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THE WHITE HOUSE

REMARKS OF THE PRESIDENT
AND QUESTION AND ANSWER SESSION
AT THE
SOCIETY OF PROFESSIONAL JOURNALISTS,
SIGMA DELTA CHI

DEL WEBB TOWNE HOUSE

6:04 P.M. MST

THE PRESIDENT: President Otwell, Gene Pulliam, Governor Williams, Senator Fannin, distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen:

It is a great privilege and pleasure to participate in another meeting of this wonderful organization of professional journalists. I have had several, and I have enjoyed every one, and I am looking forward to this one.

I understand the hour for this occasion was fixed for our meeting not by my Press Secretary, not by the networks, but rather in order to ensure the attendance of all of the late strays from the Lazy R and G Ranch party which Gene Pulliam put on last night. (Laughter) Gene is not only a great host, but a great publisher, and I am sure I will neither be the first nor the last speaker at this convention to salute him as one of the founders of Sigma Delta Chi, the Society of Professional Journalists.

Between Bob Hartmann and Bill Roberts of my own Presidential staff and half of your Washington professional chapter in the White House press room, I am hardly out of sight of one of your members at any time, and I must say I enjoy their company, and I admire their professionalism -- most of the time, anyway. (Laughter)

In doing my homework for this visit, I was browsing through your magazine, the Quill, and I read as follows: "National SPJ-SDX President Ralph Otwell is asking local chapters to contact their Congressmen to urge them to override President Ford's veto of a bill to strengthen the Freedom of Information Act.

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(OVER)

Otwell criticized Ford's actions, saying -- and I quote -- "For a President who is publicly committed to a more open and honest Administration to oppose significant reforms in Freedom of Information legislation is both startling and disappointing. President Ford's veto suggests his Administration is pursuing a discredited policy of cover-up as usual."

First, I want to assure your fine President, Ralph Otwell, that I have not come here today or tonight to argue, but to enlighten and, in fact, I may be the first President, probably the first President in history, to come all the way to Phoenix just to hold a press conference. And when I get here, I find out that Dan Rather is going to get the last word anyhow. (Laughter)

Before we go to questions, I would like to make two brief observations, if I might, both of which bear on the business of the Congress, which will be returning to Washington next Monday.

First, about my veto of the Freedom of Information Act amendment. I think, incidentally, that the veto is a constitutional power given to the President in order to require Congress to take a hard, second look at legislation which the President, who is obliged to faithfully execute the law, considers to be unwise or unworkable in whole or in part.

I really don't think my veto suggests a discredited policy of cover-up as usual. Uncovering cover-ups has to be done without the help of any law but by tough reporters and tough editors.

However, before you write all your Congressmen to override my veto, I would like to tell you my side of the story. I do support the Freedom of Information Act, and most of the reforms contained in the current amendments.

There are, however, three amendments that bother me both on principle and practicality, and these were the basis of my veto. I have written the leaders of both the House and Senate to express my hope that when Congress returns, instead of trying to override the veto, they will make three small, but very significant, changes in these three sections and send me another bill which I can and will sign.

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My first objection is to that section that would allow any Federal judge to examine privately or in camera the classified records of any Government agency, including our most sensitive national security and diplomatic secrets, and remove the agency's classification if he found the plaintiff's position to be reasonable.

In other words, no credibility was given to the Government's initial decision. I think that is wrong. As a matter of fact, this change in the proposed law would overturn a 1973 Supreme Court ruling which limited judicial review to the determination of whether or not in the initial classification there was in fact a classification according to law.

With all due respect, I do not believe many Federal judges are experts in the complex weighing of defense and intelligence needs for security or secrecy. I also think that the transfer of this judgment from the Executive to the Judicial Branch of Government may be unconstitutional.

My proposed modification, which I think is reasonable, would accept judicial review, but require judges to uphold the original classification if there is a reasonable basis to support it.

My second objection is far less dramatic. In my view, one section sets unrealistic time limits on the Government's response to a request for a specific document. I have proposed that a 30-day deadline in contested cases be increased to a total of 45 days with extra time for complex cases at the option of the court.

