Charles W. Colson Papers, White House Special Files, 01/20/1969 - 02/1973

1969-1973
Descriptive Summary

Title: Charles W. Colson Papers, White House Special Files, 01/20/1969 - 02/1973

Dates: 1969-1973

Collection Number: 895081

Creator/Collector: Colson, Charles W., 1931-2012

Extent: 59 linear feet, 6 linear inches; 136 boxes

Online items available http://research.archives.gov/description/895081

Repository: Richard Nixon Presidential Library and Museum

Abstract: This series was created to document the activities of Charles W. Colson as he carried out his duties as Special Counsel to the President.

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

Charles Wendell Colson was born on October 16, 1931 in Boston, Massachusetts. As a teenager, he demonstrated an interest in politics by volunteering for the 1948 reelection campaign of Massachusetts Governor Robert Bradford. He graduated from the Browne and Nichols School in Cambridge, Massachusetts in 1949 and went on to earn a Bachelor of Arts degree at Brown University in 1953. That same year, he married Nancy Billings on June 3rd and also joined the United States Marine Corps. He later married Patricia Ann Hughes on April 4, 1964. After serving in the Marines for two years, during which time he was promoted to the rank of Captain, Colson left the military in 1955. He then worked for approximately one year as the Assistant to the Assistant Secretary of the Navy (Material), which was a civilian office within the United States Department of the Navy. Colson began his political career in 1956 when he became an Administrative Assistant to Massachusetts Senator Leverett Saltonstall. It was during this time that Colson met then Vice President Richard Nixon. Colson obtained his Juris Doctor degree at George Washington University in 1959 and founded the Colson & Morin law firm in 1961. Former Securities and Exchange Commission Chairman Edward Gadsby joined the firm, as did former Raytheon General Counsel Paul Hannah. The firm’s name was eventually shortened to Gadsby & Hannah. In 1968, Colson served as Counsel to Nixon’s Key Issues Committee and was appointed Special Counsel to the President on November 6, 1969. He was implicated in the Watergate scandal and eventually resigned from the White House staff on March 10, 1973 in order to return to the private practice of law as Senior Partner at his Colson & Shapiro law firm in Washington, D.C. Nearly a year later, on March 1, 1974, Colson was indicted for conspiring to cover up the Watergate burglary. He eventually pled guilty to obstruction of justice in relation to his efforts to defame Daniel Ellsberg. On June 21, 1974, Colson received a sentence of one to three years and a fine of $5,000. After serving seven months, he was released from prison on January 31, 1975. His personal experiences led Colson to found the Prison Fellowship Ministries in 1976 and the Justice Fellowship in 1983. The non-profit organizations function as Christian outreach and criminal justice reform groups. For his various social, political and religious efforts, he was given a number of awards and honorary degrees over the course of several years, such as the Templeton Prize for Progress in Religion (1993), the Salvation Army’s Others Award (1990) and the Presidential Citizens Medal (2008), which was awarded by President George W. Bush. In 2000, Florida Governor Jeb Bush somewhat controversially restored the rights Colson had been stripped of as a convicted felon, including his right to vote. In addition, Charles Colson became a prolific writer. He authored or contributed to more than 30 books. Some of his own titles include Born Again (1976), Life Sentence (1979), Answers to Your Kids’ Questions (2000) and The Sky is Not Falling: Living Fearlessly in these Turbulent Times (2011). Charles Colson died in Falls Church, Virginia on April 21, 2012 from complications from a brain hemorrhage.
Scope and Content of Collection
Charles Wendell Colson was responsible for inviting influential private special interest groups into the White House policy-making process and winning their support on specific issues. His office served as the President's political communications liaison with organized labor, veterans, farmers, conservationists, industrial organizations, citizen groups, and almost any organized lobbying group whose objectives were compatible with the Administration's. Colson's staff broadened the White House lines of communication with organized constituencies by arranging Presidential meetings and sending White House news releases of interest to the groups. In addition to his liaison and political duties, Colson's responsibilities included: performing special assignments for the President, such as drafting legal briefs on particular issues, reviewing Presidential appointments, and suggesting names for White House guest lists. His work also included major lobbying efforts on such issues as construction of an antiballistic missile system, the President's Vietnamization program, and the Administration's revenue-sharing proposal. The materials are arranged into six series: Memoranda, Meetings Files, Subject Files, Chronological Files, Projects Files, and Printed Materials

Indexing Terms
Charles Colson
Chuck Colson
Charles Wendell Colson

Additional Finding Aid