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001. memo	Personal [partial]; Non-selection [partial] (2 pages)	12/27/1993	b(6)
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COLLECTION:

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RESTRICTION CODES

Presidential Records Act - [44 U.S.C. 2204(a)]

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- P2 Relating to the appointment to Federal office [(a)(2) of the PRA]
- P3 Release would violate a Federal statute [(a)(3) of the PRA]
- P4 Release would disclose trade secrets or confidential commercial or financial information [(a)(4) of the PRA]
- P5 Release would disclose confidential advice between the President and his advisors, or between such advisors [(a)(5) of the PRA]
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Freedom of Information Act - [5 U.S.C. 552(b)]

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- b(2) Release would disclose internal personnel rules and practices of an agency [(b)(2) of the FOIA]
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12/27/93

ve/m Admin

To: Mark Gearan
From: David Kusnet
Re: Reinventing speechwriting

This memo reviews the conditions under which the speechwriters have done our jobs for the past 11 months and discusses how we can do better. It covers: 1) staffing, 2) our workloads and responsibilities, 3) the process by which we receive guidance and get our drafts approved, 4) the need to include us in discussions about policy, message, and strategy, 5) the format of our speech drafts, and 6) how to improve the quality of the speech drafts. I'm offering this as an outline for a discussion of how to improve speechwriting.

To sum up my recommendations:

1) We need to add one more senior speechwriter and either one more junior speechwriter or researcher.

2) We need more time to prepare speech drafts. This can be accomplished by adding more staff, scheduling events further in advance, and giving us guidance sooner in the process.

3) The cumbersome process is probably inevitable. It can be improved -- slightly -- by encouraging people to offer advice early and discouraging them from weighing in at the very end of the process.

4) Most important of all, we need to bring the speechwriters into "the conversation" in the Administration about policy, strategy, and message. We would benefit from regular meetings with the President and with the staff and consultants who frame the message. While the speechwriting staff has been understaffed and overworked, we have also been underutilized -- loaded up with routine tasks but not included in the intellectual excitement of the Administration. This makes it more difficult to prepare speeches with intellectual depth and emotional impact.

5) We should experiment with new formats, such as extensive outlines, rather than complete texts, for the longer domestic speeches. Speech drafts and accompanying memos should give the President a sense of the process that produced the draft, the purpose of the event, the material that we recommend he use, the flow of argument, and the internal architecture of the speech. It also would be useful for speechwriters to spend more time developing arguments, lines, metaphors, and other material for various uses, from speeches to media interviews, and less time writing fullblown speeches that are unlikely to be delivered word-for-word.

6) Finally, we need to provide the President with speech drafts that will help him do his best. He is a magnificent speaker, especially in two seemingly dissimilar roles -- teacher and preacher. We should provide more fast summaries of the facts, more arguments, analogies, and statements of values and principles, and not load up speeches with exhaustive programmatic and factual detail, tinny-sounding rhetoric, or supposed soundbites that neither flow from, nor fit into, the text.

I. Staffing

For the past 11 months, the speechwriting unit has been overworked and understaffed.

Background:

During the transition, I was asked to speak with speechwriters from earlier administrations. I spoke with speechwriters from administrations from Johnson through Bush and learned they usually had six senior speechwriters, as well as junior speechwriters, researchers, and support staff. For instance, the Reagan speechwriting unit had four researchers who worked with the writers from start to finish on each speech, from information gathering to fact-checking.

I reported back on this, but it seems that speechwriting was shortchanged during whatever decisions were made to achieve the 25% staff cut. Initially, our staffing was set at three speechwriters -- me and two others who initially were budgeted to receive \$10,000 less than the salary I succeeded in negotiating for Alan Stone and Carolyn Curiel.

We also suffered from the decision to make Research a separate unit, rather than part of the speechwriting unit. For the most part, our gears have not meshed. Initially, we tried to use them for background research and fact-checking, but found that other demands on their time made it difficult for them to work on our schedule. For routine research, such as Nexis/Lexis searches, and fact-checking, we use Liz Bowyer and our interns.

After a meeting with George Stephanopoulos in May, we added a junior speechwriter/researcher (Carter Wilkie) and another senior speechwriter who would specialize in health care and would also work with the First Lady (Alison Muscatine). With Muscatine, I also had to do some hard bargaining to get her the same salary as Alan Stone and Carolyn Curiel.

