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Our counterpoint should be that RN has produced change - responsible, timely, moderately progressive, and absorbable change. Number 4 above under RN's positive points, therefore, should be hit hard by surrogates. The electorate needs a vision of the future as well as a sense of stability with the present.

2.) Don't Let The Rascals In. McGovern will assume the offensive, namely, "Throw the rascals out." RN must not simply batten down the hatches defensively. Our offensive strategy ought to be: "Don't let the rascals in." If McGovern says inflation has gone up, it is not enough for us to race to the television screen and say afterwards, "No, inflation has gone down." It must also be stressed that if McGovern's policies were adopted, inflation would sky-rocket. Analogously, if McGovern says that RN stands for war, our offensive response position is RN is the true peace candidate, McG. war candidate. In other words, the danger of an incumbency candidacy is that it assumes an exclusively defensive posture. McGovern ought not be allowed to determine which issues are to be focused on. If that happens, the Republicans will be made to look scared, even panicky.

So, in an incumbency campaign, the kind of response to opposition attacks is telling, namely, whether the attack is responded to or not; the timing of the response; its quality of restraint or force; and who actually does the responding. My present feeling is that we have more to risk by overkill in responding, than by underkill in responding. Our energies ought to be directed more to establishing the focus than to responding to McGovern's attack initiatives. Without over-profiling him, we can put him on the defensive and plot the battle grounds that we want to fight on.

bcc: Ray Price

In a memorandum to Chief of Staff H.R. Haldeman, White House staff member John McLaughlin lists four points in President Richard M. Nixon's favor in the upcoming presidential election: (1) his competence; (2) his reduction of crime and drug addiction through innovative programs; (3) his peace initiative in Vietnam; (4) his successful stewardship as president. McLaughlin also lists four attack points which could be applied to Democratic candidate George McGovern: (1) his inexperience and incompetence; (2) his efforts to decriminalize marijuana, and his proposed defense budget cuts; (3) his divisiveness; (4) his radical, leftist positions. White House, 8 Aug. 1972. U.S. Declassified Documents Online, link.gale.com%2Fapps%2Fdoc%2FCK2349674947%2FUSDD%3Fu%3Droosesc%26sid%3Dbookmark-USDD. Accessed 9 Dec. 2025.