The third reason for the veto was an amendment granting public access to investigatory files such as the so-called raw data reports of the Federal Bureau of Investigation. For example, I am told there was actually pending before the Department of Justice a request for the entire files accumulated by the FBI in their investigation of the Communist Party.

If opening such files had been proposed in the so-called McCarthy era, you would all have denounced it as exposing innocent people to vicious rumor and unproven smears, and you would have been right.

On a practical level, it would have required a brand new bureaucracy and millions and millions of man hours of the FBI simply to review those files over a period of several decades to determine what now be safely made public without injuring innocent parties or compromising their sources of information.

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I have proposed a more flexible and realistic set of ground rules that would preserve what I consider to be the essential confidentiality of investigatory files of law enforcement agencies. I hope that professional journalists will take another look at this section of the freedom of information bill and see if you don't agree that this Pandora's Box should remain shut.

There is a second matter I will discuss briefly before this distinguished society, whose members I know have a strong sense of history in the making as well as an insatiable interest in good government, both of which I applaud. That is the vacancy in the office of the Vice President.

I supposed I can properly claim to be the world's champion or world's expert on the subject of filling the Vice Presidency under the Twenty-Fifth Amendment. When I suddenly found myself nominated for this position on October 12, 1973, I did some research on the debate in the House and the Senate on this important constitutional amendment which was proposed by the Congress in 1965 and ratified by the legislatures of 47 States in 1967. Frankly, I was curious as to what I might have said on the subject, particularly Section 2, which deals with vacancies in the office of the Vice President.

The fact is, I found I had not said anything in the debate except to vote "aye", and the main subject of the debate was the matter of dealing with Presidential successions in the event of a President's disability or inability to discharge the duties of his office.

The replacement of a Vice President was incidental to this, but it seems fair to infer that the Framers, like the Founding Fathers, considered that office to be essential to the conduct of the Federal Government, and the orderly succession of Executive power in any emergency.

It is implicit in the adoption of the Twenty-Fifth Amendment as part of the Constitution that a prolonged vacancy in the second office of the land is undesirable as public policy, and that such vacancies should be filled as promptly as careful consideration by the President and the Congress will permit.

In my case, despite one of the most exhaustive investigations ever undertaken of anybody not on the FBI's Ten Most Wanted List, the Congress moved expeditiously and confirmed me within eight weeks of my nomination, although I do have to admit it, it seemed a little longer than that eight weeks to me.

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When I suddenly found myself President on August 9, 1974, and the Nation again without a Vice President, I made it my first or highest priority, aside from the Cyprus crisis, which I walked into, to search out and to select the most capable and qualified person I could find for that high office.

I finished the task in 11 days and sent to the Senate and to the House the name of Nelson Rockefeller of New York. That was almost three months ago, and while I recognize the need of the Congress to take the month off for campaigning -- I did it 13 times myself -- I believe that the time has come for them to fish or cut bait in this matter.

I have been assured by Speaker Albert and by Senator Mansfield, the Majority Leader of the Senate, that they will make every effort to bring the nomination to a final floor vote before the 93rd Congress adjourns sine die probably in late December.

I am delighted to have their cooperation because I believe it is what the Constitution mandates and what the American people want from their Representatives. I am as convinced as ever that Governor Rockefeller is the right man for the job, and I am anxious to have him as a working partner in our Federal Government.

For the future, however, I will propose to the next Congress a re-examination of the Twenty-Fifth Amendment which has been tested twice in as many years to see if the provisions of Section 2 cannot be tightened up, either by constitutional amendment, or by public law.

There should be, in my judgment, a specific deadline for the President to nominate and for the Congress to confirm a Vice President. If this reasonable period passes without affirmative action, the Congress would then be required to promptly begin confirmation hearings on another nominee.

