mentioned -- and suggested that "charity begins at home."

III. GENERAL NON-ISSUE

Children's Mail: 136,817.

Invitations to Events and Requests for
Appointments: 8,423.

Requests for and Endorsements of Positions
within the Federal Government: 11,028.

Autograph and Autograph Photo Requests: 7,982.

Requests for Birthday and Anniversary
Messages: 37,934.

Christmas Greetings: 17,507.

General Support: 16,793.

General Criticism: 8,440.

THE WHITE HOUSE
WASHINGTON

January 6, 1977

MEMORANDUM FOR: THE PRESIDENT
THROUGH: MR. HARTMANN
FROM: ANNE HIGGINS *Anne Higgins*
SUBJECT: Major Issues Drawing Presidential Mail,
August 9, 1974 - December 1976.

1974: 1,321,506 pieces

The Inauguration, including your incoming address to the people (August 9) and the message to Congress (August 12) brought 26,834 pieces of mail. Most all of these letters expressed support for your efforts and wished you well.

Soon after, the pardon of former President Nixon drew heavy comment with 75,837 expressing support and 197,494 individuals writing to express dissatisfaction with the action.

The WIN Program and suggestions for conservation helped to change the complexion of our mail with 196,800 letters. In addition to writing about what they had done to "WIN," 65,907 people were writing about economic issues, expressing concern over inflation, a possible surtax and energy costs.

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1975: 2,469,660 pieces

In 1975 the largest mail volume of your Administration came on the Common Situs Picketing Bill:

Pro: Letters: 7,179; Forms: 200;
Con: Letters: 47,459; Forms: 598,693.

During the first half of 1975 there was strong public interest in Administration proposals for a comprehensive economic/energy program. There were 41,540 letters in support of your proposals, particularly tax reductions

and energy price decontrol; and there were 70,849 pieces of mail expressing opposition to at least a part of your program. Most often, people opposed decontrol of oil and gasoline prices (which they saw as a first step to substantial price increases). Another 54,932 offered comment, suggestions and compromise proposals.

This disagreement over the issue of decontrol appeared to have a clear economic base. Business and corporate interests favored decontrol, with increased supplies, and prices if necessary, while salaried workers were much concerned with costs and supported controls, and even rationing if necessary.

Foreign policy interest was also fairly strong in 1975. It centered on:

- 1) The fall of South Vietnam and settlement of refugees in this country, with 16,339 supporting aid, 38,817 opposing it.
- 2) The Mayaguez incident, in which you received overwhelming support: 28,745; only 2,662 opposed U.S. rescue efforts.
- 3) Soviet v. Free World competition, with writers including detente generally, the Helsinki meeting, the Panama Canal negotiations, etc., in the equation: 6,326 supported U.S. policy fully, while 19,509 argued that the U.S. should take a harder line.
- 4) Middle East policy:

Pro: 50,644 Con: 32,436.

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1976: 1,138,512 pieces

The Presidential election dominated your mail in 1976: 82,607 pieces. This may generally be divided as follows:

- 1) General Support: 23,133
- 2) Political Comment/Suggestions: 15,675

3) Election Campaign (including debate comment):

Pro:	<u>7,797</u>
Con:	<u>1,913</u>
Comment:	<u>2,093</u>

4) Election Results:

Regrets/Appreciation:	<u>31,462</u>
Comment:	<u>534</u>

The economy was of less immediate interest in 1976: 9,633 pieces. It should be noted, however, that in much of the "political" mail writers did comment that their view of the economy influenced significantly their choice of a candidate. As one might expect, a breakdown of this mail suggests that people toward lower economic levels supported Federal spending, jobs programs, unemployment benefits, etc., while middle to upper income people sought limits on government authority, regulations, spending, etc.

Foreign policy generally dropped as an issue in 1976. However, it did appear that Secretary Kissinger came to personify whatever dissatisfaction people felt over U.S. initiatives, from detente to the protection of human rights in Soviet countries, from Rhodesia to the Panama Canal. There were 6,715 messages of complaint/protest over U.S. policies, 233 in support.