

ADMINISTRATIVELY CONFIDENTIAL

REPORT OF THE
CONVENTION TV COMMITTEE

"....There is something about a national convention that makes it as fascinating as a revival or a hanging. It is vulgar, it is ugly, it is stupid, it is tedious...and yet it is somehow charming. One sits through long sessions wishing heartily that all the delegates were dead and in hell--and then suddenly there comes a show so gaudy and hilarious, so melodramatic and obscene, so unimaginably exhilarating and preposterous that one lives a gorgeous year in an hour."

H. L. Mencken

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December 6, 1971

In our early discussions, we were asked to "throw away the book" and think purely in terms of the impact of the convention in 60 million living rooms.

On that basis, we have addressed ourselves to a single question: How can we best use these free network hours to present the most powerful and persuasive case for the re-election of the President?

If the answer requires departure from past rules and traditions, we have assumed that this is no barrier.

At the outset, certain basic considerations about TV coverage in 1972 should be noted:

Competition. The national political convention is no longer a TV novelty that people will watch out of curiosity or because they have no other choice. In 1972 ABC will be presenting entertainment shows, and most viewers will also have a choice of movies, sports or other attractive programs on independent stations or cable TV. In short, we are like any other TV show:

People will watch us if we are interesting and exciting and will tune us out if we are dull.

Suspense. In 1972 the main event will have been decided before the show starts. Even if there is any doubt about the choice of Vice President, that will not help us on the first two nights. Lacking the key element of suspense, we can hold viewers only if we develop excitement, emotion and pace.

The Young Audience. For some 20 million young adults this will be the first time they will have watched a convention as potential voters. In that sense, it will be their first significant exposure to the Republican Party in action. They will judge us by what they see, and if we come across as dull or phony, many will walk away from us right then and there. On the other hand, we have a great opportunity to prove to the young people that the party of Richard Nixon is honest, forthright, forward-looking and concerned.

With the above points in mind, we are attaching suggestions for each of the three evening sessions. We are also supplying the reasoning behind each of the specific recommendations. With regard to all three nights, however, our suggestions reflect the following general guidelines:

1. We should concentrate on the prime evening hours when the great TV audience is at home and ready to watch. All the routine

and dull business should either be eliminated entirely or scheduled in the morning sessions. This would include all "in house" items like expressions of appreciation to convention officials, presentation of special badges, and reports of committee chairmen.

2. The night-time line-up should consist of the most attractive and persuasive people we have. This may involve some hurt feelings, but we should be as firm as we possibly can in choosing persons who can go on camera and really come across.
3. Speeches can be an archaic form of communication. Except for the President's acceptance address, and possibly the Vice President's, no long speech made at the convention will hold an audience, either in the living room or on the convention floor. In the convention hall, delegates can mingle in the aisles or read newspapers during a speech. At home, they need only flick the dial. "Harry, see what else is on."
4. At any first night, the stars in the audience often generate more interest than those on

the stage. At a convention the speakers on the podium are very important, but the camera is often on the delegates and guests. Who they are and what they are doing can be a vital element in the total impression of the convention.

MONDAY EVENING, AUGUST 21

Chairman Dole will call the convention to order at 5:30 p.m. The preliminary proceedings should have an accent on youth. A young clergyman for the invocation and perhaps an 18-year old delegate for the Pledge of Allegiance. More importantly, we recommend that the Star Spangled Banner be sung by a youthful singing group, perhaps the Young Americans, 60 or 80 strong. They could have entertained during the pre-TV warm-up period and could also be booked for a song during the evening (This Land Is My Land, for instance).

It is particularly recommended that a section be reserved within ready camera range for prominent Americans. We should have all the entertainment celebrities we can muster, but we should also have persons prominent in other fields. These could include astronauts, athletes, Medal of Freedom winners, clergymen, and well-known minority representatives including representatives of older Americans. Ideally the camera would focus on this group during the singing of the national anthem, and at other times and might occasionally super-impose names as individuals came into close-ups. In any event, the presence of persons like Bob Hope, Glen Campbell, Frank Sinatra, Neil Armstrong, Pearl Bailey, Billy Graham, Vida Blue, Bart Starr, Johnny Unitas, Arnold Palmer, etc. would have to attract the cameras from time to time and be duly noted by the audience. This "Famous Americans" section should be filled all three nights.

The main business on Monday night traditionally has been the keynote address which this committee regards as an anachronism and a sure tuner-outer. Instead, we propose a "report to the nation" in two parts - the first, domestic and the second, foreign.

