

*After-Breakfast News Digest
Reordered by Pleased Nixon*

By Courtney R. Sheldon
Christian Science Monitor

The publishers of Washington's most exclusive news summary have a renewed contract with a very pleased White House patron.

President Nixon has told White House aides to continue serving him his after-breakfast "mint" — a 25-page, single-spaced, worldwide news digest.

The President returned a Nov. 25 issue to Patrick J. Buchanan, the "publisher," with a note in the margin to tell the summary staff that "I am constantly amazed at the brilliant work done in preparing the news summary. It is invaluable for all of us."

Buchanan has an official title of special assistant to the President and also is a speech writer.

This correspondent was permitted to review five pre-election and five post-election issues of his choice, and it is easy to understand the President's satisfaction.

All the big news splashes and a lot of little ones are there for the President to endure or enjoy.

There is almost nothing of consequence that television, the wire services, newspapers, and magazines carry in the preceding 24-hour period that is not digested for the President and the some 100 other White House staffers who receive copies.

On Nov. 28, a not untypical item said:

"New Republic's Osborne w/another critical piece on RN's (Richard Nixon's) 'charade' and the CD (Camp David) meetings—only for public effect. Osborne says reorg. plans are the only way RN could find to create impression that 2nd term is going to be, on the domestic front, more than a mere and sterile extension. But the reporter acknowledges that restructuring is serious business in RN's view. Still he wonders why and how RN let (White House) become biggest in history..."

The Nov. 29 issue reported with a bit more pleasure:

"Positive Washingtonian (magazine) profile of Haig (Maj. Gen. Alexander M. Haig Jr., Kissinger's deputy) tells of HAK-mentor Kraemer's (Fritz G. A. Kraemer, a political-military analyst in the office of the Army Chief of Staff and also a German emigre) role in suggesting

Haig as HAK's assistant and of Haig's stability, understanding of bureaucratic implications of things, intelligence, and ability to accurately read HAK's views. Haig also impressed McNamara and Laird, says the mag..."

Of personal if not general interest to the President was the paragraph immediately following:

"A firm headed by Ed Cox's (daughter, Tricia Nixon's husband) uncle will shut down sex-oriented book stores, peep shows, and a movie house operating on its properties near Times Square."

Explains Lyndon (Mort) Allin, editor of the President's digest:

"We get about 40 papers. Thirty of them are looked at quite closely. We might look at every page. The other eight or 10 we may just look at the editorial pages, or take a quick look for columns."

"We probably get a total of 25 magazines, counting quarterlies and monthlies. We cover the three network morning news, NET's Washington Week in Review, and Agronsky and Company," he continues.

"On the networks, we are very complete, because that is where most people, for better or worse, get most of their news."

"We always report everything, every story that is mentioned on the networks. When we have already gotten a story on the wires, we might just say, 'ABC and NBC noted.' We will always take a Severeid commentary."

The news-summary staff appears, judging from issues this correspondent has seen, to take its "policy of completeness" seriously. During the election campaign the summary was 55 to 65 pages. It currently averages about 25 pages a day.

During the campaign, Buchanan did a two-page "topper" between 6:30 and 7 a.m. The news digest is usually completed in the neighborhood of 11 p.m. the preceding day.

Buchanan said the news top would tell the President how eight major papers played the major news on Page 1 and the contents of the leading stories.

"I would take these eight papers: The Christian Science Monitor, Wall Street

Journal, New York Daily News, Philadelphia Inquirer, Baltimore Sun, Washington Post, New York Times, and Chicago Tribune," Buchanan, a former editorial writer on The St. Louis Globe-Democrat, said.

The summaries in the days immediately before the November election were very factual in reporting the polls and guesstimates of political observers.

The Watergate case, judging from the issues seen, was covered more evenhandedly than might be expected in view of the intense feelings on the subject at the White House.

It is on the supersensitive Watergate affair that the summary might have been expected to hedge and camouflage in view of the many denials by the White House of direct involvement.

An excerpt from a Nov. 2 summary:

"UPI says Dole (Sen. Bob Dole) appeared to bridle, but remained calm when asked about mud-slinging allegations in McG's campaign and whether it would be naive of McG forces 'to stand aside and let the GOP have a one-sided smear.' Dole said McG supporters 'have admitted it. It's all right to throw 4-letter words at Tricia and Julie because they're Nixons and they're not sophisticated. They don't appeal to this elitist group around McG and some of the people who write news stories.' Dole said some writers from the Times and CBS think they are too perfect."

"UPI reports. Post story by Byron Beam, a Santa Ana, Calif., lawyer, said Segretti asked him to recruit 'radical, long-haired kids' to demonstrate at the GOP convention. Beam said Segretti told him he was working for the administration or GOP, altho Beam doesn't remember which one. A registered GOP supporting McG, Beam said when he asked Segretti if he was acting on other WH staff members' behalf, Segretti replied, 'I have substantial connections in Washington.'"

When in Washington the President has the news summary on his desk by 8 a.m. It is said to be the first thing he looks at. If he is at Camp David, Key Biscayne, San Clemente, or China or Moscow, it is put on the

wire for him in time to see at about the same hour.

Mr. Nixon reads a morning newspaper or newspapers almost wherever he is, a member of the news summary staff said.

His staff completes his digest for the following day before the morning newspapers are delivered. However, Buchanan says that very few stories that are ultimately in morning papers are missed. Interpretive stories in the morning papers are picked up for the following day's summary.

While the President dips into the blue looseleaf binder that encloses the summary, he may write along the edges of the summary notes like "Is this true, H" (H. R. Haldeman, top executive assistant to the President), Buchanan said.

Asked what changes Mr. Nixon had suggested during his first four years, Buchanan said he once "told me there was an absence of newspapers from the Southwest and the West and that we ought to beef up the number of bylines and papers from that area of the country, rather than an excessive focus on the East and Northeast."

Occasionally, Buchanan recalled the President has suggested tightening up, especially the weekend editions.

The digest originally divided its items according to the news media sources. Now it places related stories under the same heading.

Allin also edits a "weekend news review." The papers he says he draws on in addition to those mentioned included The Boston Globe, The Washington Star-News, and sometimes, The Chicago Sun-Times and The New York Post. Allin is a former Janesville, Wis., social studies teacher, who, his associates say, has always had an intense interest in the media.

He observes: "I think we have held to a pretty high standard on the objectivity scale." He adds, speaking "personally:"

"The television stuff gets me a little more frustrated (than newspapers or magazines) because of the lack of depth and substance to it, and the sensationalist nature, and when there are blatant cases of bias—the CBS business on Watergate.