Current Staffing

The current staffing is: four senior speechwriters (Kusnet, Curiel, and Stone, and Alison Muscatine, who is on maternity leave and is expected to return in February); one junior speechwriter/researcher (Carter Wilkie); an office

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manager/researcher (Liz Bowyer); and one or two unpaid college student interns who do research and clerical work.

A few points about the staff:

o Stone, Curiel, and Muscatine were each selected after extensive outreach, interviews, and writing tests, where applicants prepared sample speeches that were read and evaluated by the communications director, the deputy directors, me, Bob Boorstin, and, with Muscatine's job, Maggie Williams, as well.

(b)(6)

o Liz Bowyer has been doing at least two jobs -- office manager and researcher. Together with the interns, she does background research for the speeches, as well as fact-checking. She has also drafted remarks for the President for several ceremonial events. In previous speechwriting units, two or three people did the work she is doing now. [001]

o Carter Wilkie does most of the remarks for ceremonial events, as well as his share of all but the most major speeches. He helps with the research on the historical background for events. He also gets assignments from others in the Communications Department and in the White House. As we've discussed, his responsibilities have increased -- and his work has been outstanding -- since he transferred from Research. If it is at all possible, he should receive a pay increase.

Recommended Staffing

I recommend that we add one more senior speechwriter and either another junior speechwriter or a researcher.

Senior Speechwriter: With the senior speechwriter's position, since the meeting in your office in September, I have passed along to you about 20 names and resumes, including at least a half dozen who I think would be credible choices. I've not followed up further with them because it was my understanding from the meeting that you were coordinating the search -- but I would be glad to follow up further, bringing people in for interviews and getting writing samples. I would suggest that "blindfold" writing samples should be part of the selection process. Particularly when we're evaluating journalists who haven't written speeches before, this helps us determine who would do the job best.

(b)(6)

II. Workloads and responsibilities

What we do

We prepare fullfledged speech drafts or talking points for the President for public events. Sometimes, we'll also prepare or revise the drafts for articles by the President for newspapers and magazines.

What we don't do

Following our meeting with George Stephanopoulos last May, the policy has been that we don't do the scripts for most presidential videotapes or the talking points for events that are closed to the press. These are to be drafted by the staff who generate the event -- usually Public Liaison or Political.

In spite of this policy, sometimes there is last-minute confusion when the staff responsible for a video or a closed event don't produce a usable script. Sometimes, we'll have to prepare or revise the script at the last minute. Also, we do prepare scripts for the President for videos for important occasions, such as the Thanksgiving and Christmas messages.

Foreign Policy Speeches

We also have not been asked to prepare the drafts for major speeches about foreign policy and defense, which have been prepared by the National Security Council staff. However, we have occasionally been asked to prepare some drafts on very short notice. For instance, on two hours notice, I prepared the draft for the President's opening statement at a news conference last spring, which included several paragraphs about the situation in Russia. And, at seven o'clock the night before Yitzhak Rabin's most recent visit to the White House, the NSC staff director asked me to revise the drafts for the President's statements at the next day's events. Here as elsewhere, while the speechwriters

are not considered to be master chefs, we are expected to be short-order cooks.

Removing us completely from foreign policy and defense has several harmful effects. Most important, it contributes to what has been an unfortunate pattern in presidential speeches in this Administration: confining the discussion of foreign policy and defense to just a few events. Second, it makes it more difficult for us to include discussion of foreign policy in major thematic speeches, such as the University of North Carolina or the DLC. Third, it makes it more difficult for us to write about issues that touch on foreign policy, such as trade or defense conversion. And, finally, it gives us less of an opportunity to write uplifting speeches, further "flattening" our style.

Average Workloads

The average workload for each speechwriter tends to be two speeches a week. While we try to clear someone's schedule if he or she is preparing a major speech, this isn't always possible because that might further over-burden the other writers. For instance, the week that I was preparing the DLC draft for Friday, I also was responsible for preparing the President's talking points for the World AIDS Day event. That same week, Alan Stone was preparing the draft for two speeches on the California economy, Carolyn Curiel was preparing the drafts for the Albuquerque speech on rural health care and the remarks at the Hollywood fundraiser, and Carter Wilkie was preparing the draft for one ceremonial event and for the Saturday radio speech.

