

# WITHDRAWAL SHEET (PRESIDENTIAL LIBRARIES)

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31a notes	Meeting w/Congressional Leadership TS 12 p. Part I  [sanitized -- placed in open file on 4/25/86] <i>open NLS 92-142 10-5-99</i>	1/30/68	A

## FILE LOCATION

Tom Johnson's Notes of Meetings, Box 2

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P U E B L O 10  
January 30, 1968  
8:30 a.m.

Congressional Leadership Breakfast

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## THE WHITE HOUSE

WASHINGTON

January 30, 1968

FOR THE PRESIDENT

FROM: Tom Johnson

Attached are the notes of your Congressional Leadership Meeting on January 30, 1968 in the Mansion.

Attending the meeting:

The President  
The Vice President  
Speaker John McCormack  
Congressman Carl Albert  
Congressman Hale Boggs  
Senator Mike Mansfield  
Senator Russell Long  
Senator J. W. Fulbright  
Senator John Sparkman  
Senator Robert Byrd  
Congressman Thomas Morgan  
Secretary Rusk  
Secretary McNamara  
General Earle Wheeler  
General George Brown  
Honorable Lawrence O'Brien  
Walt Rostow  
Barefoot Sanders  
Joe Califano  
Mike Manatos  
Tom Johnson

The meeting began at 8:30 a.m. It ended at 11:00 a.m.

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BY DCI ON 10-25-88

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Meeting Began: 8:30 a.m.  
Meeting Ended: 10:06 a.m.

NOTES OF THE PRESIDENT'S MEETING  
WITH THE  
DEMOCRATIC LEADERSHIP

January 30, 1968  
In the Mansion

The President: I want to tell all that we know about the Pueblo incident. We are spending days and nights on the situation. I want you to treat this as a very confidential meeting. Speeches will not help us on a situation like this.

General George Brown (using a map): The Pueblo was a reconverted light freighter. It is 180 feet long. It travels 10 to 12 knots. Its only weapons are three 30 caliber machine guns. It departed 8 January from Sasebo, Japan. It has a crew of 83. Its orders were to use arms only if there was a threat to its survival. Otherwise it was told to keep its guns stowed. Its mission was to collect intelligence information about coastal radar and to determine North Korean reaction to intelligence detection. It was to sample the electronic environment.

The Pueblo reported that some North Korean ships circled her. At first, she thought it routine.

At 12:00 on the night of the 22nd, one of the ships ordered her to heave too or I will open fire. The North Korean ship reported to its station that the location was 25 miles from Wonsan. This was well in international waters.

At 12:10 the North Korean ship reported having an American vessel sighted.

At 13:00 the sub chaser was joined by 2 patrol boats. An armed boarding party was already on ship. One of the craft backed up with fenders rigged.

At 13:06 it was reported that 8 MIG's were patrolling the area.

At 13:22 up until 13:50, the sub chaser told the patrol boats to clear the area and reported firing warning shots.

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At 13:45 the Pueblo was boarded. Destruction of classified material had begun. An SOS was sent.

At 15:10 the Pueblo reported three wounded.

At 14:25 the Pueblo completed destruction of most of the equipment and classified publications. Some publications will be compromised.

At 14:35 the Pueblo reported it was going off the air.

Question: Why was the ship engaged in this activity?

Answer: To secure intelligence and to observe communications capabilities.

Question: What is the scope of our activities?

Answer: We have 6 ships of this type.

Question: What are the capabilities of the Soviets?

Answer: They have 40 ships, 18 of which are at sea today.

Question: What confidence do we place in our navigation accuracy?

Answer: We doubt that the navigation accuracy is off more than a few yards. There was a rugged shore line and also good radar fixes.

Question: Why were there no escorts for this vessel?

Answer: It was felt this was not required. This is not a hazardous undertaking generally. With escorts it would be able to accomplish its mission. Piracy on the high seas is not a contingency we planned for.

General Wheeler: The ground forces of the South Koreans are larger than those of the North Koreans. The reverse is true in the air. South Korea has a much smaller air force. As a matter of military prudence we re-enforced South Korean air forces with U.S. units.

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We turned the Enterprise around into the Straits east of Pusan. We deployed U.S. Air Force fighter bombers and fighters. We have moved the Ranger to join the Enterprise in the Straits.

We want to place 300 U.S. aircraft in South Korea to at least equalize the situation.

To replace these units, the President called up a number of reserves, including 300 aircraft and 14,000 men.