We recommend that the domestic report be handled by a team of four, each from a different part of the country.

Since this is the opening act of the convention, we recommend that we use big guns -- Gov. Rockefeller, Gov. Reagan, Sen. Brooke, Sen. Howard Baker. If a moderator is needed, it could be Sen. Dole, or the temporary chairman who should, of course, be one of our most attractive people. The talks would be a maximum of 5 minutes each, hard hitting, and geared to applause lines. }

Part II would portray President Nixon the Peacemaker, and we recommend a 12 minute film introduced by Ambassador Bush.

Visually, the President's world travels make very exciting film footage whether he is in a public square or visiting a Pope or a king. Moreover, it is to be hoped that we will have special footage including an inside look, in connection with the Peking and Moscow trips.

The theme of the film will be forward looking, and thus the "keynote" of the evening will end on an upbeat note

looking to the future, a continuation of President Nixon's journey for peace.

TRIBUTE TO THE FIRST LADY

For the closing section of Monday night, we propose something that is long overdue and for which the convention and the country will be ready and eager: A salute to the First Lady. The committee is unanimous in its feeling that Americans of all parties are becoming increasingly appreciative of the superb qualities of the First Lady. What we propose is that the convention formally recognize her contribution to her country and to her family. It could be as warm and moving a tribute as has been seen anywhere in recent years, particularly because the country is ready for it.

Specifically we suggest that a proper spokesman, perhaps Jimmy Stewart, be recognized for a special report. His theme could be that this convention is here to nominate a president. In so doing, it will also nominate a First Lady. The country has been blessed with having a man of the hour in the White House. We have also been blessed with a First Lady of extraordinary gifts and character, etc. Stewart would then present either a five minute motion picture film about Mrs. Nixon or perhaps a series of still photos showing Mrs. Nixon in various aspects of her activities, domestic and overseas, including her role as wife and mother.

At the close, a delegate could be recognized for

the purpose of introducing a resolution of appreciation and affection for the First Lady which would be passed by a thundering voice vote and a demonstration. At that point, Mrs. Nixon would walk into the spotlight and be presented to the convention. As the demonstration proceeded, she would be joined by Tricia and Julie and then perhaps by her two sons-in-law. Mrs. Nixon's remarks could be as brief as she might wish. One appropriate theme could be that this recognition of her is really recognition of all women who serve in the government.

Properly presented, this tribute could be a magnificent closing moment for opening night.

TUESDAY EVENING, AUGUST 23

We recommend that the Star Spangled Banner be sung by Johnny Cash and that it be preceded by one of his very effective patriotic monologues. Cash could make this a show stopper, and he could be called on for an encore later in the evening.

Nomination of the President.

The business of Tuesday evening is the uncontested re-nomination of an incumbent president. This should be the most exciting moment of any convention, yet because the outcome is known in advance, the re-nomination procedure can be artificial and dull.

In 1956 Ike had a full nominating speech and 8 full seconding speeches. So did LBJ in 1964.

The committee considered the possibility of eliminating all nominating and seconding speeches in favor of nomination by acclamation. However, although this idea has considerable appeal, we have concluded it is not practical. Instead we recommend that the nominating speech be limited to 10 minutes at the very most and that there be only 5 or 6 seconding speeches, each no longer than 2 minutes at most.

In choosing seconding speakers, the most important test should be how they project. One of them should certainly be in the 18-21 age group; at least two should be women; and

minority groups, including the elderly, should be represented. Hopefully, at least one-half could be non-political persons.

If it appears necessary to increase the number to 8, then each should be cut down to 60 to 90 seconds. This would give each one ample time to state a specific reason for supporting President Nixon.

Demonstration

As the highlight of the evening, we strongly recommend that as soon as he is nominated, the President leave San Clemente by helicopter and proceed to the Convention to express his thanks. (He would announce that his formal acceptance speech would be made the following night.)

The announcement that the President is leaving San Clemente should trigger the major demonstration of the evening, building up to the climatic arrival of the helicopter.

The TV coverage would include his leaving San Clemente, and we would recommend that an accompanying helicopter furnish live coverage of the flight, including shots of the La Jolla Hills and San Diego skyline as he approaches.

While the President is en route, a demonstration would be going on in the hall, and we propose that some one suggest from the podium that the delegates and guests should proceed to the parking lot to greet the President when he touches down. The band would then lead a massive parade out of the hall, with the delegates carrying their stanchions. This in itself would make an exciting TV sequence.