III. Process

How We Find Out About Speeches:

Most often, we find out about speeches through the scheduling meetings at 10:30 each morning, which Liz Bowyer attends every day. After each meeting, she distributes a schedule to me and to the other speechwriters of the speeches that are coming up, along with the names of the staffers who are listed as contacts for each speech. (The 10:30 meetings are about logistics, not message; if they dealt with message, the other speechwriters and I would attend them.)

On occasion, I will hear about upcoming speeches from David Dreyer, from you or David Gergen, or from staff who are involved in an event. Only occasionally have I been asked to attend planning meetings, such as the meeting two weeks ago in the "Ward Room," with you and others, where I learned that the entitlements conference speech and other speeches were coming up on the schedule.

On occasion, we'll also see a monthly schedule, or hear about future speeches in some other way, and we'll try to follow up to learn what speeches are coming up.

All in all, it seems that, even with major speeches, we have been operating on a "campaign" schedule, where we rarely have as much as one week's notice of even a major speech -- and usually have only two or three days' notice. Moreover, even when we know an event is coming up, it is usually no more than two days before the event that we learn about the intended message. Consequently, no matter how important the event, we usually have only about two days to write the speech, knowing the message, the required format, and the details of the event.

How We Assign the Speeches

As soon as we learn that one or more speeches are coming up, we hold a meeting to assign speeches.

Particularly because of the difficulty of the workloads and the process, we've tried to maintain a sense of collegiality and equity among the speechwriters. The best way to get people to carry a heavy workload is for them to have the sense that they are part of a team and are being treated fairly.

We try to rotate assignments, so that each of us has an assignment every third or fourth day. In addition, we try to rotate the assignments, so that we each get our share of the more burdensome, the more interesting, and the easier assignments.

Following the assignment meetings, Liz Bowyer E-Mails the list of who is doing what to you (and Scoop Cohen), David Gergen (and Jody Greenstone), David Dreyer, and Ricki Seidman (and Collier Andress). She also tells those attending the morning scheduling meetings which speechwriter is doing which speech.

How We Get Guidance on Message and Substance

At the assignment meetings, I try to offer each writer some suggestions on what the message might be, and whom to consult for further guidance on message and substance. I offer this advice understanding that I'm often not "in the loop" about the event, the message, or the policy. While I try to offer a little more guidance to Carter Wilkie -- and to Alison Muscatine, who joined the staff more recently than the other writers -- I would say that all of us are now reasonably familiar with whom to consult on which subjects.

Most often, the message guidance comes from David Dreyer, although we will often make efforts to reach out to you, David Gergen, and the consultants for guidance.

Usually, this is the kind of consulting we will do:

On the message: David Dreyer, on just about everything; often, we try to reach out to you, David Gergen, and George Stephanopoulos; on major speeches or those with a political slant, the consultants -- Paul Begala, Stan Greenberg, and Mandy Grunwald. In addition, we consult with message people who have a special portfolio on an issue -- for instance, Bob Boorstin.

On the policy: Whoever is involved in an issue -- health care, Christine Heenan and the First Lady's Office; economics, Gene Sperling and Sylvia Matthews; crime, Bruce Reed and Jose Cerda; education, Bill Galston; environment, Katie McGinty; and so on. Often, we also reach out to cabinet departments or agencies involved in an issue.

On the constituency: Whoever in public liaison is dealing with the event, organization, or constituency; also, others who are familiar with a constituency -- for instance, with the labor movement, Joan Baggett and Joe Velasquez.

Approvals

We circulate every draft to you, David Gergen, George Stephanopoulos, and David Dreyer. In addition, just as we do in seeking advice on a speech, we circulate drafts for approval to: message people involved in the issue; policy people involved in the issue; people who work with the organization or constituency the President is addressing; Congressional Liaison (if the speech deals with issues before Congress); the Vice President's staff (if the speech involves technology, the environment, reinventing government, or another issue in which the Vice President is involved); and agencies or departments involved in the issue or event. Usually, even on routine speeches, we'll circulate drafts to about a dozen people, although most usually won't comment

Sometimes, especially on major speeches, we'll ask the Staff Secretary's office to circulate a draft. Sometimes, in the course of vetting the speech, they'll circulate it on their own. Recently, Todd Stern asked me to have first drafts sent to him, as one way that he can determine what briefing materials need to go in the President's briefing book.

