

Vol. III, No. 5
November 30, 1973

SO 04.01.1 The American
Political Report
The American Political Research
Corporation
(originally SO 04.01.1)

The American Political Report

Kevin Phillips, Editor

Published by the American Political Research Corporation
4720 Montgomery Avenue
Bethesda, Maryland 20014
Telephone (301) 654-4990

THE NIXON ADMINISTRATION

Converging multiple crises are once again dropping the odds on the survival of Richard Nixon and his hard-pressed Administration. White House credibility among politicians and legislators is crumbling with every new tapes absurdity, and hitherto pro-Nixon businessmen are panicking in the face of the the energy crisis and the rising threat of a severe recession and increasing unemployment. Political, economic and legal timetables appear to be moving towards a February or March crunch if RMN can't turn things around in the meantime (see p. 2 for an analysis of possible resignation triggers).

Confidence is weakening on all fronts: Sindlinger & Co. consumer data shows a massive late November slide in U.S. economic confidence. It's mostly the energy crisis finally hitting home....energy is now fast becoming the nation's top issue (with all that implies for economic and foreign policy decisionmaking), but as late as Nov. 16-22, public opinion did not take the energy crisis seriously (see polls, p. 4). Because of the Watergate Syndrome, many people -- especially Democrats -- initially suspected RMN of trickery. Under other circumstances, the energy crisis could have been a great political opportunity. But not with a Watergate-staggered President afraid to get far ahead of a disbelieving public. So far, sluggish measures have aggravated the crisis with no compensatory political benefit. Look for more movement towards rationing as polls (see p. 4) begin to convince the Administration of strong bipartisan public sentiment in this direction.

Watergate remains the all-permeating issue. Speculation on who's who in the White House or who's leaving the Cabinet is becoming steadily less meaningful as the President relies more on the politically inept but personally loyal Alexander Haig and Ron Ziegler. In the past, this narrowing circle (or "circle the wagons") pattern has always led to a bust of some degree. And as RMN falls back into the Haig-Ziegler orbit, we see other GOP politicians becoming less and less concerned with keeping the President in office. It's a very inauspicious pattern....

As of this moment, Republican prospects are dimming up and down the political line: In 1974 gubernatorial races, in Senate contests (see Special Survey) and in Congressional races, where serious speculation about possible GOP House losses is now reaching into the 30-40 seat range. After Gerald Ford's expected Dec. 6 vice-presidential confirmation, party officials and GOP leaders in Congress will begin to come to real grips with the ultimate question: How much of the U.S. economic and political crisis can be solved simply by RMN's resignation? So far, there is a lot of private talk -- and very little public speculation by top Republicans. But in APR's opinion, RMN's credibility campaign is now running against a steadily ticking political and economic clock....

Too many vital political and economic establishment interests are being eroded for much more indulgence.

P-ISAACS, Stephen

National News Council

ACCURACY in Media, Inc

Media Panel Fights Obscurity

By Stephen Isaacs

Washington Post Staff Writer

NEW YORK—The experimental new National News Council's principal grievance so far is not the complaints about the media it is receiving, but its own obscurity.

In fact, few complaints that would come under the council's purview have been received—probably because so few people know of the council's existence, says William B. Arthur, its executive director.

As a result, Arthur, the 59-year-old former editor of Lock magazine, and Ned Schnurman, associate director of the council and former city editor at WCBS-TV here, have had to become promoters of the council itself—a public relations role they do not relish.

So, says Arthur, he and Schnurman are accepting any speaking invitations that they feel do not involve conflicts of interest. Schnurman, for instance, in one 24-hour stopover in Chicago scheduled five radio and television appearances while there.

The Twentieth Century Fund and a task force considered many potential pitfalls of such a council—possible areas of contention between and among the media, private interests and the government—before establishing it.

But the fund did not fully anticipate the dearth of complaints that has greeted the council's birth.

Most of the complaints directed to the council in its few months of existence have been from "professional letter writers," persons who are known ubiquitously to editors around the country.