It has been suggested to me -- and I underline suggested -- that if, because of a partisan deadlock between the President and the Congress, the Congress fails to act within the deadline, the next constitutional successor, presently the Speaker of the House of Representatives, should be required to actually assume the Office of the [Vice] President. Although I am not prepared to advocate such a step, I must say there is really no way, despite secret briefings and all that, that anyone can even partially be prepared to take over the duties of the Presidency on a moment's notice without all the participation in the Executive process that a President can extend to his Vice President.

In this dangerous age, as the Twenty-Fifth Amendment attests, we need a Vice President at all times, and I speak as one who ought to know.

I will be glad to answer your questions.

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QUESTION: Michael Pakenham of the Philadelphia Enquirer.

Mr. President, on Tuesday the word "recession" made its debut in the official diagnostic language of your Administration. Could you tell us if you are of a mind now to press forward with any significant economic policies that are new, beyond and perhaps including wage and price controls?

THE PRESIDENT: At the time that we put together the 31-point program that I submitted to the Congress on October 8, 1974, which was a finely-tuned program to meet the challenges of a softening economy -- and there were definite signs at that time -- and on the other hand to tamp down inflation. We believed then, and I believe now, that the plan is sound, that it is constructive, that it will meet the two problems that we face.

And may I add most affirmatively, putting wage and price controls on in a period of recession would be just the absolute wrong approach to the solution of a weakening economy. I never heard of the proposal to use wage and price controls to stimulate an economy. The only time I have heard of wage and price controls being advocated was when we had inflation as our major problem.

I happen to think we have got two problems -- a weakening economy and an inflation that is too high. The proposals that I submitted, 31 in number, try to meet both and at the moment, I see no justification for any major revisions.

QUESTION: Mr. President, Gaylord Shaw, with AP.

You said just a few moments ago that in this dangerous age we need a Vice President at all times. My question is this: Would you withdraw Governor Rockefeller's nomination if it is not confirmed before Congress adjourns next month, or to put it another way, are there any conditions under which you would withdraw the nomination and submit another name.

THE PRESIDENT: There are no conditions that I can imagine or know of under which I would withdraw Governor Rockefeller's name. As I said in my prepared remarks, I think he is the most qualified person to be Vice President.

I intend to do all I can to see that he gets confirmed, and I hope that the Congress will respond constructively and act before adjournment sine die in 1974.

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QUESTION: Good evening, Mr. President. I am Bill Close from KOOL Radio and Television in Phoenix.

Congressman John Rhodes is seated over there, and my question concerns him. A move is underway in the House to challenge John Rhodes of Arizona as the Republican Minority Leader. In your opinion, is John Rhodes doing a satisfactory job, or would you rather see someone else in his place?

THE PRESIDENT: John Rhodes, in my judgment, is an outstanding Member of the House of Representatives. He has done a superb job, as the Republican leader in the House, since he took over when I became Vice President.

I see no reason whatsoever for any change in that position in the House of Representatives on the Republican side.

QUESTION: Hampden Smith, Washington and Lee University in Lexington, Virginia.

Another political question, if I may, sir. The Republican Party lost 45 seats in the House of Representatives, five in the Senate and six Governorships in last Tuesday's election, and further public opinion polls seems to indicate that the percentage of Americans who consider themselves Republican has been declining for quite a while, even before the Watergate reaction set in.

My question, sir, is how could you explain this seeming decline in the Republican Party?

THE PRESIDENT: You know, it was bad enough, but it is not quite as bad as the numbers you used. We didn't lose quite as many Republicans in either the House or the Senate. I concede it was not good from our point of view, but I would also like to add this:

As people have indicated, they are leaving the Republican Party, and you are accurate in that the polls show that. They have not gone to the Democrats, they have gone to the Independent category. The Democrats, as a matter of fact, have either lost a little or maintain only their former numerical position. So, the net result is that more and more people are becoming Independents rather than party affiliates.

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I can argue it both ways, but what it really shows, in my judgment, in this last election, is that the Republican Party was in the White House at the time where we had 10 or 11 percent inflation, where we had some softening of the economy, and where we had the heritage of Watergate.

