

Saving America, the Presidency and Mr. Nixon

Employing shady tactics reminiscent of Watergate dirty tricks, sponsors of a forthcoming national newspaper advertisement on behalf of beleaguered President Nixon are erroneously telling prestigious Democrats that Dean Rusk and Lady Bird Johnson have agreed to sign the ad.

The ad itself is the brainchild of the White House and has been entrusted to longtime Nixon intimate Donald M. Kendall, Pepsi-Cola chief executive and beneficiary of multiple Nixon administration blessings the past five years. Kendall's role: To make the strongest possible defense of Mr. Nixon without scaring off high-level Democratic signers.

Thus, the first version of the ad appears in fulsome terms to the patriotic necessity of "preserving this nation" as distinct from preserving President Nixon. That is the obvious come-on for Democrats who would never sign an outright appeal to support a man most of them loathe.

One former Johnson cabinet member was specifically told on behalf of Kendall that President Johnson's widow and former secretary of State Rusk both had agreed to sign. That

claim had the desired result of putting the former cabinet member under intense pressure to sign himself, but he nevertheless refused.

When we called Prof. Dean Rusk at the University of Georgia Law School, he told us he had no intention of signing the ad. His version of the advertisement, he said, had arrived under conditions of extreme secrecy several weeks ago and not from Kendall himself.

Rusk, secretary of state for both John F. Kennedy and Lyndon B. Johnson, said he never signs petitions, letters or ads.

In Austin, Tex., Mrs. Lyndon Johnson's personal secretary told us through an intermediary she had heard nothing about the ad. Mrs. Johnson, she said, did not make a practice of signing public appeals or statements.

Another top-drawer Johnson aide received his copy of the proposed advertisement 10 days ago. Describing it as a bald "Save Nixon" effort skillfully wrapped in "Save America" camouflage, he told us he would never sign. The language of the ad, titled "A

Warning About Weakening America," strongly supports that view:

"We can preserve this nation only if we realize—immediately!—that democracy cannot survive where mob rule flourishes. We cannot surrender to government by outcry."

There ensues an emotional appeal to "follow the rules of the Constitution that for 200 years has served us supremely well. Let us observe the constitutional grounds for impeachment—treason, bribery and other high crimes and misdemeanors."

"Let us remember" the ad asserts, "that Congress cannot impeach a President because it is tired of him, nor impeach a judge because it does not like his opinions. Let us not surrender our birthright to mob hysteria and let us resist the shouters that would stampede us into doing so."

Those words expose the ad's underlying theme: Convert Mr. Nixon's pervasive and personal crisis into a carbon copy of Mr. Johnson's narrow-based predicament at the height of the Vietnam war, when he was indeed besieged by antiwar demonstrators.

By such misdirection, the ad's clear purpose is to round up LBJ Democrats

and exploit their animus against the political left, the former college demonstrators and what Mr. Johnson used to call the "haters" at the peak of antiwar agitation.

In short, the ad tries to divide the country down the lines of the great Vietnam schism, appealing to "the love of our country." So far out of touch with reality is the Nixon White House that it still does not grasp fundamental differences between Mr. Nixon's overall critical plight and the far more restricted crisis of his predecessor.

Moreover, Republicans who know and still admire Mr. Nixon are aghast that Kendall was given a role in the ad campaign. "With Don Kendall's debts to Nixon, and Nixon's obligations to Kendall well-known," one pro-Nixon Republican told us, "using Kendall to get signatures is incredibly stupid."

Kendall's sponsorship of the ad campaign destroys the intended message that the issue is not the President but the presidency. If the real issue were saving the presidency and not Richard M. Nixon, far more objective sponsorship than Don Kendall would have been at hand.