

THE PRESIDENT HAS SEEN....

THE WHITE HOUSE

WASHINGTON

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INFORMATION
Environment as a major
political issue

MEMORANDUM FOR THE PRESIDENT

THROUGH: John D. Ehrlichman

FROM: John C. Whitaker

John Whitaker

I presume your basic reaction to the environment issue is that it is media created and may soon peak out, and appeals only to the liberals you can't reach anyway in '72.

Therefore, you have formed a basic conclusion that pushing too hard on the environment is a bad tradeoff in terms of alienating your "natural constituencies," the rural heartland people and the businessman. Also pollution laws could slow down the economy and you are, of course, wary of this.

Politics aside, I believe you have a genuine moral concern that overzealous pollution laws (also antitrust and consumer legislation) tend to tear down the private enterprise system and hurt the country.

Given these views for openers, I would appreciate it if you would review the May 1971 Opinion Research Corporation poll summary (Tab A) and Tom Benham's letter to me in response to my request for an analysis of the environment issue (Tab B).

1. In Tom Benham's last Opinion Research poll (May 1971) (a) inflation/cost of living/taxes, (b) pollution/ecology, (c) unemployment, and (d) drugs/alcohol were head and shoulders the four leading domestic issues (see Tab A).

H + E. I am not at all impressed by this memo - Benham did not have the brains to put the real question - What if you have to choose between Jobs + Price/park

We shall continue to do environment once month for defining reasons - fruit not at the cost of jobs.

2. That the environment issue is, or is not, media created may be academic. It may fall off rapidly as an issue, but the evidence is all the other way because media attention to the environment has dropped considerably in 1971 over 1970, but the polls show the issue getting even stronger. Tom Benham said to me, "the pollution/ecology issue is the strongest trend line aside from war and peace and the pocketbook issue that I've ever seen in 25 years in the business."

3. As to the assumption that the environment "turns on" only the young and the liberal and that they are not reachable for you -- there seems to be no evidence to support this in Benham's polls. His breakdown (Tab B) shows that all age groups, both political parties, all income groups and all sections of the country are very concerned over the issue. Please review the breakdown. Liberals (29%) are only slightly more concerned than conservatives (24%). The supposedly conservative South (28%) and Midwest regions (24%), are just as concerned as the supposedly liberal East (25%) and the outdoor conscious West (23%). It is particularly interesting that the South, supposedly conservative and so hungry for industrial progress, with a pollution-be-damned attitude, get a 28% rating, the highest rated region in the nation.

Except for those under \$5,000 annual income, the issue rates 23% or better up to 34% with increasing affluency. In other words, basically 1/4 or more of those polled with incomes over \$5,000 annually rate pollution/ecology as the #1 domestic issue.

The issue cuts across urban patterns -- central city (26%), suburban (25%), and outside metro areas (26%). There is no religious difference and it is a very strong issue for those who have not completed high school through the graduate school level.

However, there is a significant difference between white (27%) and non-white (13%), but the spread between non-union households (27%) and union households (21%) doesn't appear to be significant since the union households are more likely, out of fear, to conclude that they might lose their jobs on plant closings due to pollution abatement costs.

4. If you push pollution/ecology too much, you will alienate business. At the very top (executive suite) of big business, I think that is true. These are the same people who have routine access to you through various state dinners and business functions that you hear bitching about it so much. But if you met with the average middle American or even the younger businessmen on their way up, I'm sure they would be pushing you on to do more with pollution/ecology.

*E & H
These were
loaded questions.
Did over staff
prepare them?
But we see Jan
before the
next poll*

5. When it gets down to the nitty-gritty of fines and plant closings, the Opinion Research poll shows that 77% of the public favors closing down a factory that continually violates laws regulating pollution and 88% of the public favors heavy fines against companies who continually violate pollution control laws.

6. What is not so clearcut at this point is whether, in fact, the pollution/ecology issue will "turn" over the next year as the cost implications of pollution abatement become more clear. The Domestic Council is studying this matter and at the moment, the antagonists are hard at work (Train and Ruckelshaus feel the public and private costs in the long run in not cleaning up the environment, outweigh the costs in capital outlay by business to provide adequate pollution abatement while Secretary Stans advocates a "go-slow" position on business. We hope to have a balanced answer to this question in a few months.

RECOMMENDATION

Meanwhile, my recommendation is simply that the pollution/ecology issue has such great clout, that you should, once a month, do one pollution/ecology event because the problem is not that you don't have a good program, but that you are not identified with the issues in the voter's mind.

Incidentally, I believe all the big four issues in Benham's poll (1) inflation/cost of living/taxes, (2) pollution/ecology, (3) unemployment and (4) drugs/alcohol should be solidly identified with you by your doing one event for each big issue every month between now and the election. As you have often heard, "the Administration has a credit gap, not a credibility gap" and the best way to beat it is to concentrate your events on these big four issues and bang each one each month, like drops of rain wearing down a stone.

At Tab C are some suggested Presidential events in the pollution/ecology area for the balance of this year.