To: JCCE
From: HWB
Subject: The Pumpkin Papers

Background: On August 3, 1948, Chambers first publicly accused Hiss of belonging to a Communist apparatus. The accusation was made before the House Un-American Activities Committee at a public hearing. On August 5, Hiss appeared and, also publicly, denied Chambers' charges.

In his book, "Witness", Chambers describes that moment as the low point in the Committee's activities since it looked like it had been taken in. Chambers states that they met in Executive session right after that public hearing. "That the Committee did not act on its fears is a fact of history that no one can take from it. Its stand was greatly strengthened by one man, Richard Nixon argued quietly but firmly against a switch from the Hiss investigation to any other subject. He pled the necessity of reaching truth in the Hiss Chambers deadlock. By his action, then and later, he became the man of decision of the first phase of the Hiss case...". A subcommittee headed by Nixon, with Hebert of Louisiana and McDowell of Pennsylvania as the other members, was appointed to question Hiss and Chambers separately. The answers were then to be compared in an effort to determine who was lying.

Chambers was questioned in Executive Session in New York on August 7 and Hiss in Washington on August 16. On August 17, Nixon took his Subcommittee back to New York and in Executive Session in a suite at the Hotel Commodore brought Hiss and Chambers together. On August 27, in Washington, at public hearings both Hiss and Chambers were called to the stand and repeated their stories.

At that time, insofar as the Committee record was concerned, it had before it two diametrically opposite statements under oath. The record was subsequently sent to the Department of Justice.

On August 27, Chambers accused Hiss of belonging to the Communist apparatus on the "Meet the Press" program. About three weeks later he was served with process in a libel suit brought by Hiss.

The Libel Suit: The libel suit was brought in the Federal Court in Baltimore and Hiss' lawyers very quickly proposed to take the depositions of Mr. and Mrs. Chambers. This got under way. Chambers' lawyers repeatedly asked him if he had any written material. He did not reply. Finally, about the middle of November, Chambers' lawyer told him that from the way things were going, if he had any materials he had better produce them. Chambers went to New York and secured from the home of a relative an envelope full of papers which he had left with the relative in 1938. The relative had secreted them in a dumbwaiter shaft that had been converted into a linen closet. In the envelope were (a) about 30 papers and (b) some microfilm.
Tho Pumpkin Papers: Chambers came back to Baltimore that same
day, November 14 - a Sunday. The next day he gave the papers to his
attorneys but telling them he had not yet decided whether he would
produce them at the pre-trial examination. He retained the microfilms
and did not mention them to his attorneys. On Wednesday, at the pre-
trial examination, Mrs. Chambers was given a pretty rough time of it.
That seems to have made up Chambers' mind for him. On Thursday,
November 18, he presented the papers at the examination, Hiss' lawyer
immediately flew up to New York and then back again with Hiss' suggestion
that the papers be turned over to the Department of Justice. They were
turned over to Alex Campbell of that Department. The matter then lay
dormant until the week of December 1, 1948.

The Exposure: On Wednesday, December 1 Jerry Klutts, in his
column in the Washington Post reported: "The Hiss-Chambers fight is
slated to make news again very shortly. Since Alger Hiss sued Wittaker
Chambers for libel, attorneys for both men have been taking detailed
depositions from witnesses, including the two principals. Some very
startling information on who's a liar is reported to have been uncovered".

On the same day, the UP wires carried the following
story: "The Justice Department investigation of the Hiss-Chambers affair
is about to die for lack of evidence, it was disclosed today. Unless
something new turned up soon, officials said, there would be little use
going to a grand jury with the information obtained so far. Wittaker
Chambers, a senior editor of Time Magazine charged before the House
Un-American Activities Committee that Alger Hiss...was a pre-war
Communist underground agent..."The committee turned its testimony over
to the Justice Department to see if there were grounds for a perjury
charge against either man. The Department still nominally has the
'question under consideration".

Neither the New York Times nor the Washington
Post used the UP story until Friday, December 3-3rd report
Chambers, in his book, reports that as soon as
Klutts' story appeared on Wednesday, he was queried by Bert Andrews of
the Washington Post. Chambers refused to comment. "Andrews got in
touch with Stripling (Chief Investigator for the Committee)". That
night, Chambers writes, Stripling appeared at Chambers' farm, asked
him about the columnist's report. Chambers replied that he was not
free to discuss it. Stripling then asked: "Is there any evidence that
you still have that you have not yet presented in the libel suit?"I
shook my head. Stripling has been in the business of reading men's
faces for many years. He never took his eyes off mine while he questioned
me. He left shortly after."