Secretary McNamara: Why was this mission undertaken? The answer is simple. We needed this information. We have these missions continuously. The Soviets have the same thing. We believe that we benefit. It is in our own self-interest that we have it and that the Soviets have it.

For example, in the Mediterranean during the Middle East crisis the Soviets had a ship which followed our fleet. The Egyptians and Arabs accused us of supporting with air power off the carriers the actions against the Arabs. The Soviets, because of their intelligence ship, knew we had not.

Question: Why was the vessel not escorted? It is less provocative. The risk of piracy is small. No amount of escort will be adequate. If they were escorted, they would not be able to perform our mission and collect the intelligence information effectively.

Question: Should we have planned for the attack and a response?

Answer: We do not have enough planes to protect against isolated incidents of this type.

Question: Should we have been able to respond?

Answer: No. We should not respond by fire until we know all the facts. The potential for moving into an ambush is very probable.

We have 40 odd aircraft in Japan, less than one hour and twenty minutes flying time. If they had flown into the area, they could have been destroyed by a much more superior North Korean air force and could have destroyed our ship along with the enemy ships.

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If you put 20 or 40 U.S. aircraft into an environment, with 70 North Korean planes you are at a substantial disadvantage --- especially when there are hundreds of MIG's on call.

The President: In short, we would have suffered a humiliating defeat and perhaps lost our men.

General Wheeler: The weather was bad. By the time the warning got to Japan, the alert passed, the crews briefed, the aircraft flown, we would have arrived with fuel low. The situation was confused. Darkness would have been coming. It would be a very sad situation. The orders would have been that there would be a substantial air engagement and that the Pueblo would have been destroyed perhaps along with the North Korean vessels.

Secretary McNamara: Did we call up the Reserves using Korea as a cover but actually for Vietnam?

Answer: No. We had 440 aircraft available in the active forces. As soon as the Korean incident is settled I believe these units will be deactivated.

The President: There has been much sentiment to call to active duty the Reserves. We wanted protection forces in South Korea. We must have protection and the reserves were called to take the place of Regulars. I do not expect any big problem with it.

We are going to have this information. We will do it in the least provocative way. We were on the high seas. They used force. What do you do?

Answer: We could have done several things. The Commanding Officers in the area concluded that the wisest course was not to attack. We think they acted properly. This will require our greatest prudence and greatest caution.

Question: What do we do now?

Answer: I do not think it wise to begin issuing ultimatums. We have tried to devise a procedure best calculated to cool the situation. We want to do what is necessary to get the men and ship back.

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Secretary Rusk: On the diplomatic front we drafted a message and sent it to Moscow two hours after learning of the incident. We have been in touch with almost every government in the world. We have been in contact directly with North Korea at Panmunjon.

There have been replies from 90 nations. Of this 90, one-third of them have been in contact with the Soviets, including the British, the Japanese and the Indonesians. If you took a vote, the overwhelming answer is that we should get the ship and the men back.

I have talked with Gromyko. The Soviets have talked with North Korea. We do not believe the Soviets want an inflammation of this. The Soviets also have these ships. Three of them came within 3 miles of our shores in 1956.

We had the right to be where we were. If we had accidentally been inside territorial waters, the North Koreans still have no right to do what they did.

If the Soviets went into New York Harbor, we could warn their ship, or sink it, but we could not under international law seize it.

In one year we extended courtesies to the Soviets 33 times. These include Boston, Alaska and New York. In one incident, we sent a chopper out to a Soviet ship to assist with the delivery of a new born child.

We believe the Soviets are trying to find a way.

The President then showed photographs of North Korean ships taken off U.S. shores.

Secretary Rusk: In the UN, the matter was admitted to the agenda by a 12 to 3 vote. If we are to get the ship and the men back, it must be done by diplomatic means. If you get live men and a good ship we must use diplomacy. If we used military means we would get back bodies.

The closest incident which parallels this was RB-47 aircraft which was shot down in the Bering Sea. The basic issues are the same. But can 83 men be dealt with as 2?

I believe there is a 50-50 chance we can get this ship out.

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As you know, there is a big offensive underway in Vietnam. If we could take action in Korea, we would face a serious problem indeed.

The President: From the time we received the news of this incident we have been asking ourselves what is the wisest thing to do. We want to do two things:

1. Get the ship back with the men.
2. Protect the prestige of the United States.

The military has explored 10 or 12 different plans.

