

THE WHITE HOUSE

WASHINGTON

December 21, 1970

MEMORANDUM FOR: H.R. HALDEMAN

FROM THE PRESIDENT

I have been doing a lot of thinking with regard to our White House staff as we enter the next two years, and I am passing on some thoughts to you for guidance as we make some critical decisions over the next two or three weeks.

Two years ago, shortly before he died, former Ambassador Bill Bullitt gave me some advice that I think we should have in mind on all the decisions we make with regard to the White House staff and top appointments in the Cabinet and in the Administration as we come into this critical period.

He said: "The greatest mistake most Presidents make is to allow themselves, because of sentiment, to be surrounded in some top positions by first-rate, second-rate men."

As I apply that standard to our White House staff I come up with some conclusions that I am sure you will agree with. We have absolutely first-rate men in Haldeman, Ehrlichman, Shultz and Kissinger. At a second level we have first-rate men in Weinberger for the budget, Kalmbach handling my personal affairs, and, at another level, John Davies handling the Visitors to the White House and Rex Scouten in his position as Chief Usher.

Beyond that we have to take a good, hard look. What particularly concerns me is a conversation I had with Bob Finch in which he strongly urged that we keep Bob Hitt at the National Committee. You know my great affection for Bob and Pat Hitt, but I think you will agree that this is a good example of a first-rate second-rate man. We must not allow sentiment to lead us to continuing with an individual who simply doesn't measure up to the standard that is essential if we are going to meet the great challenge we have in the next two years.

The conversation I had with Shultz with regard to our Economic team brings this home with a great impact. McCracken, and even Dr. Burns, simply aren't the best men we could have had for these positions. What we will try to do here is to continue to work with Shultz to strengthen the Council of Economic Advisers. As far as Burns is concerned we will have to depend on Connally to provide the strength that we have not had in this field over the past two years.

When we look at our research team we find a number of star players but not a leader. Jim Keogh very honestly recognized this fact when he said that he really wondered whether he had been able to do the job that needed to be done in this field. I think he did the best he possibly could have done, recognizing the problems that we have - but now it's a new ball game with Price, Buchanan and Safire we have first-rate men, but still no man to lead the team.

In the television field we have made the move that we should have made long ago, by bringing Carruthers in. We should not have gone along for the time that we have with Roger Ailes and Scott - they really aren't the first-rate men that we could have in this field. I think Carruthers however will fill this need and we should give him all possible backing on this front.

When we come to the PR field generally and the Press Office specifically, I have reluctantly concluded that we have to make some pretty hard choices. Ziegler should stay on, ~~officially~~ it is recognized that he is to stay on as a briefing officer. The idea that we could keep Klein and still have Colson be the man in charge of implementing the Administration's information policy simply won't work. It would mean that Klein, regardless of what we told him, would feel that he had to be in charge and this kind of divided authority has never worked in any organization and will not work over the next two years. If Klein will not move to the National Committee, I think we have to move him to Mexico.

Moving Colson into the position of Director of Information, or whatever we want to call the spot, will break a lot of china, but unless he has the title and the authority he isn't going to be able to do the job - particularly if he has Klein looking over his shoulder all the time sitting in the meetings, with Cabinet Officers and Congressional Leaders not knowing where to look for decisions. We simply can't have two men in charge of this vital responsibility.

What we have to recognize is that over the past two years all that has really come true in terms of the many admirable accomplishments of our Administration has been the decisions we have made in foreign policy. In the field of domestic policy and, even more important, the field of getting across the personal qualities of leadership, boldness, courage, hard work, humanity, etc., we have simply struck out and we shouldn't kid ourselves on this score. It is tempting to blame all of this on the fact that we have an economic downturn and that once the economy starts turning up that all these things will be cured. But the test of a team is not whether it is able to look good when everything goes well, but whether it comes through when things are tough. I think when we examine our team in the PR and research field we will have to agree in all honesty that we have too many first-rate second-rate men.

The best indication of how weak we are in this field is that virtually all of the memoranda that we received after the election dealt with the question of "what RN could do to get the Administration more support". The real question that needs to be answered is "what can others do apart from what RN does to get across some of the very effective actions we have taken in so many fields."

This brings me to some of the decision we have to make. In addition to moving Klein, and putting Ziegler in the spot where we will not depend on him for more than he can be expected to accomplish, we must move immediately on such individuals as Chotiner. The suggestion that he move to the Vice President's staff to handle Federal-State relations is a good one. However, if that is done you must have a straight, hard-line talk with Agnew, pointing out Chotiner's weaknesses as well as his strengths so that the Vice President is not saddled with someone who might lead him in the wrong direction. Of course, from our standpoint the important thing is to get Chotiner out of the White House and I would agree that in this instance, the Vice President's office is probably the best move anybody has come up with. Carry this out, but carry it out in a way that will protect Agnew and also keep Chotiner on a proper leash.

I think Dent is the right man for the assignment we have given him and I think Timmons, with the MacGregor appointment, is the right man for the assignment we have given him. I believe Colson is probably the best man we have come up with to run the Information Office.

The big hole, as we both recognize, is still the need for a top man who can not only be a spokesman who will have great credibility with the press, with the Cabinet, with the Congressional Leaders, but who also will have my confidence and whose views I will respect when the big plays have to be made. Beyond that there is, of course, the need for someone to tpullly research and speechwriting team together and to lead it.

One top man could do both jobs and I realize that tit is almost impossible to find one that will fit this assignment, but I think our goal must be to move in that direction.

With regard to Finch I think that he is in about the right spot. He should be a Counsellor to the President and should act like a free safety to handle special assignments, but we should always recognize his weakness in being to implement , coordinate or manage any program. In fact as we look at the Cabinet appointments, we reluctantly have to conclude that his appointment was a mistake in the first instance. For example on the Domestic side, our strongest Cabinet Officer is probably Richardson considering the magnitude of the job and the capability that he has to do that job.

Mitchell of course is a special case and we should continue to rely on him to do exactly what he is doing, but I don't believe we should think of him in any other capacity except as a top adviser to the President when the big plays have to be made.

Rumsfeld presents a particularly difficult problem because we simply don't have an assignment for him. I think your idea of letting him free-wheel for the next three to six months is probably a good one. I doubt however that we could put him in charge of Information over Colson, Ziegler, et al and have it work. On the other hand he may be the only man that we could find who could do that job. This is a matter for further discussion.

My final thought is that in determining what we do on all three fronts - the Chairmanship of the National Committee, the top PR man, and the top Director of Information man, as well as the top man in the field of speechwriting, etc., is that we be absolutely candid and honest with ourselves in determining whether we are going forward with the best we can possibly find, or whether we are settling for sentimental or other reasons for "a first-rate second-rate man.