

White House Organized Letter Drive

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The White House organized an extensive campaign to draft letters and telegrams, to be sent over other persons' signatures, praising President Nixon and denouncing the news media after a presidential press conference in late 1970, according to documents released by the Senate select Watergate committee yesterday.

One of the memos, from then White House aide Jeb Stuart Magruder, to then presidential chief of staff H. R. (Bob) Haldeman, also details numerous other efforts to influence public opinion after the speech—including an attempt to get Sigma Delta Chi, a journalism fraternity, to denounce the press for tactics of its members at the news conference.

The memo indicates extreme White House displeasure over 25 reporters who met before the press conference to discuss the questions they planned to ask.

The reporters explained that this would permit them to ask follow up questions of the President, who they felt

had not made himself accessible to the press.

The memos were released yesterday in connection with the testimony of White House aide Patrick J. Buchanan. Some of the memos were written by Buchanan. These mainly outlined campaign strategy for Mr. Nixon, including listings of the strengths and weaknesses of the various Democratic contenders from mid-1971 through the election.

Other memos outlined White House plans to criticize the news media, or to sway public opinion against various newspapers and television networks.

The Dec. 11, 1970, memo from Magruder states, among other things, that:

- "Ten telegrams have been drafted by Buchanan. They will be sent to Time and Newsweek by 20 names around the country from our letter-writing system."

- "Letters to Osborne and Sidey will e sent tomorrow." (This is an apparent reference to Columnists John Osborne of The New Republic and Hugh Sidey of Time-Life.)

- "Letters to the editors

of the (New York) Times, (Washington) Post, (Washington) Star, Chicago Daily News, St. Louis Post-Dispatch are being prepared and sent."

- Statements are being "placed in the Congressional Record. Once they appear, they will be printed and distributed together with favorable columns to editors, publishers, business leaders and other opinion leaders."

- Lyn Nofziger, then a White House aide, "has contracted Victor Lasky, who has agreed to run a column." (Lasky is a conservative columnist and author.)

- "The New York Times op-ed page statement is being drafted" by two aides and that Herbert Klein, then the President's director of communications, would be the "best signatory" for the statement.

- "An attempt is being made to get a resolution from Sigma Delta Chi (sic) condemning the pre-press conference meeting by 25 commentators to set strategy to embarrass the President."

Another memo, also dated

Dec. 11, 1970, from Haldeman aide Gordon Strachan to Magruder indicates that similar activities may have occurred after a speech by Mr. Nixon on a Vietnam peace proposal in October of the same year.

The memo, in calling for a followup to Mr. Nixon's press conference, asks:

"Is the plan any different from the followup that Rob did following the Presidents' October peace proposal speech?" It is not clear from the memo who "Rob" is or how many letters were drafted and sent out. The memo does indicate the White House has a "letter-writing system" whereby persons around the country permit their names to be used on letters drafted in the White House.

The memo was reminiscent of disclosures last spring that the Committee for The Re-election of the President had, in May, 1971, generated thousands of telegrams of praise that were sent to President Nixon following his speech announcing the mining of Haiphong harbor in Vietnam.