Secretary McNamara: What has been looked at are three different types of military action. They can be sub-divided into these three categories:

1. Military actions which would recover the men alive. There are none.
2. Actions and pressures designed to influence a political decision to release the men.
3. Military actions which are a punishment.

Under the second type of action -- those designed to influence a political decision to release the men, we have these alternatives:

- a. The move of 361 aircraft to South Korea.

The President: This is a precautionary measure.

Secretary Rusk: This has been done not only because of the Pueblo incident but because of the infiltration and the attempt to assassinate President Pak and the U.S. Ambassador.

The President: The infiltrators had as their literal assignment to cut off President Pak's head and throw it into the street.

Secretary McNamara: There are no men taken from Vietnam because of this.

- b. To replace the Pueblo with the Banner. We do not recommend this now.

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c. Minding Wonsan Harbor. This could be done at night with unescorted aircraft. We do not recommend this now.

d. Seizure of North Korean vessels. They only have 2 fishing vessels and 2 small coastal vessels.

e. Quarantine of the coast. This would run the risk of escalation.

None of these alternatives or any others have a very high probability of success in influencing the North Koreans to release these men.

Senator Mansfield: I think you are following the right course in trying to get these men out alive.

The President: It was their duty to be where they were. We must have intelligence. We were within our rights. We do not escort these vessels because they would be provocative. The captain did not respond because he has constant harassment of this type.

Question: Why were no aircraft sent?

Answer: There was heavy enemy air support. The weather was bad. It was late in the day. We may have sank the Pueblo.

Why did we have only 4 aircraft in Korea?

Answer: We have, we believe, better sea flexibility operating out of Japan. No one ever expected to face the capture of a ship like this.

On the diplomatic front, we have gone to the Soviets, we have gone to the UN and to Panmunjon.

Our first objective is to get the ship and crew back. We have not decided on any future course of action that we can give you.

But we need to stop, look and listen before moving on to military alternatives.

We will keep our hands out and our guard up. We are going to protect ourselves. We are going to pursue the various diplomatic alternatives.

Any questions?

Speaker McCormack: I think the course that the President is following is a wise course.

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Senator Mansfield: I hope you will stretch the time. Thanks for giving us the whole picture. I am not sure the American people are as aware of the security pacts the North Koreans have with the Soviet Union and with the Chinese as I am.

Congressman Boggs: I agree with what the President's on this. Would it have been helpful if the ship fought back?

General Wheeler: It would have been suicidal. The North Korean ships had 3" guns and 37 millimeter guns. The Pueblo had 3 50 caliber machine guns, which compared to the enemy were pop guns.

Congressman Boggs: Do you have any information about the men?

General Wheeler: we know that some were taken for interrogation. The remainder are still in Wonsan. One man was hurt badly and believed dead and 3 wounded as a result of destroying crypto equipment. As far as I know, the other 79 are unharmed.

Congressman Albert: This has many of the aspects of a kidnapping case. You want to get the victim back, but you do not want to do anything that would get the victim killed.

If this is an overall plan by the North Koreans to divert strength from Vietnam, we should increase our military strength there.

The President: We expect to ask for an additional \$100,000,000 in military aid to Korea. We may have to extend the length of duty of men now serving. We have 2,500 men leaving the service each day who are trained. We may have additional call ups.

I do not want to leave the impression that they can get away with this.

Senator Byrd: Thank you very much for the briefing. I think the actions which have been taken are prudent and wise. On another matter, I am very concerned about the build up at Khesanh. I have been told that we have 5,000 troops there compared with 40,000 enemy troops. Are we prepared for this attack?

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The President: This has been a matter of great concern to me. I met with the Joint Chiefs yesterday. I went around the table and got their answers to these questions. In addition, I have it in writing that they are prepared.

I asked, "Have we done all we should do?" They said yes. I asked, "Are we convinced our forces are adequate?" They said yes.

I asked should we withdraw from Korea. They said no, that Khesanh is important to us militarily and psychologically.

Senator Sparkman: I appreciate this briefing. I must interrupt to say that I must leave because of the hearing on the gold cover.

Senator Long: The American people are concerned about the damage to their national honor. I think we should take more firm military action.

The President: Russell, if you will just listen a minute you will see that we are taking the action we believe to be right. There are 700 enemy dead now as a result of our actions in Vietnam. That is not soft.

Walt Rostow: During the first day of TET the enemy attacked in 10 places in Vietnam. Six were substantial attacks.