David Dreyer tends to be the final edit on most speech drafts. I have not tried to set myself up as one more necessary approval in the process. However, Carter Wilkie, Alison Muscatine, and Liz Bowyer (when she does drafts for routine events) do show me almost everything they do, and I give them my comments promptly. After the first few months, the other senior speechwriters tended to show me their drafts less frequently. On most speeches, I do try to offer some suggestions in the beginning -- and I always respond to drafts when asked to comment. After the meeting in your office about the aftermath of the Annenberg event, I am inclined to ask all the speechwriters to show me their drafts for every speech.

Recommendations

The cumbersome process is probably inevitable. However, we should encourage people to weigh in with advice early in the process, not demand major changes at the very end.

IV. Participating in "the conversation"

More important than the formal process is the extent to which the speechwriters are not part of the discussions about the Administration's policies and how these policies are communicated. In fact, we sometimes are not included in discussions about the substance, the message, and even the format of the events for which we're supposed to write speeches.

How We Are Involved

To the extent that we're involved, here's how:

- o We make every effort to get ourselves included in meetings about the substance, message, and format of the events.

- o It has been very useful to us to have meetings with the President before major speeches, as with the Joint Session address on health care, and the speeches at the AFL-CIO, DLC, and entitlements conference.

- o When the President travels away from Washington for speeches, the speechwriter who prepared the draft(s) usually travel with him and are available to work with him.

- o In spite of the late hours I have to work, I have attended several 7:30 a.m. Communications Department meetings. My sense has been that these are more useful to staff dealing with the news media than to speechwriters.

How We Aren't Involved

More important, I'm afraid, than the meetings we attend are those in which we are not included. Essentially, we are not part of "the conversation" in the Administration about policy, strategy, and message. Often, we don't even hear about the decisions that emerge from "the conversation."

- o I have never been included in senior staff meetings, deputies meetings, or most other important meetings -- for instance, as of this writing (December 26, 1993) any meetings about the State of the Union Address.

- o The speechwriters as a group -- and I in particular -- have not been included in message meetings with the consultants and senior staff. Under the previous political director, there were daily meetings with consultants and senior staff to discuss message. I was not included. When I needed guidance for one major

speech last spring, I had to spend several hours and lobby several people in order to be allowed to attend one of those meetings.

o We've tried to use upcoming speeches as an opportunity to generate discussions in which we can participate about message and strategy. For instance, I did a decision memo for the President before the AFL-CIO address on different options for discussing NAFTA. I've also circulated memos to senior staff before the July 4 speech, the AFL-CIO Convention, the DLC conference, the holiday season speeches, and other major events. Sometimes, I've circulated memos about themes and substance for radio speeches. However, these memos and follow-up calls have not always prompted strategic discussions about the events.

Recommendations

Frankly, the most important point in this memo is that the speechwriters need to be part of "the conversation" in this Administration about policy, strategy, and message. We need to be involved in the intellectual excitement of helping to shape ideas and initiatives from the beginning -- not just to draft speeches on two days' notice. It would enormously benefit the quality of speech drafts if the writers could be part of the intellectual excitement of seeing an idea through from start to finish.

Here are a few suggestions -- and they would place a burden of responsibility upon me and the other speechwriters, as well as upon others:

o Before starting work on a major speech, the speechwriter should circulate a memo about substance and message, offering suggestions and identifying decisions that need to be made.

o We should meet -- as soon as possible -- with the staff and consultants involved in the substance, message, and format for the events.

o With major speeches, we should meet -- as soon as possible -- with the President. Perhaps, we should prepare memos, outlines, or rough first drafts for the President before these meetings.

o If possible, we should have monthly meetings with the President to discuss what is on his mind and his ways of thinking and talking about things.

o We should also have weekly meetings with the staff and consultants involved in framing the message.

o We should "rotate" in on meetings with the President and senior staff about the issues we'll be asked to write about.

