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MEETING WITH LOUIS HARRIS

Monday, June 9, 1975

12:00 Noon

THE PRESIDENT HAS SEEN.

Handwritten initials or signature in dark ink, appearing to be 'J.F.' or similar, written over the end of the typed text.

THE WHITE HOUSE THE PRESIDENT HAS SEEN *W.S.*
WASHINGTON

June 9, 1975

MEETING WITH LOUIS HARRIS
June 9, 1975
12:00 Noon
The Oval Office
(10 Minutes)

From: L. William Seidman *LWS*

I. PURPOSE

To discuss some recent trends in polls conducted by Harris Public Opinion Analysis.

II. BACKGROUND, PARTICIPANTS AND PRESS PLAN

A. Background: Lou Harris requested this meeting in order to provide you with more complete information regarding recent trends that have emerged in polls conducted by his organization.

According to the most recent published Harris polls your ratings have improved considerably in the last few weeks. A copy of the most recent Harris poll, released this morning, is attached at Tab A.

Mr. Harris has agreed that this meeting would not appear on your printed schedule, would be off-the-record, and would not be discussed outside the White House.

B. Participants: Louis Harris, L. William Seidman.

C. Press Plan: No press.

III. TALKING POINTS

I am pleased to spend a few minutes with you today and have followed your most recent published polls with interest.

I am interested in how you sense the Administration

is perceived by the American people and what are the issues that Americans consider most important and crucial.

JUN 8 1975

To: Chicago Tribune--New York News, Syndicate, Inc.
220 East 42nd Street, New York, NY 10017

HARRIS SURVEY

For Release: Monday AM, June 9, 1975

Not Before

BY LOUIS HARRIS

President Ford has gained so much ground in the past month that he is running ahead of Senator Edward Kennedy by a 48-46 per cent margin in a 1976 trial heat in the latest Harris Survey. Back in April, the President trailed Sen. Kennedy by a 50-43 per cent margin, and his hopes for winning election in his own right next year appeared slim.

But now, in the wake of his highly applauded action in sending in Marines to take back the cargo ship Mayaguez, captured by the Cambodians, Mr. Ford appears to have achieved a whole new political lease on life.

In addition, President Ford has now begun to open up real distance between his own political position and that of former Governor Ronald Reagan of California. In the same survey Reagan trailed badly behind Kennedy by a 53-40 per cent margin. In other words, a little over a year before the Republican Party must nominate its candidate for president, Gerald Ford appears to have a real chance of defeating the strongest candidate thus far in Democratic ranks, while his chief conservative opponent, Reagan, does not appear viable at all as a potential GOP standard-bearer.

Thus, Ford's action in the Cambodian ship episode appears to have taken most of the steam out of the emerging conservative challenge to his leadership in the Republican Party. Whether he will now capitalize on his current advantage by demanding that Reagan not split GOP ranks in 1976, a move he could make out of his new-found strength, remains to be seen.

(MORE)

Between May 19 and 23, a cross section of 1,314 adults who are likely to vote in 1976 were asked:

"Now in the presidential race in 1976, suppose it were between President Gerald Ford for the Republicans and Senator Edward Kennedy for the Democrats. If you had to choose right now, would you vote for Ford the Republican or Kennedy the Democrat?"

FORD VS. KENNEDY

	<u>Ford</u>	<u>Kenn- edy</u>	<u>Not Sure</u>
	<u>%</u>	<u>%</u>	<u>%</u>
May, 1975	48	46	6
April	43	50	7
July, 1974	46	47	7
May	47	44	9
March	45	49	6
Nov., 1973	48	44	8

The singular mark of a head-to-head Ford-Kennedy contest, as measured over the past year and a half, is that it would have all the earmarks of a close and hard-fought contest. But only back last April it began to look as though the recession at home and the Vietnam disaster abroad were poised to deliver a mortal blow to Mr. Ford's chances in 1976. Now, however, he has bounced back into contention, although his latest margin over Kennedy is far from decisive.

In contrast, Gov. Reagan does relatively poorly against Senator Kennedy among precisely the same group of voters. They were asked:

"Suppose in 1976 it were between Ronald Reagan for the Republicans and Sen. Edward Kennedy for the Democrats. If you had to choose right now, would you vote for Reagan the Republican or Kennedy the Democrat?"

REAGAN VS. KENNEDY

	<u>Reagan</u>	<u>Kennedy</u>	<u>Not Sure</u>
	<u>%</u>	<u>%</u>	<u>%</u>
May, 1975	40	53	7
May, 1974	38	52	10
March	43	51	6
June, 1973	44	50	6

(MORE)

Previous surveys of this winter and spring had indicated a surge of support for Reagan, especially within conservative and Republican ranks. Yet, in this latest Harris Survey, Reagan runs far behind Kennedy, while President Ford runs two points ahead of the Massachusetts Democrat.

Perhaps even more significant is to pinpoint just where Reagan fails to measure up to the Ford potential among the electorate:

--Despite all the talk about Reagan appeal in the South, he trails Kennedy by a narrow 48-44 per cent margin. By contrast, Mr. Ford just edges out the last of the Kennedy brothers by a slim 47-46 per cent margin. The big news here, of course, is that the South in 1976 simply cannot be taken for granted as "safe" GOP territory. The Republicans are going to have to fight to carry the South.

--Among independent voters, whose ranks have swelled to 37 per cent of the electorate, Reagan loses to Kennedy by a 46-44 per cent margin. By contrast, Gerald Ford trounces Ted Kennedy with the independents by a 56-36 per cent margin. No Republican can hope to win next year without carrying the independent in addition to the regular GOP vote.

--Among enrolled Republicans, Reagan defeats Kennedy by a 76-20 per cent margin. But the same, identical GOP voters give President Ford an 86-13 per cent margin over the Massachusetts Democrat.

(MORE)

In short, where Gov. Reagan might be expected to bring something extra to a Republican campaign in 1976, Mr. Ford brings more, and in some cases, much more. It is not overstating the case to say that at mid-year of 1975, President Ford has regained dominance in his own party by demonstrating what in the end is the only real source of political power for a sitting incumbent: he shows a real prospect of winning the next time out, while his chief opponent does not. Whether Mr. Ford capitalizes on his present advantage or squanders it in the coming months cannot be determined. But, if he declares his candidacy shortly, as his aides have indicated, he is in a strong position to discourage any serious opposition within his own party in his quest for the nomination. And it will now take all the Democrats have to oust him from the White House in 1976.

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