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THE WHITE HOUSE

WASHINGTON

January 31, 1975

MEMORANDUM TO THE PRESIDENT

THROUGH: DONALD RUMSFELD

FROM: ROBERT GOLDWIN *RG**MR*

In your meeting with the National Council of Churches yesterday, you spoke of the difficulty of explaining a complex program when the TV commentators are forced, by the nature of their medium, to reduce everything to "headlines." In my opinion, the President has a better chance than anyone else in the nation to overcome this difficulty, because his own words will be listened to, and will continue to sound in the ears of the listeners, even as the TV interpreters strive to simplify and abbreviate.

The formula that can work is the one you stated in the meeting--"Lay all the options before them"--especially if you pose the options very sharply and repeatedly.

For example, the chances of the energy program getting through Congress in its present form are doubtful, primarily for two reasons: first, it imposes a burden on the American people--and Congress doesn't like to impose burdens; and second, the tendency is to look at it in isolation, not in comparison with other realistic alternatives.

If people are asked whether they want to impose an import tax on themselves that will cause an increase in the price of all petroleum products, or to leave things as they are, the natural reaction is to say no to import taxes. But your

Memorandum to the President

Page 2

January 31, 1975

position is that doing nothing at all about our dependence on the increasing flow of imported petroleum is not one of the responsible alternatives.

The realistic choices are (1) the President's program, (2) mandatory rationing of oil and gasoline, or (3) a large increase in the tax on gasoline at the filling station. The President has the platform to keep these three options before the Congress and the people by repeated words and actions. The public and Congress can be persuaded to look at your program as one of these three options if you continue to pose them very sharply, on every occasion. And they may be won over to your program if you continue to reiterate your support for it as superior to the others.

The preceding paragraphs are based on your remark in the meeting yesterday; on conversations over the last 10 days with Martin Diamond and Irving Kristol, who are eagerly exploring ways to help muster support for your program; and on a letter Kristol wrote to me, at my request, after a long phone conversation on the subject.

In his letter (copy attached), Kristol goes on to link use of the veto to the lay-all-the-options-before-them approach. Knowing your reluctance to speak of veto possibilities in advance, I simply forward Kristol's letter without additional comment. It may be useful at a later time.

Attachment

Public Interest

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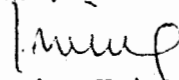
Dear Bob:

It seems clear to me that the President's energy program is in deep trouble, and that the chances of its getting through Congress, in its present form, under present circumstances, are slim. One of the reasons it is in trouble, of course, is that it does indeed impose a burden upon the American public -- and Congress does not like to impose burdens on the American public. But another reason it is in trouble is that it is being looked at in isolation, not in comparison with the two other realistic alternatives: (a) mandatory rationing of oil and gasoline, or (b) a whopping increase in the gasoline tax. If Congress and the public could be persuaded to look at the President's program as one of these three alternatives, it is possible that both Congressional and public opinion will change in its favor.

The only way to get the public and Congress to do this is for the President to pose the alternatives very sharply. I believe he should, on some proper occasion, outline these three alternatives clearly. He should then reiterate his support for his own program as superior to the others. But he should then go on to say that if Congress passes either of the other two programs over his veto, he will duly execute these programs. Moreover, he should affirm his intention of not engaging in any kind of "arm twisting" or "lobbying" on any post-veto vote. In other words, he is sticking by his own program, but he is not going to be so irresponsible as to leave us in the end with no program. What he will then be saying is that, if Congress won't pass his program, and can freely mobilize a two-thirds vote for any of the other alternatives, he will reluctantly go along.

I don't see how anyone can challenge the President's right to support his own program and to veto a competing program of which he disapproves. On the other hand, it would be a magnanimous and most responsible gesture on his part if he says that, after vetoing one of these alternatives, he will then not interfere with Congressional deliberations as to a final resolution of the problem.

Best,


Irving Kristol

IK:rl

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