

92

AUGUST 17, 1967 - 6:20 p.m.

Freshmen Republican Congressmen

MEMORANDUM

THE WHITE HOUSE

WASHINGTON

93

August 19, 1967
3:30 p.m., Saturday

MEMORANDUM FOR THE PRESIDENT

Tom
FROM: Tom Johnson

Attached are the notes of your meeting with Freshman Republican Congressmen on August 17, 1967, in the Cabinet Room.

The meeting began at 6:20 p.m. The meeting ended at 7:44 p.m.

Attachment

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93a

NOTES OF THE PRESIDENT'S MEETING
WITH THE
HOUSE GOP FRESHMEN

IN THE CABINET ROOM
August 17, 1967

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The President: I am glad to have an opportunity to exchange views with you. We will talk about any of the issues you have on your mind.

Congressman Burke: There are discussions that the surtax will result in a slow down in inflation. Is this true?

The President: My economists are in agreement that it would be less desirable to borrow all of the \$30 billion deficit than to tax part of it. Chairman Martin urged a tax bill of 10 percent rather than six percent. After much discussion with the very best economic minds we have, I concluded that we should borrow 50 percent, tax 25 percent, and save 25 percent. We expect to make cuts in the Space program and the pay bill. As soon as the appropriation bills are sent to the White House, we will look at them and make additional cuts.

Congressman Pollock: Mr. President, I want to thank you very deeply for your help in meeting the emergency needs of my people in Alaska. All of the agencies of government and you have been so helpful in our time of need.

The President: I am very distressed with the problem of flooding in Alaska and you can be assured that we will do everything possible to alleviate suffering.

Congressman Steiger: Could a smaller surtax result if we cut more than 25 percent of the \$30 billion?

The President: We are unsure even if we can cut as much as we intend to cut. I do not think we could have a smaller surtax.

Congressman Kleppe: Mr. President, could you discuss for us the targeting of our bombs in North Vietnam.

The President: Do you want an off-the-record answer to that? (All agreed that it would be completely off-the-record.)

Most of the targets on the Joint Chiefs of Staff list have been reviewed. They submit several hundred targets. These are studied by the Secretary of State, the Secretary of Defense, CIA, Walt Rostow of my staff, and by the President. They are carefully evaluated in terms of potential pilot losses and civilian casualties.

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We have approved approximately six of every seven targets requested. Of those not approved, approximately one-third are targets of slight significance and low priority.

The ones which we have not approved are in a buffer zone close to the China border. They also are in the populated areas of Hanoi and in the populated Haiphong area and ports.

We look at these targets from time to time. There are thirty to forty targets which have been authorized but not hit. As of our last meeting on Wednesday, we felt we were going as far as we thought we should go. We all make mistakes but as you know, the buck stops here. We agreed with General Wheeler on his recommendation this week. Our tactics and strategy and our weapons change from time to time, but there is no change in our basic policy. There is no major policy change in connection with so called acceleration or escalation.

The period from May to September 15 is our best period for bombing because it is a period of good weather. Frequently targets are authorized but not hit for several weeks because of poor weather or because of diplomatic discussions which are underway.

We have been at it in Vietnam for more than two years. I know of no target in Vietnam that we have authorized and hit that I would change. This has been my best judgment and the best judgment of my advisors. But we have hit Russian ships and we have violated Chinese air space. We think it is best to let things develop in China as they are developing. We do not believe that bombing as it is now conducted will lead to the intervention of China.

Congressman Scherle: Mr. President, do you plan to send to the Congress any sort of list of priorities which need more attention than others?

The President: We may forego passing some legislation we would like to see pass. We will impound some more. We do not know whether we will send a list of priorities or not. We must see the appropriation bills first and see what is in them.

Congressman Winn: Mr. President, would you settle for the original six percent tax you requested?

The President: No, I would not want that. Every billion dollars which we do not raise will have to be borrowed. It would cost us more than we would save.

Congressman Dellenback: What about increasing spending in the cities at a time when we are very concerned about a huge deficit?

