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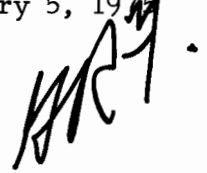
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THE WHITE HOUSE  
WASHINGTON

January 5, 1975



MEMORANDUM FOR THE PRESIDENT

FROM: RON NESSEN *RHN*

SUBJECT: SOME THOUGHTS BY DAVE BRODER ON YOUR STATE OF THE UNION MESSAGE AND SUBSEQUENT PRESENTATION OF YOUR PROGRAMS

Find attached the Dave Broder column from today's Washington Post. As you know, Dave Broder is a thoughtful, incisive and analytical writer. Many of the ideas he presents in this column are excellent and we here at the White House should consider them seriously in planning your activities of the next several weeks.

I believe your State of the Union speech is not just another speech. Based on comments from the press, the public and the business community, I have the strong impression that this speech will determine the Nation's view of you as leader and President for the balance of this term. Therefore, it is important, I believe, that the tone and substance of this speech be very carefully considered. If this speech strikes the right tone by demonstrating your strong leadership in the fields of economy and energy, and if it lays out the facts of the seriousness of the present situation to the American people, you should be able to unite the country and the Congress behind your program and get your public approval rating moving upward again.

As part of the preparation for the speech and subsequent activities in support of your program, we should weigh some of Broder's ideas seriously.



David S. Broder

# 'A Dialogue With The People'

At a recent White House staff meeting, President Ford orally summarized three option papers on the energy situation, each involving policies with serious costs to American consumers. At the end, according to the recollection of one listener, he asked: "How would you like to tell the American people those are the alternatives?"

"Maybe you should," this staffer replied, thereby giving Mr. Ford what may well be the most useful advice he could receive as he faces a critical period in his young but vulnerable presidency.

Between Jan. 20, the scheduled date for the State of the Union address, and about March 1, Mr. Ford will have his best—and perhaps his last—opportunity to set his agenda and program before the nation. If he fails in that period, adverse events and an opposition Congress may overwhelm him.

There are encouraging signs that the sojourn in Vail produced some tough policy decisions on the President's part. But even if his policies are beginning to jell, he still needs to improve his weapons of persuasion, which have not been impressive these past five months. Not since the first two speeches he made on taking over as President, in the melodrama of Richard Nixon's fall, has Mr. Ford been able to capture the public's imagination or attention.

Given this fact and given the importance of the occasion, there will be a tendency to try to write the State of the Union address as a blockbuster. The comparison one hears at the White House is the dramatic Sunday night speech in mid-August of 1971 in which Mr. Nixon announced his "new economic policy," with a wage-price freeze, the floating of the dollar and other high-voltage measures.

Mr. Ford will not echo those particular policies but there is a yearning on his staff for a similarly sensational effect. But that approach is almost certain to prove wrong for this President, for it suits neither the times nor the man.

Everyone in America now understands what only a few people knew in 1971—that our economic and energy problems will not be solved by quick-fix solutions and that any policies worth adopting will have to be carried for months and years to have any hope of success.

That implies that they should be introduced, not with a staccato blast of trumpets, but on a well-modulated note of logic and restraint that can be sustained over time.

What is needed, in short, is a continuous, low-keyed discussion of government policies, led by the President through frequent talks, inviting responses from congressional leaders and marked less by rhetoric than by clear exposition of where we stand and where we are headed.

Mr. Ford needs to signal his desire for such a dialogue in his State of the Union talk and to follow up by doing what no President since Harry Truman has done—presenting his budget to the American people himself at the same time he submits it to Congress.

And then he needs to come back on television, every couple of weeks or so, to update his report to the people on the progress—or lack of progress—toward his goals.

Such a communications strategy would suit this President. His errors at rhetoric are faltering, and he is distinctly uncomfortable at seeming to talk down to his former colleagues in Congress or talk past them to the people.

But he can expound a problem or a policy with a good deal of clarity, and by expounding, not exhorting, he can talk simultaneously both to the voters and to their representatives, without appearing to lecture either of them.

The test of these talks will be not their eloquence but their honesty. Where the question of Policy A or Policy B is a close one, Mr. Ford must acknowledge the difficulty of the choice. Where all options have some inherent disadvantages, he must face those costs at the same time he recommends his chosen course of action.

Candor comes naturally to this President, and his own honesty can impose a similar standard of straightforwardness in the congressional leaders who will—and should—come forward to respond.

This kind of dialogue will not prevent confrontations between the Republican President and the Democratic Congress; nothing could. But it can impose a discipline on the legislative branch, which was utterly lacking in the end-of-the-session veto battles, by forewarning Congress that the public will be watching its actions and seeing the President measure them against the yardsticks he has set forth.

Happily, Mr. Ford has no eccentricities of style that should make him fear overexposure on television. His effectiveness is in speaking plainly and often with the American people, not orating occasionally and brilliantly at them.

By launching such a sensible, sustained dialogue with the people, he can serve both his interests and the country's.