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COMMITTEE FOR THE RE-ELECTION OF THE PRESIDENT

MEMORANDUM

January 6, 1972

Determined to be an Administrative Marking

By SO NARA, Date 12/30/89

~~CONFIDENTIAL~~

MEMORANDUM FOR H. R. HALDEMAN  
FROM ROBERT M. TEETER  
SUBJECT: THE ENVIRONMENT

This memorandum is based on survey data we have collected in state-wide polls primarily in the midwest and east during the past several years, on a national study done on the environment by Harris about a year ago for the Public Broadcast Laboratory For Environmental Quality, and the Harris Domestic Council poll.

Several conclusions can be drawn from this data.

First and most important is that the environment has, along with consumerism, become the fourth major national issue complex and will continue to be an important issue indefinitely.

Since the 1930's there have been three basic national issue complexes: The war/peace issue, which is, of course, currently centered on Vietnam; the domestic peace issue, which has been oriented to racial problems and civil rights for the past twenty-five years, and the money issue which at various points in time may be oriented to inflation, cost of living, taxes or unemployment.

During the past 20 or 30 years, each of these issues has tended to rise and fall through time and rarely have all three of them been acute public concerns at the same time. Occasionally the data will indicate that one of these is of concern to a large number of people, but that it is being held down to some degree by another issue which is of more acute concern at that time. This has frequently been true in the past decade when Vietnam was perceived as the single most important problem in the country, but at the same time people were seriously concerned about domestic unrest, crime, and inflation.



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Nineteen sixty-eight was in many ways a unique year, because during the campaign period, the public was acutely concerned and unhappy over the status of all three of these problem areas. They were frustrated over the handling of the war, frightened over the increasing domestic unrest and civil disorders, and personally feeling the effects of spiraling inflation.

During the 1960's several specific environmental and consumer issues such as: traffic and highway safety, thalidomide, meat inspection, land use, safety of birth control pills, truth in packaging, wild-life preservation, mercury, DDT, etc. rose and fell. At their high point these issues would get up to a total rating of 20-25% but concern always fell off after the publicity which caused the original jump subsided. Concern over several of these issues was climaxed by books such as: Nader's Unsafe at Any Speed and Rachel Carson's Silent Spring. I think that many of these specific issues have now bound together to form a permanent fourth major national issue complex which we now call the environment/ecology issue, which is in a broader sense a quality of life issue. Almost all of the individual environment and consumer issues have the common characteristic of dealing with the individual's problems of living in a complex urban society in which he is dependent on a multitude of institutions of which he has little or no knowledge and virtually no control. This means that the individual doesn't know whether or not there is mercury in his fish, whether his vegetables have been sprayed with a harmful pesticide or whether the air he breathes is killing him, and even if he did, he's powerless to do anything about it. It is also something that people see examples of every day and is psychologically frightening to them because it is something over which they have no control but yet it directly affects their personal health and well being and that of their children.

Two other factors which will probably also help keep the environment an important issue are that it is an easy and attractive issue for the media to cover and an even more attractive one for politicians because it has virtually no negative side.



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Therefore, I think that as Vietnam subsides as an issue and the economy gets back on the upswing, there is a good chance that the environmental set of issues will increase considerably as an important national issue. This is particularly true if we continue to get by without any major national racial disturbances. There are several states where it has already been the first or second most important state issue in the past several months. Also, it is a very important issue to the younger generation.

The second conclusion is that it can be a very useful issue for the President in this campaign for several reasons.

First, a large majority of the electorate is concerned about it and virtually no one is against it. In most of the data I have studied every significant voting behavior group and demographic group is in favor of vigorous governmental action to improve the environment. It is truly a non-partisan and non-ideological issue. Some of the most ardent environmentalists come from both the left and right ends of the ideological spectrum. Regardless of the type of trade-off question that is asked, a large majority say they are willing to make the sacrifice whether it is higher taxes, higher prices or a loss of jobs. (This is also the finding of the Domestic Council poll.) In our current wave of polls we asked whether the economy or the environment should take precedence if a choice had to be made, and the environment is chosen by over a two-to-one margin in all those states where we have preliminary data--Wisconsin, Kentucky, and New Hampshire. Moreover, a majority of voters clearly do not believe that this choice has to be made.

Secondly, the groups who are most concerned with this issue and whose voting behavior appears to be most influenced by it, are groups who are important to us and who we may be able to attract on this issue but not on any other. These are the very young voters (18-24) with whom the environment is always the first or second most important issue, and the younger ticket-splitters (25-40) who are largely white, suburban middle class, and who are slightly more affluent than the average voter. I think there is a segment of both of these groups who may well vote primarily on this issue. In the large mid-western and eastern states such as Illinois, Ohio, Wisconsin, Pennsylvania, and New Jersey, this ticket-splitting group has been crucial for Republicans in past elections and appear to be the key for the President in those states in 1972.



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Thirdly, neither party nor any of the candidates really has a hold on the environmental issue yet. The President is rated as handling it fairly well in most of the states we have studied and Muskie, try as he might, simply is not perceived as a champion of the environment.

Lastly, I think this issue may provide an opportunity to show the President as one who is very concerned about the health and welfare of individual citizens, as opposed to one who is generally concerned with hard-to-understand issues such as: business, the military, foreign affairs, and the international money problem.

In conclusion, I do not think the environment will be one of the primary issues in the campaign, but I do think it will be an important secondary issue and that a small but significant number of people may vote on. Even if this group is only 2 or 3% they could be critical to us in close states and I see no risk in appealing to them. While I realize that the President must act responsibly, there is no risk in terms of losing votes with strong environmental position.

