

THE WHITE HOUSE

WASHINGTON

October 18, 1976

MEMORANDUM FOR: THE PRESIDENT
FROM: MIKE DUVAL
SUBJECT: Last Debate

*Mike*BACKGROUND

Based on our polling data, you clearly won the first debate and probably won, or at least did as well as Carter in the second debate. The panels polled by Teeter following the second debate showed you with an 11 point lead before the press reaction to your Eastern European remark began to play. By the time the press had blasted at you for 24 hours you were down 45 points. The lesson to be learned from this is that your debating style for the first two debates has not been a problem. Although we will suggest some minor refinements further on in this memo, it is clear that your Eastern European remark (while it did not particularly impact the viewing public at the time of the debate), became the focus of press criticism and it was the criticism that had the impact on the voting public. In addition, Carter succeeded -- to some extent -- in putting you on the defensive at the beginning of the second debate. He will probably try this again next time.

Your advisers believe you should go into the last debate with the objective of a clear victory over Carter. This will be the largest audience you will have between now and the election. You should use it to make a positive and forceful appeal for their votes.

OBJECTIVES FOR LAST DEBATE

Bob Teeter advises that you should attempt to reach the following audiences during your last debate:

1. Rural, moderately conservative, traditionally GOP voters;
2. Traditionally Democratic-leaning, blue collar voters in the big suburbs; and
3. Upper middle class ticket splitters who also live in the suburbs of the big cities.



There are two major themes that appeal to all three groups:

- . Maintaining the peace, and
- . Lower taxes.



You should take every opportunity during the debate to make these two points forcefully and with as many varied examples and anecdotes as possible.

You must emphasize the importance of this election by pointing out the major differences between you and Mr. Carter, not the minor ones. You should emphasize the fact that he is inexperienced and unknown. Compare this with your record for the past two years and your vision of the next four. You should close with a direct appeal for voter support on November 2.

SUGGESTIONS CONCERNING STYLE

One consensus that has emerged as your advisers (such as Bill Carruthers) reviewed the second debate tape is that you appear to have been overly concerned with the television cameras. In the first debate you were more natural and appeared at ease while talking primarily to the panelist that asked the question. In the second debate you seemed more concerned with the cameras and thus appeared to lose some concentration on the substance of your answer.

This undoubtedly was a result of the many criticisms expressed to you after the first debate to the effect that you should look at the camera more often.

An example of how much more effective you are when talking to your questioner can be found in your excellent performance at last week's press conference. By relating directly to the questioner, your answers tend to be short, responsive and human. This may be because of the feedback you get from the questioner by way of nods or "signals" which give you a cue when you have fully answered the question. In any event, by concentrating on the panel in the next debate you should come off as more relaxed and candid.

Therefore, we continue to recommend that you essentially address your answer to the questioner, looking only at the camera when you want to make a point directly to the viewing public. This transition should be natural and keyed to the substance of what you are saying.

Also, you may wish to keep in mind if you do talk directly to the camera you really are not perceived (by the viewer) as talking to 80-100 million people. You are perceived as talking to just those people in the room watching the television set, which, on the average is likely to be a single couple or a family. Thus, you should keep in mind that you are talking to people in the intimacy of their living room and your tone should be more conversational than that of a stump speech.

Another point on which there is substantial agreement concerns the loudness of your voice when responding. Many viewers perceive you to be shouting and this is in marked contrast to Carter's responses which tend to vary in pitch and be much more modulated and low-keyed. Given the technical control the pool producer has over audio level, you can speak much more softly without any fear of not being heard or understood.

A third point which many have made concerns the appearance you give of being overly stern. Although this is helpful at times to indicate strength and dominance over Carter, the fact is, it has not varied in the two debates and you now come across to some as angry and strident.

To summarize, your advisers (principally Carruthers, Gergen, Teeter, Baily and Deardourff), have two general recommendations concerning style:

1. Be more natural, at ease. Approach the debate as you did the press conference where you directly respond to the questioner, looking at the camera where it is natural to do so, but keeping a personal relationship between your questioner and yourself.
2. Vary the pace of the debate. Alternate -- as it becomes natural to do so, based on the questions and the statements by Carter -- between:
 - . serious, stern;
 - . hitting Carter directly and hard three or four times (not often and not in a knit-picking manner);
 - . show some humor, a smile and even (if appropriate) a laugh; and
 - . show compassion with a soft voice and perhaps obvious emotion while relating a personal experience.



