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MEMORANDUM

~~THE PRESIDENT HAS SEEN...~~THE WHITE HOUSE
WASHINGTON

November 18, 1975

PERSONAL AND CONFIDENTIAL

MEMORANDUM FOR THE PRESIDENT

FROM: DAVID KENNERLY

Last week I made four slide presentations in different areas of the country -- Washington, D. C., Des Moines, Dallas and Portland. Over 2,600 professional newspaper photographers, editors and students from practically every state in the union attended. The slides were an example of pictures I took over the last year and they showed many aspects of your life -- both working and with your family.

The response to the show was extremely good. I think it is important to note that the audience viewed the pictures of you as being a very true representation of you as a person and of what your job involves.

But, one reaction to the show took me by surprise. Audiences consistently said that the public perception of you as the serious, deliberate man handling decisive issues had not, until this show, been carried across to them. The audiences were surprised and pleased to see the man presented in the pictures.

These reactions, as well as some others I have encountered, concern me. Because I have spent my professional life on the other side of the fence, translating events and people by reporting with my camera, I have a special perspective on the problems of accurate visual communication and the problems the press faces in doing this job. I feel I should apply that knowledge by discussing this problem you face and some possible solutions to it.

I believe the public image of you is incomplete because your personality, style and the way you work have not been fully and accurately reflected through the media. And the fault is not all theirs.

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One of the contributing factors is that much of the coverage allowed of you at The White House is of insignificant events where you are smiling and greeting "Kiwanis" club groups or "Miss" somebody.

When significant meetings are photographed by the press, the coverage before a meeting starts does not convey the atmosphere of what is going to happen in the meeting. For instance, there was a meeting recently with the Economic Advisors, which naturally was used on the networks to illustrate the New York City default story. The pictures taken before the actual meeting began showed everyone sitting around smiling and joking with one another. This certainly does not reflect your real attitude when you are talking about thousands of people losing their jobs, as my pictures made during the actual meeting show.

Obviously, media cameras can't be present during entire meetings. However, one way this problem could be countered is to carefully increase access during the beginning of some of the actual working situations to UPI and AP photographers and possibly a pool network camera with no sound. (Consideration might be given to allowing a sound camera in at certain times.) This would allow photographers to capture the flavor of what was actually happening in the meeting and would be a good first step towards straightening out the public's misconceptions. It would put both you and the press in real situations.

Addressing the Nation is the kind of coverage which you should control and which should reflect you and your own personality. I don't believe that this is happening effectively.

Your media advisors are certainly interested in portraying you in what, by their definition, is a favorable light. But it appears that they are handling these events in the preconceived way they think they should be, rather than molding them to fit your particular style.

One example is the speech from the Library a few months ago where you switched to looking from one camera to another. To me it looked programmed, and that is a calculation that is not lost on the American people who know enough nowadays about television not to be fooled by carefully-staged situations. It can offend their intelligence. And, if they are so hung up on the theatrics of the event, your message can become lost.

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Consideration could be given to speaking to the American people from areas in the White House other than behind the desk in the Oval Office. The well-managed scenes from behind the desk in that office carry a psychological burden of suspicion, in my estimation, when the camera angles from which you are speaking are the same ones from which Mr. Nixon looked the American people in the eye and deceived them. This ghost does nothing to help you. You could use different locations around the White House that you feel comfortable in -- by the Oval Office fireplace, your private office, the Cabinet Room, even the Treaty Room for particularly significant events.

There must be more flexibility in your presentations to the American public. This flexibility is an inherent part of your character. You are at your best, it seems to me, when talking in front of an audience. During the White House conferences, you handled questions in a very relaxed manner and came across more personally and directly than in any of the other situations. This is a strength that should be taken advantage of and it is a natural opportunity to address the American public. It brings to mind, particularly, the speech before the VFW in Chicago where you announced the Amnesty Program. That was a group you knew would be hostile to what you were proposing and that move, in fact, won you the respect of the American people.

Whenever you do have a major policy statement to make and want to do it on the road the networks could be notified, as they are now, in order that they might carry it live. This would put you in more comfortable surroundings with people, surroundings that provide for more different visual opportunities.

For a few non-visual suggestions: I get the feeling that the American people would be much more impressed by and have more interest in a working President than a campaigning President, particularly in these days of vast unemployment and a shaky economy. Extensive campaigning may be counterproductive. I strongly believe this myself and think campaign trips should be kept to a minimum. For those trips that you do make, you will have the advantage of them being very well-planned and emphasis can be placed on fresh material for speeches where you will get better press coverage and don't risk the danger of overexposure. Such an approach leaves you working with substance and no fat, as well as more time for working on solving the country's problems.

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Along the lines of the campaign, I myself honestly think that running a head-to-head battle against Ronald Reagan is a mistake. He is a professional actor who has spent all of his life in front of cameras. Staying home and running the country will be the best way to combat him and I am sure the public thinks so, too. A disturbing thing to me is that we have given him more publicity than he deserves. People on your staff and at the campaign committee have said to the press that Reagan was a big threat. Every time that is said you are going to lose votes from people who are going to believe it. Mark Hatfield, when running against Bob Duncan for Senator of Oregon in 1966, never mentioned his opponent's name once, his theory being that that was just another way of giving him publicity. I think Hatfield's approach has much merit.

In conclusion, in order to reach the American people, you must obviously go through the media. However, what you don't want to do is put the media in the position of guessing who you really are and what you really mean. The rules are not the same as they used to be. Your candid forthrightness is what initially gained you the support of the American people. You took over the reins of government at a time when there was no leadership and through your character and skill you provided that leadership. You once told me that you will be elected President because the American people will want you for the man that you are. You said that you didn't want any false image created to portray you as someone you are not. What is necessary now is looking for and allowing coverage of situations that can give the public an accurate understanding of who you are.

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Received from Dick Cheney's office on

0 9/6/76 -- no action at that time.

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