

**The original documents are located in Box C8, folder “Presidential Handwriting, 12/10/1974” of the Presidential Handwriting File at the Gerald R. Ford Presidential Library.**

### **Copyright Notice**

The copyright law of the United States (Title 17, United States Code) governs the making of photocopies or other reproductions of copyrighted material. Gerald Ford donated to the United States of America his copyrights in all of his unpublished writings in National Archives collections. Works prepared by U.S. Government employees as part of their official duties are in the public domain. The copyrights to materials written by other individuals or organizations are presumed to remain with them. If you think any of the information displayed in the PDF is subject to a valid copyright claim, please contact the Gerald R. Ford Presidential Library.

---

12/10/74

Treated as Handwriting -- no blue card.

---

1/9

THE WHITE HOUSE  
WASHINGTON

Don --

I am returning the original to you for  
your files.

Jack Marsh

THE WHITE HOUSE

WASHINGTON

December 10, 1974

MEMORANDUM FOR THE PRESIDENT

THROUGH: Donald Rumsfeld *D. Rumsfeld*  
FROM: William E. Timmons *W. E. Timmons*  
SUBJECT: Consensus Government *GR*

Attached is a personal and confidential memorandum to you from John Rhodes. He elaborates on his "consensus government" ideas which he raised with you briefly last week and which has received some news coverage.

Rather than a written response, I recommend you discuss the concept with Rhodes at a convenient opportunity.

My own views, whatever they are worth, are:

1. The idea is good as a publicity tool to show an effort to cooperate.
2. Few results will come of meetings because Congress is not one whole, but rather 535 parts. Chairmen disagree, ranking Members disagree, leaders disagree, etc.
3. There is some risk in appearing not to lead the nation, but to be led by Congress.
4. If there is any degree of unanimity on a single issue by the Members, and the President rejects the legislative method recommended, the Congress would be free to close their minds to arguments advanced by the Administration along another line.

Nevertheless, I suggest you ask John Rhodes to put together lists of participants and issues to be covered, and dates available (has to be soon) and proceed to set them up.

JOHN J. RHODES  
1ST DISTRICT, ARIZONA

WASHINGTON OFFICE:  
2310 RAYBURN HOUSE OFFICE BUILDING  
WASHINGTON, D.C. 20515

ALMA A. ALKIRE  
RICHARD ROBERTS

DISTRICT OFFICE:  
6040 FEDERAL BUILDING  
PHOENIX, ARIZONA 85025

ROBERT J. SCANLAN

**Office of the Minority Leader**  
**United States House of Representatives**  
Washington, D.C. 20515

H-232, THE CAPITOL  
WASHINGTON, D.C. 20515

JOHN J. WILLIAMS  
DENNIS J. TAYLOR  
J. BRIAN SMITH  
CLARA POSEY

December 10, 1974

PERSONAL & CONFIDENTIAL

TO: PRESIDENT GERALD R. FORD  
FROM: JOHN J. RHODES, MINORITY LEADER, UNITED STATES HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES  
SUBJECT: CONSENSUS GOVERNMENT

#1. THE PRESENT SITUATION

The Democratic Party has overwhelming control of both Houses of Congress. In the House of Representatives particularly, the new Members, under the leadership of the Democratic Study Group and other liberal elements will force the Democratic posture to be both militant and oriented to the left. This means that any legislation presented by your Administration will probably be either ignored or amended beyond all recognition, tending to the left, and toward greater governmental deficits at present and in the future. Any legislation which they initiate is quite likely to be so oriented as to make it unlikely that persons with our economic persuasions could approve it. This will lead to many vetoes by you in the 94th Congress.

#2. OUR PURPOSE

Our purpose should be twofold:

1. To try to prevent legislation from being adopted which would be against the best interests of this country.
2. To try to prevent a stalemate which would prevent the Federal Government from acting wisely and effectively in the fields of economy, energy and national defense. Not the principal, but an important purpose, is to impress the American people with the responsibility of the Republican position and the cohesiveness of Republicans in the Congress.

#3. ALTERNATIVE COURSES OF ACTION

1. To do nothing, and assume that since the Democrats won the election they have a mandate to govern the country. We would, of course, then be relying on their inability to produce a viable program and would be putting you in a position of either having to sign or veto bills in which none of us had had much input.

DECEMBER 10, 1974

#3. ALTERNATIVE COURSES OF ACTION (CONTINUED)

2. Operate as usual, in which event the Administration would proceed quite independently to produce its legislative program, send it to Capitol Hill, and work for its passage. This, of course, leaves us open to the delays and doubts of the amendment process, particularly in the Senate, with the probable result that legislation will be sent to you which is unacceptable, and also very late.
3. An alternative would be to attempt to arrive at a consensus on major legislative proposals before they are set in concrete. While I am not completely familiar with the process by which legislative proposals arrive at Congress in the form of a message, I assume that they either originate as somebody's idea in the White House or as a result of thoughts engendered in one of the Departments. However this may occur, the proposal finally is submitted to the Office of Management and Budget before it goes to the Congress. I would propose that somewhere in this process, certainly before the matter is set in concrete, the leadership of the House and Senate, both Democratic and Republican, and the top members of the legislative committee or committees to be involved, would sit down in the Roosevelt Room or in a Department with representatives of the White House staff, the Departments, etc. and go over the proposal. This should be done exhaustively. The legislators should not be expected to make a decision on the spot, but should be given a chance to formulate their own thoughts with their own staffs, and a second or even a third meeting should take place until the areas of agreement and the areas of disagreement can be pretty well blocked out. At the end of this process I should think that it might be well to formalize those areas of agreement and disagreement and, at least, get the legislative members to initial the formalization. They may balk at this, but I would certainly try it.

#4. BEST COURSE OF ACTION

Clearly I favor alternative #3. I am not at all sure that the Democrats will do it. If they don't, and stalemate results, I think that that stalemate can clearly be laid to their door. If they do, the route through the House and Senate is made much easier and crippling amendments made more difficult of adoption because of the probabilities that the ranking members of the committees and the leadership would oppose them.

I also feel that the existence of a system such as this and the knowledge by the Republican Members that it does exist would make it easier for us to sustain vetoes when they occur. It would also be my hope that a warning of a probable veto could be given the Members of the House and Senate at the earliest possible time. It is recognized that many times pieces of legislation change not only on the Floor of the two Houses, but also in conference. Even so, if a bill comes from a committee in a form which is clearly unacceptable, and is not substantially amended on the Floor, it would be helpful if our "troops" knew that the bill in its present form would be vetoed.

#4. BEST COURSE OF ACTION (CONTINUED)

If they vote against the bill, and the bill is later signed because of improvements made in the other Body or in conference, they can always vote in favor of the conference report and repair any political damage which they might have suffered.

It is my hope that the Republican Members of the House and Senate and the Republican Administration can come out of this next two years with the image in the country of being a small but effective and completely sensible force--probably the only such force which exists in the Nation's Capital.

#5. POSSIBLE DEMOCRATIC DEMANDS

They may want "goodies" or appointments for their co-operation. I would remind them that the 80th Congress co-operated with Harry S. Truman for patriotic reasons and we hope they would do similarly.

However, I think you might want to consider appointing some Democrats to some high positions--even to the cabinet. This might be necessary and desirable in really developing a consensus.