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THE WHITE HOUSE

INTERVIEW WITH THE PRESIDENT

BY

HELEN THOMAS, UPI

BOB SCHIEFFER, CBS

AND

GEORGE HERMAN, CBS

ON

FACE THE NATION



11:50 A.M. EDT

QUESTION: President Ford, you say you are not making the assumption that Ronald Reagan will get the nomination or be elected, but the problem lies ahead of you now for Tuesday in California. Some political experts think you are going to have a really tough time at the convention if you don't win a good hunk of California's votes -- say 45 percent. Can you do it?

THE PRESIDENT: We are very encouraged by the last three days. I talked to some people in California and I have gotten reports from our people in California and we think we are coming from an underdog position with new momentum and we believe we are closing the gap, and we think that there is an opportunity to win California. That, of course, would be the ultimate, but we think we will do quite well in California.

QUESTION: Mr. President, how many delegates do you think you will have when you go to Kansas City and do you still think you will win on the first ballot?

THE PRESIDENT: Miss Thomas, I think we will win on the first ballot. At the present time we have 805 delegates. We expect to win a good share of the delegates on Tuesday. That will put us quite close to the necessary 1130 and if we do well on Tuesday, then I think we only need about 40 percent of the uncommitted delegates, so the opportunities look I think very good for us in Kansas City on the first ballot.

QUESTION: Mr. President, do you feel that you will have the delegates before the convention actually opens or do you feel as Vice President Rockefeller does that you probably will be 20 or 30 votes short, but you will have them by the time the first ballot comes around?

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THE PRESIDENT: We believe we will have them by the time the first ballot comes around. There are always those, you know, Mr. Schieffer, who play a little cozy and have not quite made up their mind, but if we add up the committed and those that we think are honestly leaning our way, I think by the first ballot we will have the 1130.

QUESTION: But you won't necessarily have them by the time the convention opens.

THE PRESIDENT: Well, I am not going to argue about whether we have them by the time the convention opens or not, the most important time is when they actually cast their vote in that first ballot.

QUESTION: Mr. President, let me get back just for a moment to Ronald Reagan. One of the most interest things, I think, that has been found by the CBS-New York Times polls is a statistic that came up the other day that said if the race were Ford versus Carter, 41 percent of those who call themselves Ronald Reagan people would defect and vote for Jimmy Carter. It also says 23 percent of those who call themselves Ford voters would defect to Carter if Reagan is the nominee. In light of that aren't you going to have to put Ronald Reagan on the ticket if you are going to have the backing of your party and you have got to have the solid backing of the Republican Party?

THE PRESIDENT: I have said that I would not exclude any Republican that I have looked at or we have heard about that might qualify as being a Vice Presidential candidate and that would include Ronald Reagan. Now he has himself indicated he would not be interested in being Vice President but as far as I am concerned I would not exclude him.

Now we will have to take a look at the two people that the Democratic Party nominates in their July convention in New York City. We will have to see how the convention turns out in Kansas City, how we can best heal any wounds that the party might have as a result of the many primaries. Of course, the main thing is, is the person who is going to be nominated for Vice President fully qualified to be President in case something should happen to the President? Now all of those things have to be put into this formula and we will look at the kind of data you have indicated, but I think it is premature to make any commitment at this time.

QUESTION: But are you seriously saying that the choice of the Democratic Convention would really influence the man that you want for your Vice President?

THE PRESIDENT: It certainly is a factor in the formula. That has been the tradition in conventions over the years in our Presidential races. You can't ignore it. Democrats have done it, Republicans have done it and I suspect it will be a factor, not the controlling factor, but it will be a factor.

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QUESTION: I know this is probably something you can't tell us in some detail. You usually give a list of the people that you are interested in that has been well published. Do you have one favorite yourself, in your bosom -- as they say in the church -- who you would like as your Vice President?

THE PRESIDENT: I haven't decided on one person, Mr. Herman. I have several that I think fit a very good category of the kind of people, but it is very premature to make any final decision at this point.