Chambers then reports that early the next morning
Stripling - who knew he was coming to Washington - asked him to drop
in at the office. When he did, he was handed a subpoena duces tecum
and two investigators accompanied him back to the farm. At the farm he
handed the investigators - Donald Appell and William Wheeler - the
microfilm rolls, taking them from the pumpkin where he had hidden them
in the morning before he left for Washington. The investigators took
the films back to Washington.

Newspaper Coverage: The next day - Friday, December 3 - Bert
Andrews had a long story in the Washington Post reporting on the lack of any results in trying to run down the Jerry Kluttz story. He gave the following inferences: (1) That Chambers had "aided something new and important to the charges"; (2) That the Department of Justice knew about the new material and regarded it as "too hot" to handle; (3) That the New York Grand Jury was likely to be reactivated; (4) That Department of Justice efforts to break the case would be stepped up; (5) That the House Committee would hold new hearings before the 80th Congress expired; (6) new names might be mentioned. He reported that Alex Campbell of the Justice Department would not talk about the conflict between Kluttz' story and the release by the Department of Justice covered by the UPI dispatch. He reported that when he questioned the attorneys handling the libel suit they admitted that the material was not in the possession of the judge. Andrews also stated that he had sent a wireless message to Nixon "who is vacation bound to Panama aboard the steamship Panama. Nixon was asked, in view of yesterday's developments, if his committee will reopen its investigation. No information had been received late last (Thursday) night."

The story broke in the papers the next day - Saturday December 4. Rankin was the only Committee member in Washington. Mundt, now Senator-elect, was at home in South Dakota. Nixon was aboard a boat.

The New York Times did not play up Nixon's role until Sunday when it stated that he had ordered the subpoena served. The Washington Post played up Nixon's role.

On behalf of Mundt, Stripling read a statement to the press a few hours after Tom Clark announced that the Department of Justice was reopening the Hiss case and would probably go before the Grand Jury in New York with the case the following week.

The way Bert Andrews wrote it up in the Washington Post on Saturday: "Mundt sent a wireless message to ... Nixon...vacation bound to Panama on the liner Panama. Mundt asked Nixon to leave the ship by plane if possible and fly back. Nixon, all reporters in Washington know, has been more responsible than any other member of the Committee for bring Hiss Chamber facts into the open. It was Nixon, in fact, who ordered a subpoena served on Chambers - and who got a pumpkin and its contents...Nixon, presumably acting on the theory that if Chambers had some undisclosed documents he might have others, issued a subpoena calling for anything and everything that Chambers had...the outstanding fact was that Representative Nixon, because of his belief that Chambers might have other untold information, gave Stripling some strong instructions on Wednesday night...Nixon was to leave - and did leave - on Thursday afternoon for Panama. Nixon requested Stripling to get up early in the morning on Thursday and take a blanket subpoena to Chambers on his farm...Stripling did. The microfilm came out of the pumpkin. Stripling came back to Washington. Stripling got Representative Mundt on the telephone..."

Sunday's Washington Post (December 5) announced the reopening of hearings on Tuesday. Sam Stavisky in his page two column entitled "People in the News" devoted it entirely to Nixon in a very favorable piece giving him credit for the new developments. Sunday's New York Times was more restrained. It stated: "...Nixon, informed of the Chambers testimony (in the libel suit) ordered a
subpoena served on Mr. Chambers on Thursday. That night the editor
drove with two committee investigators to his Maryland farm and at
1 A.M. led them to the hollowed out pumpkin...". The News of the
Week in Review of the same day also stated that Nixon had issued the
subpoena after he "got wind" that some documents had been turned
over to the Justice Department.

The Washington Post on that same Sunday carried
an editorial which ended as follows: "...Mr. Nixon undoubtedly deserves
credit for belatedly bringing forth what the Committee on Un-American
Activities should have had months ago. Even less can be said for the
Department of Justice. If the subpoenaed microfilm and the documents
voluntarily offered by Mr. Chambers are as significant as they are
represented to be, our investigators will be put in the position of
having indulged in child's play".

Nixon, with the cooperation of the Coast Guard
and some photographers flew into Washington Sunday night. (The picture
of Nixon being transferred from ship to plane was given prominence
by both papers) In Washington that Sunday night, Nixon found that
he was the only Republican member of the Committee in town. He issued
a number of statements about the importance of the find, who would
be subpoenaed. From then on his activities are given great prominence
by both papers as he goes back and forth between Washington and
New York (with Mundt) holding hearings in both places - night ones
too - in an effort to keep one step ahead of the Department of Justice
which is pulling witnesses in before the Grand Jury. The game seemed
to be who could get a witness before it first.

On December 9, as reported by the Times, Nixon
predicted that the Department of Justice would indict Chambers in
order to prevent the indictment of Hiss.

Nixon's activities after he returned were given
great prominence by the press.