Now, those are pretty tough problems to overcome in the political arena. Those are transitory. We are going to solve the inflation. We are going to strengthen the economy, and Watergate is ended. This Administration had no connection with it, so we are going to be strong come 1976.

QUESTION: Mr. President, Helen Thomas, United Press International.

Mr. President, do you plan to retire General Brown as Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, and I have a follow-up.

THE PRESIDENT: I have publicly disavowed the comments made by General Brown. I had General Brown to the Oval Office this morning at 7:15 before I took the plane and I indicated to him very directly my strong feeling concerning the statements that he made, and reaffirmed to him directly my disavowal of those comments that were recorded at Duke University Law School.

I think it ought to be said that General Brown has publicly apologized to those that might have been involved in the comments that he made. I have no intention of asking General Brown to resign. General Brown has been an excellent Air Force officer; he has been an excellent Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff. He made a mistake; he has recognized it. He is going to continue as the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff.

QUESTION: Mr. President, do you think that the Defense Secretary was remiss or some of your White House aides, perhaps, in not informing you earlier of General Brown's remarks so that you could have been apprised?

THE PRESIDENT: Well, the truth is that I had about 12 to 15 hours advance notice. I could not have remedied the situation any better than we have tried if I had known a few hours earlier.

I just want to say very candidly I disapprove and disavow of what he said. I not only said that publicly, but to General Brown directly. It was a mistake, but he is a fine officer and he has done a good job, and I don't think he should be fired for that one mistake.

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QUESTION: Peggy Roberson, the Birmingham News, Birmingham, Alabama.

Mr. President, recently we have seen horrifying pictures of starving people in the world, and we have learned that energy and food are unbreakably linked. Are we prepared to use food as a weapon to force down energy prices so farmers can produce low-cost food to feed these people?

THE PRESIDENT: We are not going to use food as a weapon. We must recognize, however, that food is just as important to the world as oil, and that in order to get a better distribution of oil that is held in vast reserves by other nations and food that is produced by us to a greater extent than any other nation in the world, we must get together and cooperate to make sure that that which is available in both cases is spread throughout the world for the benefit of all people.

Dr. Kissinger, the Secretary of State, has put together the group of oil-consuming nations. We expect to work with the oil-producing nations. I believe that there can be an understanding achieved that will be to the mutual benefit of the producers in food and oil, and the consumers in both.

QUESTION: Jules Witcover of the Washington Post.

Mr. President, Secretary of Interior Morton told reporters yesterday he is still interested in the possibility of a new gasoline tax as a weapon to fight the energy crisis and inflation. Your Press Secretary on your behalf has repeatedly said that you are not considering it.

Can you clear up exactly what the Administration's position is on a new gas tax?

THE PRESIDENT: I certainly will, Julius. I don't know how many times I have to say that we are not considering an additional gasoline tax. I said it the first time, I think out in Sioux Falls, South Dakota, and I have repeated it many times thereafter.

I thought that others in the Executive Branch got the word, and I hope this word is conveyed to my good friend, the Secretary of the Interior. We are not considering an increase in the gasoline tax.

QUESTION: Norman Dohn, Ohio University. That is where Bill Hess is a football coach, not Woody Hays.

My question is in regard to foreign policy. Senator-elect John Glenn of Ohio and others have suggested that despite Dr. Kissinger's very fine track record, that perhaps a foreign policy is such a complex and delicate matter that the machinery of foreign policy ought to be spread out over a broader base. Do you have any plans to do this under your Administration?

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THE PRESIDENT: I have no such plans. I can't imagine someone who really is not an expert in the field of foreign policy giving advice to a man who has conducted foreign policy with great skill and great success. If you have got someone who is doing a good job, I don't understand why anyone in seriousness would advocate that he be taken off part of the job and turn it over to someone who might not do as good a job.

I respect the right of the Senator-elect to make the suggestion, but I don't think it makes very much sense.

QUESTION: Tom Jarriell with ABC, Mr. President.

