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October 1, 1976

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MESS...
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The President of the United States
The White House
Washington, D.C. 20500

Dear Mr. President:

Enclosed is a copy of my October strategy paper, "Final Strategy Considerations for Victory in November." I include in this paper some constructive observations concerning the first debate as well as suggestions which are applicable for the remaining part of the campaign.

When I saw you and Dick Cheney on September 20 and 21, I suggested that I would like to visit with you briefly before the last Presidential debate concerning some specific strategy suggestions for the last debate which I think could be particularly helpful. Assuming that your schedule will permit this, I will be calling Dick Cheney's office for a particular time that would be convenient for you.

Best regards.

Sincerely,

David W. Belin

DWB:cs

Encl.

- c.c. Richard Cheney
- Robert Hartmann
- John Marsh
- Ron Nessen
- Philip Buchen



THE ELECTION OF PRESIDENT FORD

BASIC STRATEGY PAPER NO. 12 - OCTOBER, 1976

David W. Belin

Final Strategy Considerations for Victory in November

Basically, the 1976 election is not going to be decided so much on issues as it is going to be decided on how the respective candidates are perceived by the American people.

Accordingly, this paper will discuss the positive factors about President Ford which must be accentuated, the two major negative factors which we must try to eliminate, and finally we will discuss the negative factors of Jimmy Carter which we must accentuate.

In part, the discussion will include a constructive critical analysis of the first Ford-Carter debate with particular reference to the strong points and the weak points of President Ford's performance. Some specific suggestions will be offered which are applicable to all subsequent appearances by the President in the campaign, including the last two debates.

A. President Ford - Positive Factors.

In my September strategy paper, a copy of which is attached, I discussed the obvious positive factors of the President: He has restored trust and confidence in government, and is thought of as a man of integrity. We have peace and ever-increasing prosperity with inflation being cut in half. All of these are most important accomplishments, and these must be emphasized in the context of President Ford having performed all that the country asked of him. President Ford used this to good advantage in the first Ford-Carter debate.

Another basic positive factor is the natural empathy that the American voter has for the underdog. We must be careful on how we capitalize on this. For instance, it is yet too early for President Ford to say, "We are going to win in November." This completely destroys the image of the underdog.

Rather, he must say, "The polls show that we are still behind, but we are gaining ground, we can win, and I believe that we will win."

The ultimate conclusion is the same, but the way in which it is perceived is entirely different. At all times, we must be aware of the fact that the crucial issue is how we are being perceived by the American people.

Perhaps the most important positive factor in the last month of the campaign in general and the last two weeks in particular is the psychological concern of the voter and the fear of the voter about the unknown. President Ford is a known quantity. As I discussed in detail on pages 14-16 of my September strategy paper, we want to make sure that the undecided voter thinks twice before he pulls the lever on the voting machine or places his mark on the ballot. We want him to vote for a known quantity who has performed well rather than voting for a man who in substance would be a "pig in a poke."

B. Negative Factors Affecting the Ford Candidacy.

Among the most important negative factors affecting the candidacy of President Ford is the false impression that he is not smart enough to be President. This has a carry-over effect into another perception that President Ford is not enough of a leader. Finally, there is a problem that President Ford has because of the perception of the Republican Party as the Party that does not care for people.

The first debate made a major contribution in offsetting the first two of these negative factors. The way President Ford handled himself, his command of facts and figures, certainly showed both high intelligence and leadership. However, unfortunately the first debate did not materially overcome the perception of the Republican Party as the Party which is more concerned about balancing budgets than it is about people.

There are other aspects of President Ford's record which should be developed to overcome the negative factors affecting his candidacy. For instance, with particular reference to the question of whether or not President Ford is "smart enough" to be President, we can turn to his academic record.

Both the University of Michigan and Yale University are two of the outstanding educational institutions of our country. They are perceived as such. President Ford was a member of the all-campus senior honorary society at Michigan as well as President of his senior class. At Yale Law School, he was in the upper third of his Law School class. These facts must be conveyed to the American people. Furthermore, this can be conveyed in the frame of reference that President Ford attained these academic goals while working his way through school. This adds an emotional identification of something akin to a Horatio Alger story (which President Ford's life really is).

This leads into the second question--the question of leadership. Is President Ford a leader? The record speaks for itself. While in college, he was elected President of his senior class. While in Congress, he was elected minority leader of the House Republicans. And while President, he has led this country along the paths of peace with ever-increasing prosperity. To be sure, the vehicle he uses to exert leadership is cooperation rather than confrontation. But I think his past record of leadership has not been strongly enough emphasized in the campaign.

