

2/26/73

Mr. Fred Graham
CBS News

Dear Fred,

Your four-way discussion of our Glorious Leader's last night's wisdom on this morning's show was one of the more informative for the average listener, by professional standards a good news segment but to me a disappointment because it tells me all over again that the best minds in the media are not prepared to cope with the requirements of best reporting on the extremely complex or the ultimate in deliberate dishonesty.

Or, as Luther said with commendable honesty, the format of the news conference. (I have thought of a way that not having your obligations can appear to me to hold some possibilities without involving disrespect or departure from professional norms.)

What I really have in mind is two items of fact with which you and Van Schorr dealt. I believe Nixon can be reached on both and the truth can be reported without editorializing. That with which you dealt you can understand better than I because I am not a lawyer and you are.

As I understand Nixon's claim to high principle, it is that he resists all compulsions in the interest of the presidency as an institution. Thus he pretending it was public knowledge let drop that he had refused to testify before the grand jury. But in the same breath he says he would submit to compulsion, he would respond to "interrogatories." Not questions but a legal document, part of a legal procedure, and under oath.

This amounts to saying he will comply with compulsion as long as he can control that to which he responds and the words with which he responds. Or, an admission that he insists on being in a position to hide whatever he may want to hide and not to respond to that to which he does not want to respond. Without leaving a record of his evasions or refusals to answer, for in answering interrogatories to can give any contrived reason that seems convenient for not answering.

Schorr came very close to what I believe even today is some gut stuff in the few words he said about the "gift." There is a difference in what Nixon said last night about this and what he had said earlier. I think the reason none of you caught it is because you can't spend the time in pursuit of details. This is one of the areas of vulnerability/newsworthiness. But to say, as Schorr correctly did, that Nixon could take his papers back is to do no more than consider taking the first halting step.

But the path is a clear one, easy to follow to one who knows where to walk.

Easier for a lawyer but all downhill for any good reporter who understands where it is to take him.

It is known as "Fraud."

I mean this literally, not as a figure of speech.

Sincerely,

Harold Weisberg