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THE PRESIDENT HAS SEEN....

PL / Ford

THE WHITE HOUSE

WASHINGTON

September 24, 1976

MEMORANDUM FOR THE PRESIDENT

FROM DAVE GERGEN and JERRY JONES (J.J.)

JJ

SUBJECT: The Southern Trip

When originally scheduled, this trip was intended to offset the notion that you were writing off the South. As the momentum has swung in your direction, however, the trip has become more and more an opportunity to score major points in Carter's stronghold -- and to test how much emphasis we can place on the South in order to capture states such as Louisiana, Mississippi and even Alabama.

A key question is what theme you should set for the trip. What headlines are desirable? How much attack is appropriate? Etc. We have discussed this with Bob Teeter tonight and based upon his latest data (Mississippi poll and post-debate poll), here are our joint recommendations:

-- The tone of the trip should be fundamentally positive and show your growing confidence that you have a fighting chance in the South. It would be premature -- and probably not credible -- to say now that you're definitely going to win. But you can clearly be upbeat. For example, you should say, "We're going to surprise a lot of people in the South."

-- Your remarks should not be a direct, frontal attack on Carter. Teeter thinks that Southerners might be offended by this so that it would backfire and mar the tone of the trip. Drawing comparisons between yourself and Carter is fair game. There is



evidence that Carter is now being tied in many voters' minds to the liberal Congress and that Carter suffers worst from being perceived as fuzzy. What you say should reinforce these thoughts. We want to move Carter as far toward Humphrey and the liberals as possible.

-- At the same time, you do not want to appear to be kowtowing to the South and especially to perceived Southern prejudices. If your supporters in Philadelphia find you stressing very conservative Southern themes, they could easily be alienated. Instead of identifying yourself with strictly Southern interests, what you want to do is identify interests of the South with the interests of the entire nation -- interests that you deeply share. You should definitely ask for their votes, and this is the basis upon which you can do it.

-- Teeter strongly recommends that you talk far more about the future than about your record. He suggests you spend two to three times as much on your hopes and goals as on your record. Those who support you for your performance in office already know about the record. The question is how to attract over other voters; and the way that you approach the future as opposed to Carter is one of your most appealing issues for them. This is a view very strongly shared by pollster Al Sindlinger.

-- The key issues that appeal in Louisiana, Mississippi and Alabama are fairly predictable:

- Holding down government spending;
- Holding down the size of government;
- Holding down taxes;
- Holding down cost of living;
- Maintaining a strong national defense.

These should be done in a way that stresses comparison -- how your programs will make peoples lives better, create more jobs, less inflation, more individual freedom, etc. On the key issues, it is clear that you represent much more faithfully the



interests of the South -- and of the rest of the nation -- than does Mr. Carter. You might even make a point that for years, Southerners told the nation that they should be judged not by their accent or their background but by how much they could contribute to the country. Today you are asking the South not to judge by accent and background but on how much more you can do for the nation.

-- More and more Southerners are coming to appreciate your vetoes, not because they disliked the original bills but because they now see the vetoes as necessary.

-- Louisiana is heavily Catholic, but it is suggested that you not bring up abortion.

-- Ideal story line to come from the trip: Ford Confidently Woos South, Feels He Has Surprising Support. Worst headline: Ford Rips Carter in Deep South. Next worst: Ford Promises Deep South to Work for Them; or Ford Hits Campaign Road Again.

Fred Slight and Agnes Waldron have developed the attached briefing book for you on issues by state.

