

White House Papers Outline '70 Effort To Get TV Networks to Ease Criticism

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WASHINGTON, Nov. 1—The White House undertook a broad campaign in 1970 to pressure the television networks into tempering criticism of President Nixon and refusing free air time to his Democratic opponents, according to White House documents obtained by the Senate Watergate committee.

The documents outlined a series of efforts intended, in the words of one "secret" memorandum, to "tear down the institution" of broadcast journalism. Another memorandum discussed methods to create "an inhibiting impact on the networks and their professed concern with achieving balance" in news coverage.

The plans were detailed in seven memorandums, written over 12 months beginning in February, 1970, that were made available today to The New York Times by Senator Lowell P. Weicker Jr., Republican of Connecticut, a member of the Watergate committee.

Mr. Weicker said that he did not know whether any of the proposals had been carried out. Taken as a whole, however they appeared to reflect the Administration's attitude toward television news in particular and the news media in general.

Among the activities described in the documents were the following:

¶ A request by H. R. Haldeman, the former White House chief of staff, for plans to "concentrate on" the National Broadcasting Company for what Mr. Haldeman described as the networks' "totally negative approach to everything the Administration does."

¶ An effort to generate public attacks on Chet Huntley, just before his retirement as the New York anchor man on the N.B.C. nightly news programs, because of uncomplimentary remarks attributed to him in a Life Magazine article. The issue was not Mr. Huntley, wrote Lawrence M. Higby in a memo to his superior, Mr. Haldeman, but "what we are trying to do here is to tear down the institution."

¶ Efforts by Charles W. Colson, the former White House special counsel, to pressure senior executives of the three commercial networks to resist requests by Democratic spokesmen for free air time to reply to televised statements by the President.

The Colson memorandum to Mr. Haldeman, dated Sept. 25, 1970, said that network officials were "very much afraid of us and are trying hard to prove they are 'good guys.'"

"These meetings had a very salutary effect," Mr. Colson continued, "in letting them know that we are determined to protect the President's position, that we know precisely what is going on from the standpoint of both law and policy, and that we are not going to permit them to get away with anything that interferes with the President's ability to communicate."

Mr. Colson said that he would ask Dean Burch, the chairman of the Federal Communications Commission, to

consider issuing "an interpretive ruling" on the fairness doctrine "as soon as we have a majority" of Republican members on the independent commission. Under the fairness doctrine, broadcasters are required to present conflicting views on controversial issues.

Referring to officials of N.B.C. and the Columbia Broadcasting System, Mr. Colson wrote, "The harder I pressed them, the more accommodating, cordial and almost apologetic they became." His memo said that William S. Paley, chairman of C.B.S., "went out of his way to say how much he supports the President," that the "only ornament" on the desk of Julian Goodman, the president of N.B.C., was the 1969 Nixon inaugural medal, and that James C. Hagerty, a vice president of the American Broadcasting Company, had stated that A.B.C. was "with us."

Mr. Paley issued a statement tonight in New York, saying that the Nixon Administration, like prior Democratic and Republican Administrations, had made occasional "representations" criticizing coverage by C.B.S. news. But he said that the overtures had never affected the network's news coverage and that "our news judgments will never yield to outside influences."

Walter Cronkite, the managing editor and anchor man of the "C.B.S. Evening News," added on the program tonight that "none of that pressure ever reached this desk."

Democrats Sought Ruling

The issue of access to free television time was first raised in May, 1970, when the F.C.C. announced that it would consider issuing a rule on the obligations of broadcasters under the fairness doctrine. Lawyers for the Democratic National Committee sought a ruling that the opposition party would have an automatic right to respond to televised statements by the party in power.

No action on the rule had been taken by September, 1971, when the Democrats sought a Federal Court order to expedite the F.C.C. consideration.

In January, 1972, the commission agreed to settle the matter promptly. The following June, the commission denied the Democratic party request.

Andrew Schwartzman, a public interest lawyer with the United Church of Christ, said tonight that Mr. Burch had demonstrated impartiality throughout the fairness doctrine proceeding and "has not allowed the F.C.C. to be used" for partisan purposes.

That the White House considered making overtures to Mr. Burch appeared to be borne out by a July 17, 1970, memo to Mr. Haldeman from Jeb Stuart Magruder, a former White House aide and official of Mr. Nixon's 1972 re-election campaign.

The four-page "confidential-eyes only" memo listed a number of projects "to raise the larger question of objectivity and ethics in the media as an institution."

One of the suggestions was that Mr. Burch "express concern" about press objectivity

in response to a letter from a Congressman."

He urged the White House to "plant a column with a syndicated columnist which raises the question of objectivity" and to "encourage the dean of a leading graduate school of journalism to publicly acknowledge that press objectivity is a serious problem."

The Magruder memo said that Mr. Huntley was planning to send a letter to Life magazine contending that he had been misquoted in his criticisms of the President and was sending a letter of apology to Mr. Nixon. The memo suggested making public the apology.

On Aug. 28, 1970, a memo from Magruder to Mr. Higby said: "The issue of Chet Huntley is fairly well played out. We leaked his letter of apology to the President and it got very good coverage. We will continue to hammer at press favoritism on a regular basis. We will ask the Vice President to make this standard fare" in the 1970 Congressional election campaign.

A brief memorandum to Mr. Haldeman from Mr. Colson on Aug. 26, 1970, asserted that the Democrats and C.B.S. were jointly seeking to block an unfavorable ruling on the fairness doctrine.

"I think," Mr. Colson wrote, "it is time for us to generate again a PR campaign against the Democrats and C.B.S."

Across the top of the Colson memo were Mr. Haldeman's initial and a one-word approval: "Absolutely."