

Report on Nixon Raises a New Issue

By Drew Pearson

It was not my desire to pursue Richard Nixon and his psychiatric problems when I answered a question at a National Press Club luncheon last week regarding the checking of facts that go into a newspaper column. Rather it was to illustrate the difficulty of ascertaining the truth and deciding fairness and timing that brought up the matter of Nixon's psychiatric treatment.

Now that Nixon's press secretary, Ron Ziegler, has stated that all of what I said was "totally untrue, most of his columns are," a second issue is at stake.

The first is the right of the public to know all the details about a candidate's health, a policy that President Eisenhower so admirably set after his heart attack.

The second issue is the credibility gap.

Ziegler should know something about the latter and the fact that it pays a press secretary to stick to the truth, for he comes from the California Republican camp where Gov. Ronald Reagan had to retract his charge of "liar" in connection with my report of two homosexuals on his staff.

Nixon campaigned for President partly on the issue of the credibility gap, claiming that the American people have been deceived and misinformed

by the Johnson Administration. The issue is important. The American people are entitled to know the truth. But is Nixon now going to turn around and deceive the American people himself?

Ziegler says not. He stated on the day he was appointed press assistant that he would operate in "a spirit of openness, honesty and mutual respect."

Yet one day before this he had stated that what I said about Nixon's psychotherapeutic treatments was "totally untrue, most of his columns are."

Examine Facts

Let's examine the facts, therefore, to see who is telling the truth.

First, we have private statements of several patients of Dr. Arnold Hutschnecker of 829 Park ave., New York, that they were undergoing psychotherapy at the same time Nixon was receiving similar treatments. These patients were willing to talk privately, but not for quotation.

However, another patient, William Block, a commercial photographer, of 242 E. 60th st., New York, has authorized me to quote him as saying: "I was a patient of Dr. Hutschnecker for four and a half years, during much of which

time Vice President Nixon was also a patient.

"It was common knowledge that Mr. Nixon was receiving psychotherapeutic treatments and the doctor expressed some concern that such a man should occupy the important post of Vice President."

The issue remains as to whether first we are to have a credibility gap; and second whether the public has received all the facts about the health, mental or otherwise, of a prospective President.

Credibility Gap

On the latter point it is obvious that Nixon has not been as frank as President Eisenhower was after he suffered his heart attack in 1955.

On the former point it would appear that Nixon is getting off to a bad start regarding the credibility gap that he has criticized in the past.

It is difficult for newspapermen to do much about the latter, except complain. An exception took place after the 1960 presidential campaign when I reported Oct. 24 that Howard Hughes had loaned \$205,000 to the Nixon family. This also brought a denial from Nixon's then assistant, Robert Finch.

The story was greeted with such skepticism that so distinguished a paper as The Washington Post refused to publish it, though publishing

Finch's denial on page one, a denial that he subsequently retracted.

Subsequently also 43 New England newspapers asked a committee of editors, including Arthur Edward Rowse, a former assistant city editor of The Washington Post, Norman Isaacs, an editor of the Louisville Courier Journal; and Carl E. Lindstrom, former editor of the Hartford Times, to investigate why newspapers had lost influence in New England.

The three editors reported among other things on the treatment given to my story on the Nixon-Hughes loan, in which the denial had been played up and the facts either played down or ignored. The editors said that this treatment undermined reader confidence in the press.

Thus a very important issue at stake in the Nixon credibility gap, for which I would like to suggest a remedy.

Rep. John Moss of California has done a statesmanlike job in the past of focusing attention on suppressed news. Let him broaden his approach to include mistruths by the Government and mistruths by newspapermen. I should be delighted to submit names of witnesses to Rep. Moss so he can dig out the true facts regarding the psychotherapeutic treatment of the man who after Jan. 20 will have his finger on the nuclear trigger.

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