Gordon C. Strachan Papers, White House Special Files, 1969-1971

1969-1971
Descriptive Summary
Title: Gordon C. Strachan Papers, White House Special Files, 1969-1971
Dates: 1969-1971
Collection Number: 6851304
Creator/Collector: Strachan, Gordon C.
Extent: 7 linear feet; 16 boxes
Repository: Richard Nixon Presidential Library and Museum
Abstract: These files were created during Gordon Strachan's term as Staff Assistant to Herbert Klein and document activities such as his work with public information officers in the executive agencies, preparing "game plans" for certain events, and public relations.
Language of Material: English
Access
Collection is open for research. Some materials may be unavailable based upon categories of materials exempt from public release established in the Presidential Recordings and Materials Preservation Act of 1974.
Publication Rights
Most government records are in the public domain; however, this series includes commercial materials, such as newspaper clippings, that may be subject to copyright restrictions. Researchers should contact the copyright holder for information.
Preferred Citation
Acquisition Information
These materials are in the custody of the National Archives and Records Administration under the provisions of Title I of the Presidential Recordings and Materials Preservation Act of 1974 (P.L. 93-526, 88 Stat. 1695) and implementing regulations.
Biography/Administrative History
Gordon Creighton Strachan, a California-born lawyer in Nixon's old New York law firm, came to Washington in August 1970 to join the Nixon White House staff. His former college classmate, Dwight L. Chapin, who was the President's appointments secretary, recruited Strachan for a White House position. Strachan was, however, already acquainted with several Nixon aides from his college days at the University of Southern California and from his intermittent advance work during the 1970 congressional campaigns. His first assignment at the White House was staff assistant to Herbert G. Klein, Director of Communications for the Executive Branch. It seemed he was filling a vacancy on Klein's staff that was created by the departure of James Hogue. There is in Strachan's files two folders of what appear to be Hogue's chronological files for the period March-July 1970. Although Strachan was hired as a staff assistant to Klein, he worked primarily under the supervision of Jeb S. Magruder, deputy director of communications, who reported directly to Klein and White House Chief of Staff H. R. Haldeman. Strachan's most important daily assignment was overseeing the liaison work with the public information officers at various departments and agencies. Strachan personally handled liaison with departments of Commerce and Labor, Office of Economic Opportunity, and Peace Corps. Although he had been initially assigned responsibilities with the offices of Emergency Preparedness, Army Corps of Engineers, Nixon's science adviser Lee A. DuBridge, and those promoting voluntary service, his file folders on these topics are empty. The liaison work required daily contact with the appropriate public information officers, and in some instances Strachan was expected to maintain morning and afternoon telephone contacts with particular departments and agencies. Strachan's handwritten notes indicate the extent of these daily contacts. He was also required to prepare weekly and monthly reports on the activities of his assigned departments and agencies. Although Strachan had functional duties as staff assistant in the communications office, he had been initially recruited to be what was called project manager. In his testimony before the Ervin Committee, Strachan described the specialized duties of a project manager. Specific issues of varying degrees of importance to the administration were assigned to one senior White House staffer and one junior staff member to devise the best strategy for communicating to the public various Presidential and administration activities or programs. For example, during the 1970 midterm elections the state of the economy became a major campaign issue. Strachan and White House speech writer William L. Safire were assigned to the economy issue as a project-Strachan as the junior staff assistant and Safire as the senior person. They reported to Haldeman through Magruder on the alleged high cost of congressional spending. The titles of the folders in Strachan's files indicate the topics of other projects on which he worked: Vietnam, State of the Union address, B-52 casualty figures, Honor America Day, SST, inflation, polling, the Indian occupation of Alcatraz, Presidential vetoes, political advertising, and selected legislation. As a project manager, it was Strachan's responsibility to develop so-called game plans for a particular event or issue from all the ideas furnished by interested staffers or offices. The general format of these tentative plans included a description of the event or issue, the desired objective, and a proposed
course of action. Strachan would thus outline the possible steps the administration might take in dealing with a particular event or issue, and then, using the game plan as a working document, prepare a follow-up memorandum based on his annotations to the original game plan. In addition to this, it was his responsibility as the project manager to make certain that the plan was carried out as agreed by Haldeman and other senior staffers. Strachan's files also revealed his involvement in the mailings operation which the communications office was becoming increasingly more active. Klein and his staff felt a need to improve the dissemination of information from the White House to the public, because they realized not every news organization could afford to maintain a correspondent in Washington nor belong to one of the major wire services. Consequently, the communications office began to mail out fact sheets or background materials on specific issues to editorial writers, publishers, news media directors, and other influential groups for their use. As the operation began to expand in size and scope, the staff realized that it could not be handled within the White House and so turned to the Republican National Committee (RNC) for assistance. To insure the proper coordination between the White House and RNC, Strachan was assigned the task of liaison. He made certain that the lists were periodically updated and that the most effective groups received a complete set of mail listings. Strachan was also instrumental in expanding the mailings list to include select groups of individual voters, such as blue-collar workers, educators, farmers, and various ethnic groups. Although the content of the mailings varied greatly, the objective remained always the same—to foster and mold public opinion in support of the President and his policies and programs. An offshoot to the mailings operation was a letters-to-the-editor project. Under Magruder's guidance, a White House letter-writing campaign was established around single issues, such as law and order, media bias, welfare reform, campus violence, integration, select legislation, and political candidates. Since the RNC had the facilities and ample manpower to handle the details, it took on the job and supplied the writers and other support services for the White House. Strachan, acting as the White House Liaison, provided the proper supervisory coordination for the project. Strachan worked for Klein until after the 1970 elections. Once these elections were concluded, key senior White House staff members immediately began to turn their attention to planning for the 1972 Presidential campaign. An indication of this shift in outlook was a reshuffling of personnel within the White House staff, and Strachan was one of those Nixon aides affected. By March 1971 he was working as a staff assistant on Haldeman's staff, handling all projects in the political area. Although Strachan told the Ervin Committee he worked in Klein's shop until the end of December 1970, his chronological files as a staff assistant to Klein end at the beginning of March 1971. Other material related to Gordon Strachan are in Haldeman's Staff Member and Office Files within the White House Special Files. These files include, as a readily identifiable body of materials, Strachan's chronological files. These particular files, comprising 3.6 cubic feet, date from March 1971 to December 1972, when he left Haldeman's staff to assume the duties of general counsel at the United States Information Agency.

Scope and Content of Collection

This series contains the subject files of Gordon S. Strachan. The subject files contain memoranda, letters, handwritten notes, clippings, pamphlets, reports lists, diagrams, work drafts, speeches, and White House and departmental press releases. The records document Strachan's daily staff assignments as liaison with public information officers at various departments and agencies, his specialized duties as project manager, and his White House liaison work with the Republican National Committee. The materials are arranged into one series: Subject Files.