I would like to follow up the answer you gave on the economy a moment ago. You said that wage-price controls would be the wrong approach to combat inflation. Some of your aides are saying inflation is the cause of recession. Should the recession continue and should you see a need to combat inflation in order to halt the recession, would you then reconsider the possibility of wage-price controls, or is this categorically ruled out?

THE PRESIDENT: I have no intention of requesting the Congress to enact mandatory or standby wage and price controls, and I have been told by the Democratic leaders that there is no prospect of the Democratic Congress enacting wage and price controls. There are no circumstances that I foresee today that would justify the heavy hand of wage and price controls in the present economic circumstances.

QUESTION: Have you any tax-raising proposals to replace the 5 percent surtax should that not be acted on by Congress?

Your Press Secretary has said, I believe, you would have an open mind on it. Have you any other proposals in mind?

THE PRESIDENT: No. I would hope that the Congress would take a serious look at this constructive proposal which would affect only 28 percent of the personal income taxpayers, with 72 percent of the income taxpayers not being affected at all. Even a person with a \$20,000 a year taxable income would only have to pay an additional \$42 or 12 cents a day. I think somebody making \$20,000 a year would be willing to make that kind of sacrifice if that would be helpful in whipping inflation and if that would be helpful in helping the people who are less fortunate who need some help during this transition phase from a recession to a healthier economy. It is a good proposal. I hope the Congress does take affirmative action.

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QUESTION: Mr. President, Bernie Wynn of the Arizona Republic.

In light of the GOP disasters at the polls, on Tuesday, would you rather have waited maybe until after November 5 to pardon Mr. Nixon, to have granted amnesty to draft dodgers?

THE PRESIDENT: Not at all. I think the timing in both instances was right. I could see no justification for another two months of delay in the action in pardoning President Nixon. I did it because I think we had very important business to get on with, both domestically and internationally in the United States, and it was obvious to me that with the prospective court action and all the controversy that would be stimulated by it, that it was wise for me to exercise the right of pardon when I did, and waiting two months would have made no difference.

In the case of earned amnesty for draft dodgers and draft evaders, I think the sooner we acted in that case the better, and I am glad to say that from where I had an opportunity to examine it, it has worked well. It has not given a free ride to individuals, and it has given those who wanted to earn their way back a second opportunity, and we have had quite a few who have applied.

I think in both instances I acted right, and in both instances the timing was correct.

QUESTION: Mr. President, Bob Johnson, WHAS, Louisville.

A number of critics say that the people in this country are going to have to adopt a far simpler lifestyle than they have shown their willingness to do voluntarily, something that goes beyond cleaning their plates, eating a great deal less, driving a great deal less.

Do you agree that this will be necessary, and if so, how is it going to be done? What type of leadership are you going to offer?

THE PRESIDENT: I think we may have to tighten our belts a little bit. I think buyers will have to be better Yankee traders, and salesmen will have to be more aggressive salesmen; in other words, we have got to restore some competition on the one hand, and people have to be wiser on the other, saving energy, hopefully, in a voluntary way.

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If not, we may have to impose some limitations or restrictions. But I don't see us having to retrogress. I don't see us having to go backwards, which in my judgment is so contrary to the philosophy of America. We have got a great country; we can make it grow and prosper. We just have to tighten our belts and get rid of the fat, and the excesses, and we will be a lot better off as a country and as individuals.

QUESTION: Mr. President, Norman Kempster of The Washington Star News.

You have spoken of the danger of the Nation being without a Vice President. On Sunday you are planning a trip to Japan where some violence is threatened. What do you expect to achieve on this trip to Japan that could make it worth the risk?

THE PRESIDENT: There are three very important countries that I am visiting, and I should preface that with a comment that a President has two major responsibilities, one in the field of domestic policy and the other in the field of foreign policy.

And where we have three extremely important countries, two where we have good relationships, treaties where we are allies--Japan and South Korea, where we want to strengthen that relationship; and the third, the Soviet Union, where we have been trying to achieve a detente, and broaden it --where we are going to hopefully lay a broader foundation for SALT II.

