

The original documents are located in Box 64, folder “April 12, 1972 - John N. Mitchell - Campaign Theme” of the Robert Teeter Papers at the Gerald R. Ford Presidential Library.

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COMMITTEE FOR THE RE-ELECTION OF THE PRESIDENT

April 12, 1972

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MEMORANDUM FOR:

THE HONORABLE JOHN N. MITCHELL

FROM:

ROBERT M. TEETER

R.M.T. by [signature]

SUBJECT:

Campaign Theme

As we begin to focus the campaign exclusively on the general election and as the President increases his travel schedule, I think it important that we develop a central theme or idea for the campaign. It is important that the President's campaign have one central idea -- a message that everyone knows by election day to which various statements and actions can be tied. It does not necessarily have to be a slogan, although one could emerge later. The main point is that the campaign have a central idea or message that the majority of voters find attractive and would support.

Based on my analysis of our first wave data and the other research data I have looked at, I am concerned that the President is viewed as a tactician without an overall strategy or master plan for the country. This causes voters to interpret many of his positions and programs as things done for political expediency or to appease specific special interest groups rather than as part of an overall plan to move this country toward a perceivable set of goals or objectives. A majority of voters do not apparently think the President has such a master plan. No one seems to know how the President would like to leave the country after eight years "for his children and grandchildren."

I think it is imperative for the President and for the campaign to articulate his master plan to the voters and to show how the President's positions and programs fit into the plan. This should become the campaign theme -- the idea that ties everything together.

While this is important for every campaign and every President, I think it is particularly important for this one. It is a relatively well-accepted fact that he does not have any great personal appeal and will not be re-elected on the basis of personality or personal appeal. Moreover, because of the current issue structure and the type of problems he has had to deal with, I think we would have trouble trying to fight the campaign on a series of specific issues.

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As an incumbent, the President is always open to the charge that he should have done more. More importantly, the general attitude in the country toward government, and politicians is very negative. If the voters know and understand what the President is trying to do for the country and how each of his programs are a part of that plan, it should be easier to gain support for his programs.

Also, the fact that voters are concerned about more issues now than has been the case in previous campaigns and also because the solutions to many of these problems are complex, it will be difficult for the President to attract the ticket-splitter on the basis of specific issues. Rather, he is going to have to appeal to these swing voters on the basis of a set of well-articulated goals for the country and further showing that his programs are moving the country toward these goals, and that he is more capable of leading the country toward these goals than his opponent.

The essential elements of this theme are what the President believes to be the destiny of the nation and the element of hope. The President could do this well. It would be positively received in the press and it is the type of approach which the public apparently wants and would favorably receive. The President may find that a "destiny speech" is the appropriate vehicle to deliver such a theme. It would allow him to stay on the high road and elevate the level of the campaign. It would be something he could develop and use now as President and yet carry into the campaign. It would give the campaign a common thread with which to tie things together while giving many of his individual statements and positions a prospective which they currently lack, yet be general enough so that the President would not be trapped by events between now and the election.

By giving the voters the idea that he has a master plan, the President would go a long way in solving the credibility problem. If the voters could see his various positions in the context of an overall strategy the President would be less suspect of being political. This approach gives the administration more breath and depth by tying things together such as China, Vietnam, welfare reform, bussing, economic controls, revenue sharing etc. It would also emphasize the complexity of the job and give us the benefit of being evaluated on the record as a whole.

While I recognize that the President should not get into a position of over promising, and also realizing that anything he says must be believable, I think his basic theme must restore the element of hope. I believe our data clearly shows that the people have lost hope that things can and will get better. More recently, there are indications that the public is looking for someone to restore this feeling of hope and optimism which has characteristically been the American attitude.



I have the feeling that the President has been very close to this idea several times when he has talked about the loss of the American spirit and desire to be number one, but his choice of words has left him just off the mark. Possibly a slight change of words or emphasis could make this basic idea catch hold. Also, I have the feeling that the President has used this approach to defend unpopular positions in the past, such as the SST. He has left the impression that we should strive to be number one so that we will be better than everyone else, not just for the sake of excellence itself. This is a subtle difference which has occurred in our society in the past 10-20 years.

We have the advantage of time to experiment with this approach over the next several weeks while the Democrats are involved with the primaries. The various domestic appearances which the President makes during the spring and summer present an excellent opportunity to try to find the combination of words and ideas that catch. Possibly the President needs a "new" inaugural address to be used on some occasion when people least expect it, such as during a campus appearance or before ethnics. It may be possible to tie this approach to the Bicentennial.

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