The President: All of you see where the riots are occurring. In the cities. We have made several recommendations to the Congress. Among them are proposals for the Teacher Corps, mass transit, urban research, urban renewal, safe streets and crime, housing for the elderly, low rent housing, rent supplements, model cities, poverty, rat bill, education, and medical care.

These are the things we should be acting on now. Most are new proposals. We think they are the best we can find.

My staff has been going into the cities. They have been reporting to me on the conditions in the cities.

I do not see why we should spend all our time fighting each other. When I was Senate Majority Leader I voted with President Eisenhower 76 percent on foreign policy, 36 percent on domestic policy. Of course, I know you do not have as good a President to support as I did, but I know that you want to vote for what is right and what the people think is right.

It is often not doing what is right that is difficult, it is knowing what is right. The Congress will do what it thinks is best.

Congressman Schwengel: He expressed his appreciation to the President for asking the Republican Congressmen to the White House.

Congressman Heckler: Congressman Brad Morse said this week that the people of this country are frustrated about the war. He put forward a plan that he said would result in an honorable conclusion.

The President: Most of the proposals which I have seen are based on a hope and a prayer and not on knowledge. I read several hundred cables each week -- cables from capitals around the world. I read CIA reports, State Department reports and Defense Department reports. I can say to you tonight, as of this moment, they want nothing except to take South Vietnam by force.

I would be willing tonight to have Secretary Rusk meet them tomorrow, I would stop the bombing if they would not use this halt to kill my men. Ho thinks he could take South Vietnam by holding out. He thinks that he can win in Washington as he did in Paris.

I have the very best military leaders this nation possesses in Vietnam. He also told them that the four best generals are General Westmoreland, General Johnson, General Abrams and General Palmer. None of them recommends

a halt in the bombing unless the North Vietnamese agree not to take advantage of the halt. All of you remember the letter I received from Ho. His view has not changed one inch.

On elections, the South Vietnamese have the same difficulties in elections as you and I do in elections. There are many charges, but this is not unusual. What about the Viet Cong? They murder people. 150 were slaughtered last week. In my judgment the South Vietnamese have come further than I expected.

Ky is putting in 65,000 men and dropping his draft age. Nobody wants to go to war, nobody wants to die.

We are not in a stalemate. We expect to receive more troops from Australia, Thailand and from Korea. Don't kid yourselves, Hanoi thinks they can take South Vietnam without a military victory. They think they can win it here at home.

Congressman Wyman: Mr. President, do you see a need for us to do in Vietnam what we had to do in Japan?

The President: Definitely no.

Question: Should we declare war?

The President: No, you might bring in China and Russia. We have all the authority we need to do what we are doing. The President then gave the Congressmen a run-down on what the Gulf of Tonkin Resolution provided.

What I am concerned about is unity in this country. The Communists thought they had it won when you Republicans won your seats last year. That did not happen. The House has conducted itself very well on foreign policy this year. You Republicans are to be thanked for your assistance on foreign policy.

Question: Could you tell us what we are involved with in Thailand.

The President: Yes, Thailand is next on their list. If the pressure were to let up in Vietnam, Thailand would be next. We think the Thais will prepare themselves. Indonesia would be in serious trouble were it not for our presence in Vietnam. If we stand up to the Communists in Vietnam another free Korea may emerge.

Question: We recently sent out a questionnaire to our constituents. The response showed that most Americans favor your policy.

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- 5 -

The President: I have never had more patriotic support than I have had from you. I would have to tell every Marine that. The House Foreign Affairs Committee and the Armed Forces Committee have been very helpful.

Question: Did Kosygin's attitude surprise you?

The President: No, I was surprised that he did have as little authority as he did. I think Chairman Kosygin received a different impression about us. I believe the people at Glassboro showed what good, wholesome and nice people we can be.

The President concluded the meeting by thanking the Congressmen for expressing their views. He said, "We all work for the same people. They pay our salaries. I want to help you do your job better."

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[5 of 5]

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