When you add up the plusses, I think that there is convincing evidence that I, as President, should go to Japan, to expand our good relations with Japan; go to South Korea, a staunch and strong ally and to work out some differences, if any, and to broaden our relations there, and to go to the Soviet Union to hopefully make some progress in detente in the reduction of arms.

I think it is a very worthwhile trip.

QUESTION: Mr. President, if I may follow up, what is the urgency that would not permit waiting until Governor Rockefeller is confirmed?

THE PRESIDENT: Well, if I knew the Congress was going to act, there might be some justification for it, but I can't sit and twiddle my thumbs and not do something, which I think is important for the benefit of foreign policy of the United States.

We have to do things on an affirmative basis, which I think are necessary, and to sit and wait until Congress acts on this -- and I think they ought to act a lot more quickly than they have -- I think would be wrong.

Some things that we have to achieve here are vitally important, and I think the trip ought to go on, and as far as I am concerned, it is.

QUESTION: Jennifer Schanno, College of Catherine in St. Paul, Minnesota.

Mr. President, there seems to be some argument as to what direction the Republican Party should go to avoid another landslide defeat. Some are saying it should go in a moderate direction; some in a more conservative.

In which direction do you feel it should go?

THE PRESIDENT: I think the Republican Party ought to continue to be a middle-of-the-road party, a party that has a strong, internationally-oriented foreign policy, a party that has a middle-of-the-road to conservative domestic policy -- certainly conservative in the field of fiscal affairs.

I think that is a good policy and I don't see why we should abandon a good policy just because we took a licking on November 5.

If you go back in the history, in 1946 when Mr. Truman was President, the Democrats took a worse beating, and the 80th Congress came in with more Republicans in the House and Senate by a substantial number. Mr. Truman and the Democrats didn't abandon their policies. They went out and fought for them. They went out and made an effort to sell them. And Mr. Truman and the Democrats were successful in November of 1948.

I think that is what we ought to do as Republicans in 1976.

QUESTION: Mr. President, Lester Coggins of AP.

Why do the Democrats seem to have better luck in electing Democratic Congresses than Republicans do? Why can't the Republicans have won?

THE PRESIDENT: Well, I am glad you pointed out that the Democrats have controlled the Congress -- the House and the Senate -- 38 out of the last 42 years. So all of the evils that you have had, you can blame on them, not on us.

QUESTION: Mr. President, Forrest Boyd, Mutual Broadcasting.

I would like to take that just one step further. As Senator Dole suggested that you shed your Boy Scout image and get tough with Congress, and if necessary, go over their heads to the people, what will be your tactics?

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THE PRESIDENT: Well, let me preface the answer to the one part of your question that I was a Boy Scout. I am proud of that experience. I have no apologies for it.

I think they have done a great deal of good for lots of young people and I am not going to back off from the five or six years that I enjoyed being a Boy Scout and doing the things that I think are good for America.

Now, to answer your other question. I wish there would be a lot more Boy Scouts.

Now I am going to try to work with the Congress. It is a Democratic Congress, better than two-to-one in the House, and I think about 62 percent in the Senate. I think we ought to try and work together. They do have some sort of a mandate. They have an obligation, they have a responsibility, but they also have an accountability.

I want to work with them. I hope we can. But if we find that they are going to try and override, dominate with policies that I think are wrong, I will have to disagree with them.

But I am going to start out with the assumption that they are as interested as I am in what is good policy, both at home and abroad, and hopefully that will continue. So let's wait and see.

QUESTION: My name is Tim Rife. I am from the University of Nebraska at Omaha.

Mr. President, does your willingness here to show up here to a Sigma Delta Chi convention reflect a new attitude in your Administration towards the press?

THE PRESIDENT: I don't think coming here is a reflection of any new attitude toward the press on my part. I think most of the press from Washington would agree that I have always been open and candid with the members of the press. The fact that I became Vice President or President I don't think has changed me. I acted in the past as I am acting now. We don't agree on some things, but I have always felt that I should treat them as I would want to be treated, and vice versa, and I think that is a good relationship.