QUESTION: Mr. President, you have said several times on several occasions that Reagan's statements on Panama were irresponsible. Yet you say all that would be forgotten, when he gets into the White House he would be responsible. Are you saying that Reagan is only making campaign rhetoric now and does not truly believe in the things he says? You also implied there would be guerrilla warfare if Reagan became President and stopped the Panama Canal negotiations.

THE PRESIDENT: Sometimes in the height of a political campaign statements are made that on cool reflection candidates wish they hadn't said.

QUESTION: Are you referring to yours or his?

THE PRESIDENT: I am referring to several that have been made by my opponent in recent weeks. Certainly if a person becomes President he has to be more judicious, more careful, in what he says and how he says it and when he says it, and I think when you get in that Oval Office, Miss Thomas, it does make you far more responsible than you are when you are out on the political hustings.

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QUESTION: You know in a recent interview you volunteered -- or in answer to a question, I guess -- some information about your plans for alternatives to court ordered school busing. Could you explain them in somewhat more detail than they were explained, as I read them. They seemed a little indefinite to me, or are they still in that stage?

THE PRESIDENT: I think there are three points we have to make before we discuss busing.

Number one, this Administration will uphold all constitutional rights of any individual in this country, including the rights under the Fourteenth Amendment.

Number two, this Administration is totally dedicated to quality education.

Number three, this Administration will carry out the decisions of the Supreme Court.

I took an oath of office to do so, and I will continue to do so.

Now, we have found, or I believe, that court ordered forced busing to achieve racial balance is not the best way to necessarily protect individual rights on the one hand or to achieve quality education on the other. Therefore, starting back in November of 1975, I asked the Attorney General and other members of my Cabinet to see if we couldn't put together something that would be better than the remedy that has been used by some district courts in trying to solve the very difficult problem of protecting constitutional rights and, at the same time, achieving quality education.

Within the last two weeks the Attorney General has decided not to intervene in the Boston case for good reasons that he, as Attorney General, decided, and I support him. On the other hand, the Attorney General is seeking a particular case where we can get a clarification or a modification of some of the previous Supreme Court decisions in this very complex area.

Now, in the interim, the Department of Justice has prepared -- or is in the process of preparing -- legislation which I will submit to the Congress in the very near future which would seek to limit the courts of this country to the direction of the areas where the local school board, by its act, has violated the constitutional rights of individuals -- in this case students -- and not to permit the court to go beyond the instances where rights have been violated.

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Now, in some cases the court has taken an illegal act of a school board -- relatively small part of a total school system -- and taken over the whole school system, and the court, in effect, has become the school board. I think that is wrong. The Attorney General agrees with me.

The legislation that we will propose will seek to limit, to minimize the corrective action or the remedy by the court to the actual instances where there is a violation of a person's constitutional right. That will minimize in many cases to a substantial degree the amount of court ordered forced busing.

QUESTION: Mr. President, the courts have already ruled on that point, if I understand it, in 1973 in the Denver case.

THE PRESIDENT: Are you talking about the Keyes case?

QUESTION: Yes, sir. Have they not, when they said that was not a remedy? You could not just remedy it in a specific area rather than the whole system.

THE PRESIDENT: The Attorney General and his associates informed me that that has not been totally clarified, and that is the purpose of actually seeking a case where the Department of Justice can go into a subsequent case and get a clarification.

That is why we are going to propose legislation, so that there is a legislative direction given to the court to make sure that we protect constitutional rights where there has been a violation and, at the same time, preclude the courts from becoming in effect the school board in a local community.

QUESTION: Let me ask you just a somewhat broader question, and you are the attorney and I am not, so maybe you can explain it to me. If the courts have already ruled that busing is a permissible way to achieve integrated schools and they have already ruled that integrated schools are a constitutional right --

THE PRESIDENT: A permissible remedy to correct an injustice.

QUESTION: -- how can you pass a law to limit that remedy if the courts have already ruled it is constitutional? Don't you need a constitutional amendment?