In particular, I want to find a way to put ideas and phrases "into the mix" with senior staff and consultants, so that I can make more of a contribution to what we say and how we say it. This should be part of my role as chief speechwriter. I am inclined simply to do a lot more memos and to circulate them in the hope of contributing ideas and generating discussions.

Overall, it would probably make better use of the speechwriters if we devoted less time to preparing fullblown texts and more time to developing arguments, lines, metaphors, and other material for various uses, from speeches to media interviews.

V. Format

It has been difficult determining the best way to serve a President who is so gifted at speaking extemporaneously. Neither the campaign nor previous presidencies provide an exact model -- and there is still something of a mismatch between the formats for the drafts we provide the President and the formats that would serve him best.

What we do

As of now, we provide the President with fullfledged drafts for longer speeches and with shorter drafts or talking points for less formal events. With the longer speeches, we provide triple-spaced texts in a large type face. With the shorter or less formal speeches, we provide cards, as well as triple-spaced texts.

Understanding that the President will expand on the drafts, we try to provide him with drafts that are as short as possible. For most speeches, we keep the drafts shorter than four single spaced pages -- about 12 minutes. For the shorter events, we keep the drafts to one-and-a-half pages -- about five minutes. With even most major speeches, we try to keep the drafts to no more than five pages -- 15 minutes.

Usually, these texts are all the President receives from us -- and, usually, because of last-minute scheduling, heavy workloads, and tight deadlines, he receives them the night before the speech.

How we could do better

Most of the problem -- and most of the solution -- goes beyond format. But -- in addition, to more time, more guidance, and more staff -- new formats would be helpful.

"Owner's manual": At different times, you and I -- and David Dreyer and I -- have talked about providing the President with a cover memo for each text, explaining who has reviewed it, what news we want to make, and which phrases or paragraphs are

especially important. We should ask the speechwriters to do this for every speech and make sure with the Staff Secretary and Andrew Friendly that the President receives this cover memo along with the draft.

Extended Outline: With the AFL-CIO speech, at the President's request, I prepared the draft in the form of an extended outline. This format included section markers showing the internal architecture of the speech. It also included some sections with complete sentences and paragraphs, as well as other items that were cues for the President to improvise along familiar lines ("anecdote about Make a Wish family visiting the White House"). Using this extended outline, he followed the structure more closely and used more of the suggested language than usual with a domestic policy speech. After the speech, he told me he would like to get more drafts in this format.

I come to this conclusion reluctantly, but I would suggest that, for domestic policy speeches to familiar audiences -- for instance, the AFL-CIO, DLC, Children's Defense Fund, or National Urban League -- we give the President more drafts in this format. This allows him to see the structure of the speech, offers suggested language, and makes it easier for him to return to the text after he has extemporized.

Previews: In order to help the President get started on revising and writing a speech, it would be helpful to give him copies of early drafts that are not perfectly polished and have not been completely vetted. This would be more helpful to him that waiting until the last minute to get him a text that has passed through the cumbersome process and has been completely vetted. In the early drafts, we could indicate which material has not been vetted or fact-checked.

Displaying the internal architecture: Even when we give the President a fullfledged draft, it should include subheads so he can see the internal architecture and return to the text after improvising.

Emphasizing recommended text: Where there are key paragraphs, soundbites, or important points that we strongly suggest the President use, we should put these in boldface in the text and call his attention to them in the cover memo.

Advance texts: With major domestic speeches such as the University of North Carolina, when we want to release advance texts, it would make more sense to release excerpts that the President has approved, rather than an entire prepared text.

VI. Content and Style

How the Process "Flattens" the Speech Drafts

The constraints on us -- understaffing, heavy workloads, fast deadlines, cumbersome process, isolation from "the conversation," and compressed formats -- all make it more difficult to write good speeches.

- o With the tight deadlines, not only is it difficult to devote enough time to research, write, and revise a speech. But the writer is also less likely to "take chances" and develop new ideas, arguments and turns of phrase, for fear that it would be impossible to get the text approved, so close to deadline.

- o The cumbersome input and approval process also makes speeches longer, more loaded with detail, more filled with passages that do not flow from the context, and less uplifting than anything we would produce on our own. Once again, the tight deadlines make us more eager to produce an approved draft and less likely to fight against additions or revisions that make the draft worse.