At 6:00 a.m. today General Westmoreland said the enemy suffered the highest killed in one day of the war. They counted 700 enemy dead. The ratio of enemy killed to U.S. killed runs about 5 to 1.

The enemy is trying to terrorize the people. Reports said the ARVN performed very well. Khesanh's air field is open.

General Wheeler: On the matter of your question, Senator Byrd, about 5,000 U.S. troops versus 40,000 enemy troops. Khesanh is in very rugged areas. There are 5,900 U.S. troops in the Khesanh Garrison. These are support troops including 26th Marines and a battalion of the ARVN. In support of this there are 105 millimeter, 155 millimeter and 8 inch guns.

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There are 175 millimeter guns operating from the nearby "rockpile." There are 14 more 175 millimeter guns 14 miles east.

Off the coast, there is a force of cruisers and destroyers which can target on the enemy.

There are 4 North Vietnam divisions at Khesanh. We have available the 1st U.S. Infantry Division. We have one additional ARVN Division available with units which can be dispatched quickly. There are 39,968 friendly forces versus 38,590 enemy forces. Roughly, there are 40,000 allied troops to match the 40,000 enemy. We think we are ready to take on any contingency.

In addition, there are 40 B-52 sorties and 500 tactical air sorties in the area Niagara each day hitting the enemy.

I talked with General Westmoreland yesterday. He had been in the area and conferred with senior field commanders. He placed the entire field operation under his deputy General Abrams. He has as his air deputy General Momyer.

General Westmoreland is confident he can hold the position. To abandon it would be to step backward. The Joint Chiefs agree with General Westmoreland. The Joint Chiefs believe that he can hold and that he should hold.

General Westmoreland considers it an opportunity to inflict heavy casualties on North Vietnam. We have 6,000 men there, and 34,000 available. It is 40,000 versus 40,000.

Senator Fulbright: I agree with what you are doing on the diplomatic front on Korea.

I have two questions: First, is it true that we were warned about the Pueblo?

Secretary Rusk: There was a complaint on January 9. There was no warning that this action would be taken.

We get complaints like this all the time.

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General Wheeler: I have had this matter researched thoroughly.

General Brown: We found on 8 January and on 11 January the text from North Korean radios. It was handled by Reuters. This information was analyzed by CIA and DIA and there is nothing substantive in this. They said that South Korean fishing vessels were operating in North Vietnam waters. They said nothing about U.S. vessels.

Senator Fulbright: We know that the North Koreans had orders to seize the Pueblo. How do we know?

Secretary Rusk: We listen to their chatter.

Senator Fulbright: How do their boats communicate with their base? Was it an international voice or an open line?

General Wheeler: Their boats communicate by voice and by international morse code.

Senator Fulbright: That is what puzzled me.

I think the course that you are following is correct. I think it will lead you to a solution. I do not think we should go to war over this ship. I think your course is right.

Congressman Morgan: What about this charge that we have direct contact with the North Koreans through the Security Council?

I saw this morning over NBC that this is causing concern by the South Koreans.

Secretary Rusk: This resulted from discussions in the Security Council. There have been discussions about another meeting in Panmunjon with North Korea. The Security Council wants to get somebody into North Korea to discuss this matter.

Senator Fulbright: Who authorized the mission of this ship?

Secretary McNamara: The 303 Committee. From my side that is Paul Nitze.

Senator Fulbright: Did we actually pick up a Soviet warship off Seattle?

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Secretary McNamara: We did not pick up a warship. We picked up a fishing vessel and fined it.

Secretary Rusk: There are 3 incidents of warships inside U.S. territorial waters, 2 were in 1965 and 1 in 1966. We required them to leave.

The President: From time to time the Soviets say we buzzed or harassed their ships.

We called to their attention many incidents of their doing the same.

Senator Long: Was the captain of the ship under orders not to fight?

General Wheeler: His orders were to get out of the area.

He would have two MIG's overhead plus gun ships alongside.

The President: I think the most fortunate thing about this whole situation is that we did not get into a fight over it.

Walt Rostow: His orders were to destroy the classified equipment first.

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## PART II

The President then met with the regular leadership in the Sitting Room. Those attending were:

The President  
The Vice President  
Speaker McCormack  
Senator Mansfield  
Congressman Albert  
Senator Byrd  
Senator Long  
Congressman Boggs  
Larry O'Brien  
Barefoot Sanders  
Mike Manatos  
Joe Califano  
Tom Johnson

PART II

The President: We need to get the Poverty and Education Bills moving. We need to get passage of the gold cover and the tax bill. There are 18 authorized bills. We need to get to work on them.