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THE PRESIDENT: The Constitution permits the legislative body to give guidelines in certain court cases--and according to the Attorney General he believes that this proposed legislation is constitutional--it will simply limit the remedy to the instance where there has been a violation of a constitutional right. According to him, that is constitutional.

QUESTION: Then it is your interpretation that the Keyes case did not invalidate --

THE PRESIDENT: As I understand it, it was a dictum, not a final judgment.

QUESTION: To cut through some of the legal niceties which are a little hard on us, it seems to me -- perhaps I misunderstand it -- the final impact of this is to leave in place all de facto school segregation which has happened without the breaking of a law?

THE PRESIDENT: The courts already decided that.

QUESTION: So, that this is the direction which you wish to encourage law and legislation to continue?

THE PRESIDENT: We would recommend, as the court has said, we correct the violations but we only correct the violations, not make a Federal district court a local school board.

QUESTION: Mr. President, what chance do you think such legislation would have of passing, and what constitutional right is violated by being bused?

THE PRESIDENT: Well, the Congress, I think, would be responsive to some legislation of this kind because I think the public --

QUESTION: This year?

THE PRESIDENT: I would hope so. I can't promise it because I don't control the Congress, but I do believe there is a great public sentiment for a limitation or a minimization of the court in the remedies that they have pursued.

What was the second?

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QUESTION: The second is, what constitutional right is being violated by being bused?

THE PRESIDENT: Busing is simply a remedy to achieve a correction of an alleged act by a school board to violate somebody else's constitutional rights. Busing itself is not a constitutional right, nor is it a lack of a constitutional right. It is only a remedy.

QUESTION: But isn't it the law of the land to desegregate the schools in this land?

THE PRESIDENT: Where there has been a specific violation of a person's constitutional right. It is not beyond that, and that is the real point at issue.

QUESTION: On another subject, Mr. President --

QUESTION: Before you change the subject, before you abandon schools altogether, just to explore one further item, private schools, the private white academies that have been founded in parts of the South, would you leave those as being perfectly legal?

THE PRESIDENT: That case is now before the Supreme Court. I think that the individual ought to have a right to send his daughter or his son to a private school if he is willing to pay whatever the cost might be.

QUESTION: But a segregated private school, if that should be his choice?

THE PRESIDENT: I think in a private school a person ought to have an individual right.

QUESTION: What if those schools get some kind of Federal aid?

THE PRESIDENT: If they get Federal aid, Mr. Schieffer, that is a totally different question and I certainly would not, under those circumstances, go along with segregated schools, under no circumstances.

QUESTION: That would include any kind of tax break, Federal tax break?

THE PRESIDENT: That is right.

QUESTION: Would you approve of a private school turning someone away on the basis of color?

MORE

THE PRESIDENT: Individuals have rights. I would hope they would not, but individuals have a right, where they are willing to make the choice themselves, and there are no taxpayer funds involved. Now, this is a matter before the courts at the present time, and I think there will be a Supreme Court decision probably in this term or the next term, certainly, but individuals have a right where there are no Federal funds available.

I would hope they would not, and our own children have always gone to public schools, which were integrated, and they have gone to private schools where they were integrated. So, my own record is one of our children and my own belief in integration.

But, I think individuals do have some rights, where they are willing to make the choice and pay the price.

QUESTION: Are you working for a Middle East conference this year? You said you were talking actively to the Israelis and other Governments to move off dead center the status quo. Is there a possibility that there could be a Geneva conference this year?

THE PRESIDENT: It is not likely that there would be a Geneva conference this year. I don't rule it out entirely, but it is not likely. We are, however -- I am talking to the heads of Government when I see them, as I did with Prime Minister Rabin of Israel when he was here. We are talking with foreign secretaries. We think momentum has to keep going beyond the Sinai II agreement.

If we stop the momentum, the pot begins to boil again, so we are trying to deal bilaterally, urging other nations to get together to move forward. But the prospect of a Geneva conference in 1976 I think is somewhat remote.

QUESTION: Does the Syrian intervention in Lebanon have your blessing?