- o Since the process encourages short drafts with lots of substance, the result tends to be speeches that "read like memos," without soaring language.

What Works and What Doesn't

Over the past 11 months, we've seen the President at his best rhetorically, and we've also seen how we can fall short of helping him be his best.

The President tends to be at his best in two seemingly different roles -- teacher and preacher. In the Joint Session speeches, he conducted a national classroom on the budget and on health care. In his address to the ministers in Memphis, he preached an extemporaneous sermon on individual and social responsibility. Our challenge is to help him scale these heights more often, including events with less inherent drama.

We've also seen some situations we don't want to repeat, particularly much of the discourse surrounding the budget debate last year. Too often, the speeches were either too filled with unexplained details -- or too harshly partisan in tone.

Over the past few months, the President has found his best presidential voice -- speaking for and to the entire country; appealing to Americans' sense of our country's special heritage and purpose; arguing from principles and values; offering a sense of hope; and avoiding either the excessive detail or the overly political soundbites of the first few months.

Now that we are entering another budget debate, a new stage of the health care debate, and an election year, we need to make a special effort to prepare speech drafts resembling the best of the past few months, not the worst of the first few months.

Recommendations

Here are some ways we can help the President be his best:

- o For starters, we should resist the temptation to over-schedule or schedule on short notice. Good speeches need time to prepare, and also need time to sink in on the media and the public. What has been called "the rhetorical half-life" of a speech -- the likelihood that what is said will be remembered -- increases when there is a build-up of anticipation before it, and another major speech does not immediately follow it.

- o We also need to resist the temptation to load up speeches with facts, numbers, details, programs, and technical language, to the exclusion of understandable arguments and explanations.

- o Another temptation to resist is inserting soundbites into a text without any context or connection with what is said before or afterwards. Often these fail to make news, or make news in a way we don't want. For instance, when a soundbite attacking Republican obstructionism was inserted at the last minute in the speech at the conference on the new workplace in Chicago in August, most coverage called attention to partisanship and self-pity, not to the point that was intended.

- o We should keep in mind the difference between presidential rhetoric and campaign rhetoric. The presidency offers the unique opportunity to speak for the nation to the nation. Uplifting statements of American values can make news and opinion -- and should not be dismissed as "off-message." The President's eloquence during the last two months -- much of it extemporized -- reminds us of the power of the bully pulpit and how it differs from a campaign soapbox.

- o Every speech should include some argument based on principles and values. As with the Oval Office address in August and the Joint Session speech in September, principles and values make a good organizing principle for a speech. As we've done during the discussion of health care -- but, for the most part, didn't during the budget debate -- principles should be emphasized and repeated.

- o We should give more thought to what produces passion and eloquence in the President's speeches. Statements of values, historical references, religious imagery, and Biblical quotations -- all elevate his rhetoric. So, too, can anecdotes about people he has met. As Carolyn Curriel recommended last spring, the staff should make more of an effort to compile and record the stories of the people the President meets. In fact, scheduling should give more consideration to events that will generate such stories. However, while the President is especially eloquent in telling anecdotes about real people, we should remember that these stories seldom make it through the media filter into news accounts of the speeches, unless the people who are mentioned in

the speech are actually present at the event. This should be kept in mind in scheduling and planning events.

- o Good speeches tell stories -- not just anecdotes about people but parables about America. In planning, drafting, and reviewing speeches, we should remember that it is better to tell a story that helps people understand what is happening to them than to load up a speech with facts, claims, and rhetoric.

- o Finally, we should remember that occasions can be eloquent. Part of the power of the bully pulpit is the capacity to praise an audience for what it is doing or to challenge it to do better. Thus, the President has often been at his best addressing audiences of working class people who are making use of opportunities for education and training, as at Northeastern University, New Hampshire Technical College, and Van Nuys Community College. These occasions exemplify his support for expanding educational opportunities and his identification with those who "have the courage to change." Similarly, we should schedule more events that call attention to people who are taking responsibility for building a better life, from neighborhood patrols, to good public schools, to factories such as Saturn where labor and management are working together to improve quality. And, without using audiences "as props," we should also consider events where he can challenge people to meet their responsibilities -- for instance, medical students or business executives.