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THE WHITE HOUSE
WASHINGTON

October 3, 1975

ADMINISTRATIVELY CONFIDENTIAL

MEMORANDUM FOR:

RON NESSEN

FROM:

JIM CONNOR *JCC*

SUBJECT:

GRIDIRON CLUB SPEECHES

The President reviewed your memorandum of September 30 concerning the book being published by the Gridiron Club and made the following notation:

"All OK"

Please follow-up with appropriate action.

cc: Don Rumsfeld

THE WHITE HOUSE

WASHINGTON

September 30, 1975

MEMORANDUM FOR THE PRESIDENT

THROUGH: DON RUMSFELD

FROM: RON NESSEN *RAN*

The Gridiron Club is publishing a book reminiscing about the speeches made to its annual dinner by Presidents and other public officials. The book is being written by Harold Brayman, a former president of the Gridiron Club and former president of the National Press Club.

Mr. Brayman has sent me the attached pages from his manuscript which quote from the speeches you have made to the Gridiron dinners. Since these speeches have always been considered off-the-record, Mr. Brayman and the Gridiron Club feel an obligation to obtain your permission before publishing the excerpts from your speeches.

When you have a moment, would you please review the manuscript and scratch out whatever lines you would prefer not to have published?

Attachment

all OK
[Signature]

Ford, as the House Minority Leader, was introduced to speak for the Republicans. "And if the electoral fates are in his favor," said Finney, "he may be the next Speaker of the House."

Referring to the last song, Ford said that "what the President calls us in public -- wooden soldiers -- is nothing compared to what he calls us in private.

"Let me tell you a little inside story. I've heard that President Johnson tells his visitors: 'There's nothing wrong with Jerry Ford except he played football too long -- without a helmet.'

"Now I don't mind a little joke. But like so many other things you hear nowadays, that just isn't true.

"And I can prove it. On the Gridiron, I always wear my helmet."

He pulled out a helmet from under the table and put it on.

"This is really my helmet -- ," he said, "it used to fit."

Humphrey was to be the Democratic speaker, and Ford paid his respects to him in the following comment:

"Why did I ever tell Nat Finney I wanted to be the next Republican Speaker? Matching me against Hubert Humphrey for laughs is like putting Twiggy up against Zsa Zsa Gabor.

"Nat told me how it would go tonight. He said first he'd give a little talk -- and next I'd give a little talk -- and then the Vice President would follow.

"I said: 'Who follows the Vice President?'

"He said: 'Hardly anybody.'

"It's good to see so many great political writers here tonight. More and more lately, you gentlemen have been the zipper on the Credibility Gap.

"Now where else in Washington can you bask in the warm glow of good fellowship -- and see Bill Fulbright toast President Johnson's health in Charlie DeGaulle's wine?"

After some references to the "Garbage Gap" in New York City, which had supplanted the Missile Gap, he noted that "Presidents are not always considerate of their Vice Presidents."

"Remember when Nixon returned from South America -- stoned?"

"Remember when Johnson had to fly 26,000 miles -- for a camel?" [A reference to the fact that he had been given a camel in Saudi Arabia].

"Frankly, if I were Vice President Humphrey, and just got home from a backbreaking tour of Africa, and the next day my President put a stop to all foreign travel -- well, I'd lead a pretty good riot myself.

"But what a full public career Vice President Humphrey has had.-- just one long struggle against McCarthyism.

"He's been birched red by the Old Right, and rapped brown by the New Left.

"But Hubert always comes up smiling. He's really the Pagliacci of politics."

As to Bobby Kennedy, Ford remarked that "Bobby's now at the awkward age. He's too young to be President -- and he's really too old for that haircut."

Of George Wallace he commented that "if George sneaks off with just a few little ol' electoral votes, we may have to pick the next President in the House of Representatives."

Of Nelson Rockefeller: "He still won't volunteer, but last week he installed a hot line to his draft board."