THE PRESIDENT: We have objected to any foreign intervention in Lebanon. We don't believe that military intervention is the right way to solve Lebanon's political problems. About eight weeks ago I sent Ambassador Dean Brown as my special emissary to Lebanon, and he was very helpful in trying to bring some of the parties together, and I think we made a significant contribution in seeking a political settlement without any military intervention.

I repeat, the United States Government is opposed to any military intervention in Lebanon. I think it could be destabilizing, even though thus far it has been done with restraint.

MORE

QUESTION: Are you doing anything about it?

THE PRESIDENT: We have let all parties know that we oppose any military intervention.

QUESTION: Mr. President, in almost every campaign speech it seems to me you say something about the economy which goes along the lines that everything that should be going up is going up and everything that should be coming down is coming down.

THE PRESIDENT: That is true, and it is getting better every week.

QUESTION: Then that gives point to my question, which is that the CBS-New York Times polls of voters have repeatedly shown a very strange phenomenon. Only about a third of the people we have queried in various States around the country expect their economic state to be better a year from now. The rest think it is going to be the same and a very large proportion -- in some places, more than half the people -- think they are going to be worse off in a year.

What is going on?

MORE

THE PRESIDENT: If you look at other surveys you find that consumer confidence has been going up and up every month or whenever --

QUESTION: Until recently.

THE PRESIDENT: There was a slight drop in recent -- I think the last week or so but for the last nine months it has been going up very steadily and over the last year it has gone up 100 percent.

Now, I think there was a little apprehension that developed because we had a wholesale price index figure that went up .8 percent for the month of April. But now that we had the good news of Friday where the wholesale price index went up .3 -- then I also saw, as you did, that we had good unemployment news and we added some 300,000 more to our employment figures, so I believe public confidence after that just 30-day setback will again start climbing and if it continues, as all of us think it will, we will have a continuous process of economic growth and stability.

QUESTION: Mr. President, could I just for a tiny minute get back to politics. I must say I am struck by how nice you are being to Ronald Reagan today. At the beginning of the broadcast you talked about how you thought he would grow in office if somehow he wound up there at the White House. You talked about how you have obviously taken note of some of the statistics I cited about how many Reagan voters were going over to Carter. Would it be fair to say that you are not just including him, and you are not excluding him as a Vice Presidential possibility, but you are giving serious consideration to Ronald Reagan as your running mate?

THE PRESIDENT: I am giving serious consideration to him like I am to all of the other Republican potentials. I think we have to have an open mind about all of, say, 10 to 15 individuals, including him.

QUESTION: Mr. President, one of the last times we had you on this broadcast when you were Congressman Jerry Ford we asked you about the Warren reports on the assassination of President Kennedy. A great deal more information has come out about motives in the case of the assassination of President Kennedy, information which was not obviously available to you as a member of the Warren Commission at the time. Do you agree with those who say that, therefore, the Warren Commission report should be reopened, the thing should be restudied?

THE PRESIDENT: I think in the very limited area a reopening might be desirable. The Warren Commission did make a massive effort to try to find a motive, and we had academicians, we had lawyers, we had all kinds of people trying to find out.

QUESTION: Everything but the information --

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THE PRESIDENT: And we never were able to find a motive. And if there is some additional, I think, constructive information available, I think it ought to be reopened in that very limited area.

QUESTION: You say "if," do you not think that there is?

THE PRESIDENT: I have not had an opportunity to examine the detailed information and until I have personally examined it I don't think I ought to pass judgment on it.

QUESTION: Mr. President, you said repeatedly that yours is an open Administration, anybody can come in and talk to you. Has anybody come in and talked to you about getting rid of Secretary Kissinger as a means of improving your chances.

THE PRESIDENT: Absolutely not.

QUESTION: Nobody in the Administration?

THE PRESIDENT: Nobody in this Administration has come to me asking that I fire Secretary Kissinger. I happen to think he has done a first class job towards peace and that is the responsibility of the Secretary, to carry out my foreign policy. It has been successful, so I want him to stay.

QUESTION: Thank you very much, President Ford, for being our guest on Face the Nation today.

END

(AT 12:15 P.M. EDT)