The third problem--the perception of the Republican Party as the Party that does not care--is a practical problem the President faces. The best way he can offset this factor is to incorporate in his responses to questions in presidential debates and in his public speaking engagements the true concern that he has for the human being--the true compassion he has for American citizens--and the vision he has for what we and our children can possibly attain in the next century of American history.

In my September strategy paper, I talked about the perception of the Republican Party as the Party that does not care and the tremendous problems this posed. I also talked about other related problems in this area and the fact that President Ford runs a risk by trying to drown Jimmy Carter in a mass of facts without showing compassion and vision.

The President's closing statement in the first debate was an attempt to meet part of this problem, but, to be candid, the President is capable of doing much better.

For instance, in the second debate, when national defense is going to be one of the important issues, the President has an opportunity as he talks about the need for a strong defense to also comment what a tragedy it is that in this world of ours so many billions are spent on instruments of destruction by all nations in the world. Mankind would be so much better off if we could devote our world resources productively to instruments of peace. This can be followed with comments that in light of the totalitarian goals of the communist nations, we cannot afford to let our guard down. But in any event, the President would show that he is concerned about the welfare of individual people in this country and in this world.

C. Weaknesses of Jimmy Carter Which Can Be Exploited.

Jimmy Carter has several major weaknesses.

First and foremost, he is fuzzy on the issues. More and more satire is being directed against him on the comedy shows. These have a telling effect.

I believe this can be exploited, particularly in the last two weeks of the campaign, with media advertising along the lines emphasized in my September strategy paper. This media

campaign would capitalize on the natural fear and apprehension of the unknown. On the one hand, President Ford is a known quantity. "You know where I stand." On the other hand, Jimmy Carter is not. We must be prepared to bring to all of the American people this emotional factor: When the voter goes into the privacy of the voting booth, he thinks twice before he pulls the lever for an unknown quantity. The natural fear of the unknown, coupled with the advantage of the underdog, are the two single most important psychological advantages that we have. We must not forget these, and the President should be sure that in his closing remarks in the final debate, he makes reference to these emotional factors.

Another major weakness of Jimmy Carter is that he does not have any major governmental experience--particularly in foreign policy. I think that President Ford can contrast his record of achievement in this area.

Finally, there is a question concerning Jimmy Carter's judgment and stability. The Playboy story is a perfect example. The way to capitalize on this is not on the substance of what Jimmy Carter said, for you can produce a counter-productive sympathetic reaction in favor of Jimmy Carter. He can claim that he was misinterpreted, or misunderstood.

The real question is one of judgment: Should a candidate for the office of the President of the United States discuss the things that he did, use the kind of language he did, with a magazine that caters to the commercialization of sex. Perhaps Jimmy Carter had a perfectly legitimate point to make. But the forum in which he chose to make it was absolutely wrong.

This is the judgment factor--the factor of ultimate importance in who is to be President.

I think it is a fair comment for the President to say that both he and Jimmy Carter are smart enough to be President. They both have good records of performance at their respective academic institutions--but the real question is not just one of being smart. Rather, the real question is one of judgment.

Coupled with this is the crucial question of fuzziness which makes all the more paramount the natural psychological fear of the unknown. In a recent speech in support of the President, I concluded my remarks with the following:

"With President Ford, we know what we have, But with Jimmy Carter, we don't know what we don't have." In essence, this is what we have to convey to the undecided voter.

D. Conclusion.

This election will be won or lost on something which is basically different from past elections. The political issues are not that decisive. Rather, the real issue will get down to the question of which candidate is the one upon whom the American people can best rely.

On the one hand, President Ford is perceived as a man of integrity. He has a record of accomplishment. If we can combine with this the fact that he is intelligent and that his record shows that he is a leader, I believe we can overcome the major disadvantages of the perception of the Republican Party as a Party without compassion, the numerical majority of the Democrats, and the natural advantage that Carter has because he is from the South and he will start off with a bloc of votes from this section of the country, which will be very tough to crack.

As I have said all along, I believe Carter can be beaten. There is a story to be told. There are emotional issues that must be tapped. Above all, we must remember that the crucial question is not so much the actual issues. Rather it is how President Ford is perceived as contrasted with how Jimmy Carter is perceived.

We have talked about strengths of the President as well as his weaknesses. We have also talked about weaknesses of Jimmy Carter. This battle can be won--and it must be won. But above all, we must remember that we must interlineate the facts we have with the emotional arguments at our disposal-- particularly with reference as to how the President is perceived-- his strengths and weaknesses--and how Jimmy Carter is perceived-- with the weaknesses that he has.

To be sure, there are nearly twice as many Democrats as Republicans, but there are Democrats who are ready to cross Party lines, just as there are Independents who are ready to vote for the President. The natural ability and overall experience of the President will prevail, if sound strategy is followed in these final weeks.

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October 1, 1976