Concerning President Johnson, he recalled that Henry Clay always said he'd rather be right than president.

"Now President Johnson has proved once and for all," he said, "it really is a choice.

"You know, I nearly didn't get here on time tonight. When I heard it was to be a bi-partisan affair, I went straight to the President's Club.

"Isn't that where you go to Buy Partisans?"

But partisanship, he said, had to stop somewhere, and it does, for "the things that unite us as Americans are far more enduring than the things that divide us, and one of these is our national sense of humor...

"Our unwritten compact of respect for the convictions of others and faith in the decency of others, allows Americans the luxury of rugged political competition. Let's all work to banish war from our shrinking world and hate from our expanding hearts -- to make this whole planet as full of friendship and felicity as this room tonight.

"In this spirit, let me assure the distinguished Vice President of the United States, before all of you, that I have absolutely no designs on his job.

"How many others in this room can make that statement?

"I'm serious. I'm not at all interested in the Vice Presidency.

"I love the House of Representatives, despite the long, irregular hours.

"Sometimes, though, when it's late and I'm tired and hungry -- on that long drive home to Alexandria, as I go past 1600 Pennsylvania Avenue, I do seem to hear a little voice saying:

"'If you lived here, you'd be home now.'"

The Democratic skit was laid at the Alamo, where "132 years ago tonight, in the war for Texas independence, 4,000 Mexicans at the Alamo had Lyndon B. Johnson's grandfather surrounded. Since then, things haven't changed much," said the announcer. "Once again the Alamo is under siege, and once again its defender is the head of the Johnson family."

A long list of Democratic Senators were among the defenders, and an impersonator of John Bailey, Chairman of the Democratic Party, thought them "a likely bunch of defenders! Look at them!"

He named seven or eight. "I'd feel safer with the Viet Cong."

An impersonator of Senator Everett Dirksen asked that Bailey not forget him, and Bailey inquired, "Aren't you in the wrong skit?"

"Possibly I am," replied Dirksen. "But when anybody knows as much about me as does Lyndon Baines Johnson, I stalwartly and graciously rush to his defense. He is my commander-in-chief -- so long as he doesn't begin to tell all he knows."

Bailey decided that in order to make a proper defense of the citadel, they would have to call in the reserves. The reserves proved to be "Bobby Kennedy" with an entourage including "John^W Kenneth Galbraith" and "Arthur Schlesinger, Jr."

This led Bailey to comment of Kennedy, "He may be ready, but he's not about to be called."

We can walk through the storm
with our heads held high,
And not be afraid of the night.
For the stars we have followed
Still ride the sky,
And still show us the way back to light.

The times may be hard,
the road may be long,
But our destiny's our own.
We'll all join hands with the rest
of the world,
And we'll never walk alone --
We'll never walk alone. (1)

The toast was offered to President Ford, and he responded with good grace and closed with a tribute to the Gridiron Club, which, with his permission, is reproduced here:

Since he had moved into the White House, he said, "I've learned how much of a life-saving medicine a little laughter is for Presidents. So, if a fine evening of fun and friendship like this is good for Presidents, it must also be good for America.

"The Gridiron Club nurtures this great national asset. And I'm very glad we can all poke gentle jokes at ourselves and one another just this way -- singeing without really burning -- and I hope it will always stay that way.

"Americans are a very diverse people, living together in many different styles and many different places. We are united more by the way we look at things than by the traditional ties of blood or belief or battles long forgotten. And when we are able to look at the brighter side of our troubles and the lighter side of our struggles, and see the smile that lies just below the surface of our neighbor's face, I think we Americans are at our very best.

"Thank you and good night."

(1) Book of the Dinner - Closer, p. 3

And so ended 90 years of Gridiron history, during which 15 Presidents, hundreds of distinguished Americans who never made the Presidency, and thousands of guests heard and saw themselves satirized; and often answered with great wit in an organization the like of which does not exist in any comparable degree anywhere else in the world.

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