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Correspondence Between Madeleine Traynor and Bettie Gibson Regarding the Article, "Nixon vs. the Media: Why Won't He Try to Verify Charge?"

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Dear Bettie Gibson:

2 January 73

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On behalf of three generations of Traynors, who have become your readers, may I express appreciation of the 15 December '73 piece you sent on, together with all good wishes for the New Year.

Enclosed is a bulletin from our front, about which we spoke at Wingspread, still of some currency though heavy violence is in abeyance.

Madeline Traynor

ROCHESTER
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ROCHESTER, MINNESOTA 55901



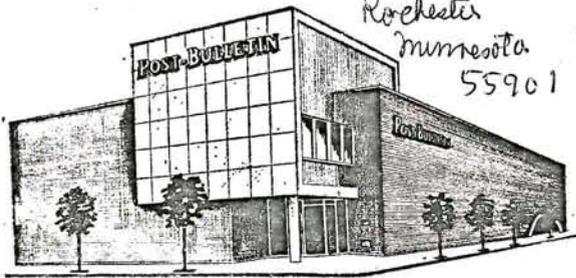
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EDITORIAL PAGE

Saturday, December 15, 1973

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CHARLES WITHERS
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Nixon vs. the Media: Why Won't He Try To Verify Charge?

EDITOR'S NOTE: Bettie Gibson, of the Post-Bulletin editorial page staff, is a member of the 20-member Minnesota Press Council which investigates grievances brought against newspapers in this state. The Minnesota Press Council, the only statewide council in the United States, met this week with the National News Council at Racine, Wis. The National News Council, headquartered in New York City, is currently investigating its first case: President Nixon vs. the news media.)

By **BETTIE GIBSON**

Eleven years ago Richard Nixon supposedly left public life and told reporters they wouldn't have him to "kick around" anymore. Mr. Nixon has since been elected twice to public office — the highest office in the land — and it's no secret he feels he's getting a raw deal from the news media. He openly charged just that at his Oct. 26 press conference: "I have never heard or seen such outrageous, vicious and distorted reporting in 27 years of public life."

That's a serious charge — so serious, in fact, that the newly established National News Council (NNC) feels it should be investigated and publicly aired. The 15-member NNC was established last May to investigate complaints brought by the public against national news suppliers (Associated Press, United Press International, Newsweek, Time, and the Wall Street Journal; the big news syndicates such as the New York Times News Service, Los Angeles Times-Washington Post Service; and the electronic news programming of NBC, CBS and ABC radio and television networks.)

Four days after Mr. Nixon made his charge, the News Council decided to investigate. Council Chairman Roger Traynor, retired chief justice of the California Supreme Court, says the charges made (particularly against the electronic media) are so serious that a public airing is warranted. The council asked Mr. Nixon to elaborate — to spell out the what, the when



Miss Gibson

and the where of his accusation. But the White House so far has not been very cooperative in helping the NNC get to the bottom of the President's criticism.

After two telegrams and a half dozen phone calls to the White House, NNC representatives finally got an appointment with Ronald Ziegler, the President's press secretary, at which they invited the White House to furnish specific examples of the reporting Mr. Nixon deemed outrageous, vicious and distorted. NNC representatives left the 25-minute meeting on Nov. 29 with six rather vague example areas, but no specifics. Example areas included the quoting of Hanoi Radio during resumption of the bombing of Hanoi as saying Nixon had taken leave of his senses, comments made after the firing of Archibald Cox (which apparently includes an interview Walter Cronkite had with Cox that made reference to a Nixon trust fund which the White House had denied existed), references to the ITT settlement, reporting last fall figures on Nixon's personal finances, and implications that Nixon's alert of U.S. armed forces around the world was just a ploy to take the spotlight off Watergate.

On Dec. 8, Gerald Warren, Nixon's deputy press secretary, said that the White House has neither the staff nor the time to provide examples of what the President meant.

White House reaction to the opportunity to state its case against the news media seems strange indeed. One would think that President Nixon would have welcomed with open arms the chance to elaborate on how he thinks he's been wronged by the press, radio and television.

The National News Council could not make any investigation or judgments based on only the sketchy information supplied by Ziegler. It must have specifics. Mr. Nixon must elaborate, for example, what was "outrageous, vicious and distorted" about comments made after the firing of Archibald Cox. What were the comments? Who made them? Were comments made in news segments or in commentaries? Were they statements made by public officials and reported by the news media?

Because of the seriousness of the President's charge, the National News Council decided this week that it will not drop the case even though inadequate information was supplied by the Administration, but will again approach the White House for the information. Normally, the National News Council (as with the Minnesota Press Council) investigates and evaluates only grievances or complaints which are officially filed by the complainant. It normally does not initiate the action as it has done with the case of "President Nixon vs. the news media." But obviously this is a special case.

Of the National News Council's 15 members, nine are public members and six are representatives of the news media. (Minnesota Press Council membership includes 10 public members and 10 press representatives.) In addition to retired Justice Traynor, public representatives on the National Council include the dean of New York University Law School, a former U.S. senator, a former U.S. representative, a civil rights leader and a female attorney who is president of the legal defense and education fund of the National Organization of Women (NOW).

The National News Council and the Minnesota Press Council have no legal or coercive powers. They rely instead on the cooperation of the news media in making its case findings known — whether the findings vindicate the media or are in favor of the complainant.

If the White House fails to provide specifics on the President's accusations, what will be the next step of the council? That hasn't been decided yet. This writer believes that if the President can't supply proof of "outrageous, vicious and distorted" reporting, then he should apologize. The news media have agreed to give full cooperation to the investigation. Hopefully, so will Mr. Nixon. He should put up or shut up.

Dear Judge and Mrs. Traynor:

-Just a note to wish both of you a Happy New Year and a belated Merry Christmas. I am sending you a column I wrote on ~~the~~ the National News Council meeting which I and other members of the Minnesota Press Council attended.