We also suggest that the convention committee arrange for outside music and a large group of young people to be gathered in the parking area. These could be families of the delegates or other loyal young Republicans from California. (We understand that the available area will be huge and that the parking lot is fenced and secure.)

An area would be roped off for the landing, where the President would be greeted by members of his family and by convention officials, all to the cheers of the 20,000 people gathered in the parking area.

As soon as the cheering and demonstration quieted down, the President could speak from a platform which can be placed near the helicopter.

Thus, the wind up of the night's proceedings would take place outdoors, Benediction and all. This should be a very unusual and exciting ending as the President and Mrs. Nixon board the chopper and take off into the night. Dissolve.

WEDNESDAY EVENING, AUGUST 23

Under the schedule we have proposed, the program for Wednesday evening would consist of the nominations for vice president, roll call, and the acceptance speech by the vice presidential nominee. Then the grand finale would be the acceptance speech of the President.

From a television standpoint, the committee is not in a position at this time to make any specific recommendations about the handling of the vice presidential nomination since it is not known whether there will be a contest.

If there is a real contest for vice president, or even a nominal contest, the traditional procedure for speeches and roll calls would have to be followed. However, if it is known that there will be no opposition to the nominee, then we must consider whether to adopt the Tuesday night precedent of nomination by acclamation. Clearly no recommendation or decision can be made at this time.

Whatever else may happen on Wednesday night, the big event will be the President's acceptance speech, and it is important that every effort be made to schedule it not later than 7 p.m. Pacific Time. Therefore, if there is uncertainty about the duration of the vice presidential proceedings, we may wish to begin the evening session earlier

than usual on this final night. We understand that there will be no morning session on Wednesday, and therefore, it would be plausible to open the single session as early as 4:30 or even 4 p.m.

After all, the great final TV shot at the convention will be the picture of the President and his running mate, joined by their wives and all the party leaders such as Reagan and Rockefeller, in a final visual demonstration of unity and enthusiasm. This should be on the national screen not later than 10:30 p.m. in the east.

MISCELLANEOUS COMMENTS AND SUGGESTIONS

Young Delegates and Alternates. It is not this committee's province, but we certainly would favor a national committee policy which would encourage state delegates to include young delegates and alternates. Better yet, it might well be that the President could request the RNC to adopt such a policy at its upcoming meeting. From a TV standpoint, the presence of many young delegates, including some in the 18 - 21 bracket, would be an important plus.

Reading of Roll Calls. To relieve monotony and provide some variety and representation of various minorities, could the Convention appoint a number of attractive Assistant Secretaries, each of whom could participate in the reading of the Roll Calls?

Visual backdrop. The backdrop behind the podium is an important visual effect. Traditionally it has been a giant photograph of the incumbent, but the committee unanimously believes that something different should be done this year. The overexposure of such a picture can be counter productive, both in the hall and on TV. Fred Reinstein is looking into the practicality of a changeable backdrop and we will make a further report.

Mexican Americans. Because of San Diego's proximity to Mexico, it seems particularly appropriate that some special recognition be given to Mexican Americans. As a minimum, there should be one Mexican American clergyman for the invocation, and a Mexican American should recite the Pledge of Allegiance.

Clergywoman. The assistant chaplain of Vanderbilt University is a 25 year old girl.

She or someone like her might be chosen for the invocation on one of the evenings.

Documentary Film. Consideration has been given to a 30 minute documentary film which will be produced for the Campaign and which will tell the full story of the Nixon years; however, we would have no guarantee that the networks would not cut away from a half-hour film, even though we showed it in the hall as part of the program. In any event, we believe that the mixture of film and live that we have outlined for Monday night is just as effective.

Finally, if the documentary proves to be a powerful film, it should perhaps be saved for intensive use in October, particularly in the key states. If we fire this gun in August, it may have lost its effectiveness during the last crucial days when we get down to the wire.

Flexibility. It is recognized, of course, that unforeseen events in the next months can affect the recommendations of this report.

In particular, the proceedings at the Democratic Convention could well have an effect on our own planning and might require revisions.

Evening News Shows. Because of the time zone difference, the network evening news programs will be carried as usual in the east and midwest. This means that they can include film footage from the morning sessions. As the morning schedule develops, plans should be made to insure at least one newsworthy or colorful event that is susceptible to TV coverage. This committee will be glad to assist in this when more is known about the morning schedule, such as the possibility of disputes about rules or credentials.