YOUR ANSWERS/RESPONSES

The following are some general recommendations concerning the content of your answers/responses during the third debate:

1. Keep them Short. Your answers and responses in the second debate were generally longer than during the first encounter. Your shorter responses tend to be better organized and more forcefully stated. Bob Hartmann makes the additional point that it would be very useful if you can answer just one question with a simple yes or no. Teeter agrees with this but feels a brief sentence or two in explanation might be appropriate. It is obvious from reviewing the first two tapes that there is no need to use all your time and indeed you score your best points with short, crisp, sentences that make a point with one or two facts to support your argument.
2. Be Responsive and Positive. It appeared to us in reviewing the second debate that you often did not focus on the question or on Carter's response. It may be useful this time to jot down the question directed to Carter so you can refer to it specifically in your rebuttal. It may also be useful for you to very briefly repeat the essence of the question asked of you so that you can demonstrate your willingness to deal forthrightly and directly with the question. If you concentrate on the specific question asked and on the specific statements being made by Carter, you are more likely to come across in a natural, relaxed and responsive manner, much like your performance in last week's press conference. After giving a short, but direct response to the question you can go on and make the key points (themes) which are covered in the next section.

We recommend that you set a positive, up-lifting tone in the last debate. Demonstrate by how you deal with the questions and Carter's attacks that you are the President and the other guy is an over-ambitious, light-weight challenger. Always take the high ground and leave the cheap shots to Carter. Although we are not certain, the public may well believe that the campaign has sunk to a very low level of petty charges and counter-charges.



The press certainly has this view. Your post debate reviews will benefit considerably if you are perceived to have taken the high road.

By being positive and referring to the future you will not be on the defensive -- a crucial point in terms of "winning" the debate.

3. Give simple answers that communicate thoughts, not statistics. Many of us felt that your answers in the first two debates (particularly the second), while technically accurate and powerful, nevertheless contained so many statistics and complexities that the point you were trying to make was lost on the average viewer. Our review of the analysis developed by Bob Teeter (see Tab A) shows that you scored most heavily in the first debate with your statements concerning tax cuts. The only thing that approached this positive response in the second debate was your comments concerning the Mayaguez which came across as emotional, personal and in relatively simple, easily understandable terms.
4. Draw conclusions. We recommend that you end each answer/response with a conclusion which puts into perspective the subject matter just discussed and the differences between you and Carter. The people expect you, as President, to demonstrate your leadership by stating simply what these complex issues mean. You should give them the "bottom line". This is also an excellent opportunity to put Carter on the defensive as he attempts to respond to your answers. By representing his position in your conclusion, you tend to preempt his response by stating in advance the points he is about to make and why they are wrong or misleading. (We will provide some specific examples.)

KEY POINTS (THEMES)

As indicated above, after responding succinctly to the question, you should make the appropriate key points in order to "score" with the targeted audience.

We have indicated that the two most important points (or themes) to make are that (1) you are for lower taxes for everyone and (2) under your leadership we will maintain peace.



(In addition to these two points, we are developing some suggested responses to key issues.)

Nevertheless, it is not the substance of your answers and rebuttals that is going to "win or lose" the debate. What counts is the message you communicate concerning your own character, ability, and vision vis-a-vis Carter. Accordingly, I recommend that you spend as much time as possible over the next two days going over your answers with two or three of your advisers in a Q and A format.

SUMMARY

For the above reasons we believe you can decisively win the last debate if you:

- . Emphasize the major themes of peace and tax cuts and mention other key "themes" we will present to you.
- . Appear relaxed and natural thereby conveying to the viewing public your personal qualities of strength, self-confidence, ability to deal with people directly and forthrightly, and compassion and understanding for peoples' problems.
- . Deal with Mr. Carter by appearing clearly as the President, on the high road, who is not distracted by the challenger. You should occasionally, and sharply, put him in his place with a forceful (but not strident) rebuke at the appropriate time involving an issue of importance.
- . Do not become defensive. Stress your record of achievement and talk about the future.

