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COMMITTEE FOR THE RE-ELECTION OF THE PRESIDENT

January 6, 1972

MEMORANDUM

~~CONFIDENTIAL~~

MEMORANDUM FOR H.R. HALDEMAN

FROM ROBERT M. TEETER

SUBJECT: CATHOLIC VOTE

This memorandum is in reply to your request for my thoughts on the Catholic vote.

While I think we should reserve any hard conclusions until our first wave of polling is completed in February, a few trends have emerged from studies we have done in the past, which I think allow us to make some tentative decisions. It is, however, a very difficult political issue because much of the evidence is conflicting. There are clearly cases in which Governors have helped themselves markedly by making overtures directly to the Catholic vote and other instances where other Governors in other states have either failed to help themselves or hurt themselves at the polls by attempting to appeal directly to Catholics.

All available data does, however, indicate that there has been a definite break in the traditional Democratic voting behavior of Catholics in suburban and, to a lesser extent urban areas. Catholics, in and around metropolitan areas, particularly in the north are clearly becoming more independent politically and splitting their ticket at an increasing rate. This trend is not apparent to any significant degree, however, in rural areas, the border states, or the south.

This trend appears to be primarily a result of Catholics becoming more upward mobile in the society and assuming increasingly middle class values, thereby, changing their political attitudes and voting behavior. Some of the reasons for this shift, in addition to the fact that many Catholics have improved their socio-economic status are that many urban Catholics have strong ethnic backgrounds and have remained in somewhat closed ethnic communities in the large cities until recently but have tended to leave these ethnic communities in the second or third generation as they moved up on the socio-economic scale. At this point, many of their ties to their ethnic group, including their traditional political attitudes and voting behavior, weakened.

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By SO NARA, Date 10/30/65



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A second reason for the increasing political independence of Catholics is the erosion of the hitherto strong Catholic dogma, particularly among younger Catholic families. These two points - upward mobility and the diminishing importance of Catholicism per se - contribute to the increasing importance of newly attained social class and economic status in voting behavior.

At this same time, there may also be a group of Catholics who have retained their strong religious beliefs and who feel the Democratic party has moved away from them as it has become more liberal and their life-style has been threatened. These people have been primarily Democrats in the past but have always been basically conservative and held the traditional American values which many Democrats now appear to repudiate. This group tends to be lower end educationally and economically and also a group that has disliked Republicans fairly intensely for a long time. There was (in 1968) and is today some definite Wallace support among this group. Many of these voters now feel strongly cross pressured politically because their philosophical beliefs tend to push them more towards voting Republican but they have grown up disliking Republicans and formed fairly strong Democratic voting patterns. In my judgement, this group will be much harder for the President to attract than will the middle class upper end Catholics who have moved to the suburbs.

While the data indicates that socio-economic status rather than religion are generally the most important determinants of voting behavior, the issue of aid to parochial schools is clearly one where Catholics vote primarily on the basis of their religion and one which appears to cut across most socio-economic lines. It is important to understand, however, that even though religion determines voting behavior, on this issue most Catholics see it strictly as an economic rather than religious ideological issue. The opposition to aid to parochial schools among non-Catholics however, is based largely on philosophical or ideological grounds. Politically, it clearly becomes a question of whether the President can pick up more Catholics than he will lose non-Catholics by proposing some type of aid to parochial schools.

Based on the data I have available, I think the President's appeal to this group of voters should be aimed at them as a social class rather than Catholics for two reasons. First, I think there is a strong possibility that he might lose more non-Catholics than he would pick up Catholics, by proposing some type of federal aid to parochial schools. This may be particularly true in several of the Border and Southern States that are



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important to us and where there is some definite anti-Catholic sentiment. Moreover, in many of the states with large Catholic populations where such a proposal would clearly help them or states that we have very little chance of carrying anyway, such as, Massachusetts, Rhode Island, Connecticut and Michigan. The second reason is that there is a high probability that the President's opponent will be a Catholic and the preliminary returns on our first wave polls that Illinois, Wisconsin, Kentucky show Muskies having a very strong appeal to Catholics which I doubt could be loosened even if the President proposed some type of federal aid to parochial schools and Senator Muskie opposed it. While Kennedy's appeal to Catholics is somewhat less than Muskies', particularly in Illinois, it is substantial in Wisconsin and Kentucky and it would probably not be changed on the issue of aid to parochial schools.

Summing up, I simply think that the potential payoff of such a position against either Muskie or Kennedy would be small in that risk of a net loss with non-Catholics is too great. The Catholics who are most available to the President are those who will vote on issues not related to their Catholicism and whose main concern is with insuring their security in their new social environment, which makes them most interested in the economic issues of inflation and unemployment. They are those who have or are just realizing the American dream and want desperately to protect their newfound status.