I hope that Senator Mansfield and Speaker McCormack will get together on an agreed schedule for the year so we will know when to get the messages up.

As coach, I am trying to get you quarterbacks to agree on the signals and give this information to your halfbacks so your team can begin to play.

The discussion then followed the attached format.

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BY DCH ON 10-25-82



1. Message Scheduling:

This week the Veterans Message will go Tuesday and the Economic Report on Thursday. Joe Califano will have the most recent tentative schedule in the event you wish to discuss dates beyond this week.

2. This week's schedule:

House floor: San Rafael Wilderness Conference Report  
Truth in Lending  
Fire Research and Safety

Senate Floor: Civil Rights Debate

There will be a fight on the San Rafael Wilderness Conference Report. This is a left over item from last session which we would really like to get out of the way now.

Truth in Lending will be on the floor with three hours of debate. We would like to have general debate finished Tuesday so that the amendments can be offered Wednesday.

The three chief issues are:

1. The \$10.00 exemption
2. Revolving credit, and
3. Garnishment

The principal argument will be over revolving credit. The House Leadership has pitched in behind Chairman Patman and Mrs. Sullivan and it appears there will be very substantial Democratic support to include revolving credit. The President's Consumer Advisory Council has sent a letter to all members of Congress endorsing the inclusion of revolving credit.

Whether or not revolving credit is included we do not believe there will be any serious problem on final passage of the bill.

Fire Research and Safety is another consumer item remaining from last session which, like Truth in Lending, has already passed the Senate. The \$10 million authorization in it will be halved to \$5

million by floor amendment; the Senate bill authorized \$5 million. There should not be any difficulty in passing this bill which is a part of the Administration program.

On the Civil Rights debate you may wish to discuss with the Senate Leadership the current situation on the possibility of compromise and what the outlook is for closing debate and obtaining an early vote.

### 3. Authorizations and Appropriations;

We have provided a list of major authorization measures. The various departments are this week contacting committee chairmen urging early hearings on the necessary authorization measures.

Chairman Mahon is willing to adopt an Appropriations Committee schedule for reporting out bills provided that he can agree with the Leadership on a schedule for the authorization measures which must precede the appropriations bills.

It would be very helpful if the House Leadership would meet with Mahon on this, and if the Senate Leadership could work out a similar program on the Senate side with respect to authorization measures.

### 4. Highway Beautification

This Senate passed bill is pending in Rules Committee. We would like to get early favorable action by Rules so that the House Leadership can decide the appropriate time to schedule the bill for floor action. This is a must item.

### 5. Housing Legislation

You will be sending to the Hill in the near future an Omnibus Housing bill. Pending on the Senate calendar is a Housing bill (S.2700) reported last session. We would like to withhold Senate action on this bill pending the arrival of the new Omnibus Housing bill on the Hill.

You may want to discuss with the Senate Leadership whether S.2700 should be permanently put aside or brought up for Senate debate. (Probably, it would be better to lay it aside, and wait for the Committee to report the Omnibus bill. In this way there would be only one floor fight on Housing legislation this session -- and that is plenty.)

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6. Tax Bill

Now might be a good time to emphasize your keen interest in early passage of the Administration's Tax bill. What can be done with Mills and his Ways and Means Committee to get early and favorable action on this measure?

7. Safe Streets and Crime Control.

This House passed bill is pending in Senate Judiciary. We need the bill without state bloc grants. What should be done with Senator McClellan and to Senate Judiciary Committee to bring a strong bill to the Senate floor at an early date?

You may wish to point out that you intend to lay great stress in the Crime Message on the necessity for early action on this bill.

8. Recess Dates.

At last week's Leadership meeting Senator Mansfield said that the Senate had already announced the dates on which it will be in recess for holiday periods. Those days are:

Lincoln's Birthday: Conclusion of business February 8 to noon February 14.

Washington's Birthday: No business after reading of farewell address on February 22.

Easter: Conclusion of business April 11 to noon April 17.

Memorial Day: Conclusion of business May 29 until noon, June

3.

July 4: Conclusion of business July 3 until July 6.

The Speaker has as yet made no similar announcement for recess dates in the House. It would be particularly helpful to us in scheduling messages, and it would also be helpful on the attendance problem, if the House Leadership could adopt and announce a similar schedule. Even if the House recess dates do not coincide with those of the Senate, there are great advantages in knowing these dates as soon as possible.

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