The council is hearing several times a week from Accuracy in Media, Inc., a non-profit Washington organization that describes itself as "an educational organization representing you (the public) in combating error and distortion in the news media."

So far, says Arthur, none of AIM's complaints has been of the nature of the type of grievance the council was set up to investigate. "We take their letters one by one," says Arthur. "That's the only way to deal with them fairly."

"We certainly hope we're not going to be used on a regular basis by organizations with big public relations departments," says Arthur. "We hope to encourage complaints from far less organized sources."

So far, then, the several hundred letters that have come to the council are no barometer of either happiness or discontent with the media. They are, says Arthur, more emotional than substantive, "like the psychologist who wrote us and said that Harry Reasoner always has a leer when he mentions the President's name. That's an emotional response."

One letter-writer from Vancouver, Washington, said that "I wish to propose to you investigation of national news coverage of the abortion movement of the last five to six years."

"It is continuously clear," said the letter, "that the pro-abortion forces receive better coverage than the anti-abortion ones at all levels and in all media."

Schnurman's reply stated: "The abortion issue is a complex one which does receive a sizable amount of media coverage. However, it is not our purpose, or the spirit in which the council was conceived, to examine general charges of bias in the media. If you can cite specific examples of media bias involving a national news organization we shall be happy to entertain consideration of your complaint . . ."

Another letter complained of "a specific practice of CBS radio news. I have no way of documenting what I heard, but perhaps my letter will reinforce someone else's complaint."

The letter cited radio reports that said in which "the reporter ended his newscast with the flat state-

ment that he was broadcasting from 'Chile, the most democratic nation in South America.' Now this may or may not be true. I am sure there are many South Americans who would dispute it. However, such a statement is strictly a matter of opinion, and I strenuously object to this kind of propagandizing in a so-called news report.

"This is not exactly an earth-shaking matter, but I find it indicative of the bias and irresponsibility that sometimes plagues the news media. 'Credibility gap' is a cliché, but it certainly does exist."

In this case, the writer was told that complaints had to be more specific.

Yet another letter complained about a story carried by The Washington Post-Los Angeles Times news service that described a new drug for treating gonorrhea.

"Gonorrhea is a terrible problem," said the letter, "but this (article) implies some new drug was discovered." Instead, said the letter, the drug in the article was not new, and a far cheaper version of the drug has "been around about a decade."

The council's by-laws authorize it to study First Amendment issues, and last week the council announced its first such study, to be directed by Columbia University constitutional law expert Benno C. Schmidt, Jr.

The study of "the potential threat of a free press posed by increased demands for access to the media," was triggered by a Florida court decision that extended the FCC's equal time provisions to newspaper editorializing on political campaigns.

"Maybe the results of such a study will be directly valuable," says Schnurman, "in case that some day goes all the way to the Supreme Court. At least we'll hope to have this study published by early 1974."

Schnurman and Arthur have been considering all elements of contention between the media and the government, and have debated as to what procedures they would have followed if vice-

president Spiro Agnew had brought his complaint about news leaks to the council instead of to court.

In one case where another action was taken, Schnurman says, the complainant might have preferred news council action.

Schnurman says the American Medical Association complained to the Federal Communications Commission about an NBC documentary last December about the nation's health care.

A copy of the AMA's complaint was sent to the news council, and AMA was told that, since it had its case pending before a regulatory agency, the council could not act.

NBC gave in before the FCC was through hearing the case, Schnurman says, by giving the AMA time to rebut the program on the "Today" show and by admitting certain errors in fact.

"Our postulation," says Schnurman, "is wouldn't it have been more interesting if it had gotten before us and gotten to the open hearing stage. Couldn't the council, by its publicity, have ended the thing. Then NBC would not have been obliged to make the 'Today' show time available. If that publicity had been publicized in enough areas, wouldn't NBC have been better off. The kind of thing they did makes it look like they were guilty."

The NBC action, says Schnurman, had a further impact in that other related programs "have been shelved or put aside because of it. You have to ask yourself why."

Schnurman says he understands that the AMA in retrospect would have

continued