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QUESTION: Mr. President, I am Russ Ward of NBC News.

There has been some recent talk in the Middle East about a possible reimposition of the Arab oil embargo. Do you have contingency plans for dealing with such a move, and might those plans include a possible change in our relationships over there, either with Israel or the PLO?

THE PRESIDENT: Our plans are aimed at trying to get the Israelis to negotiate a settlement or additional settlements with the Egyptians and the other Arab nations. Those are the plans we have which are affirmative and plans that I think if we continue constructively, can bring about some success.

Until we have failed and, I don't think we will, in trying to get the parties to work together, I don't think it is appropriate to discuss what we will do if we don't achieve success.

QUESTION: Are you suggesting, Mr. President, that Israel should deal directly with the PLO? It has been the Israeli objection all along against recognizing the PLO as a bonafide political organization.

THE PRESIDENT: I didn't say that. I did say that the Israelis should negotiate with the Egyptians and other Arab parties. The Israelis have said they will never negotiate with the PLO. We are not a party to any negotiations. I think we have to let the decision as to who will negotiate to be the responsibility of the parties involved.

QUESTION: Gene McLain, KTAR Television and Radio, Phoenix.

Mr. President, you are approaching your first 100 days in office. How do you size up your plusses and minuses, your major disappointments and successes?

THE PRESIDENT: I think the best things we have done -- number one, nominating Nelson Rockefeller; number two, the conducting of the economic summit meetings, I think 12 all over the country, with two in Washington and the formulation of a good, sound economic plan that meets the problems of a weakening economy and inflation.

I believe that we have laid additional groundwork for success in the Middle East. We have redirected some of our policies in the subcontinent areas. We have, in addition, enhanced the possibility of Strategic Arms Limitation agreement number two, which I think will be enhanced by the meeting I am going to have in Vladivostok in about 12 days, hopefully to be followed by a meeting in Washington some time in the summer of 1975.

Some of the disappointments -- we had a few bad breaks. I think the Congress was dead wrong when they handicapped myself and Secretary Kissinger in the efforts that we could make in the settlement of the Cyprus question between Greece and Turkey.

I think that was a terrible disappointment, and some of the things we warned about might happen and it won't be helpful to Greece. That was a bad break.

Another was the failure on the part of the Congress to act more affirmatively on behalf of the nomination of Nelson Rockefeller. It should have been done before the campaign recessed. I think the Congress also might have moved ahead more rapidly in some of the economic suggestions.

We have had some plusses and we have had some minuses, but I believe so far we are a little ahead of the game.

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QUESTION: Mr. President, Bob Watkins from the University of Houston.

In response to an earlier question, you said that disenchanted Republicans were becoming Independents and not Democrats. Well, many Democrats are becoming Independents, too. Do you see this desertion as a preface to a large-scale third party movement in 1976?

THE PRESIDENT: I don't see that as a third party movement. I think it does suggest that political parties, the traditional ones, are weakening. I think that is sad, however. I think the two major political parties ought to be strengthened, but nevertheless the trend is just the opposite.

I hope that in the months ahead that we, as Republicans, can regain some of those by the performance both at home and abroad in our policy actions. I don't hope that my Democratic friends improve their situation, but if they do, I still think it would be healthy to have more responsible people in political parties than as Independents.

QUESTION: Good Evening, Mr. President. Walt Rogers of the Associated Press.

I am sure you have read newspaper accounts suggesting that perhaps the United States faces another Great Depression similar to 1930. Your Administration has already admitted that we have slipped into a recession and that unemployment will go even higher than the current rate of 6 percent. How much more slippage do you expect in the economy? First, when will the slump bottom out, and specifically, will unemployment go over 7 percent?

THE PRESIDENT: I can't give you categorical answers to those three questions. I think we will have some increase in unemployment, but I do believe that if the Congress cooperates with me, we can reverse that trend in 1975. I believe that we have certain safeguards today that we did not have in the 1930s. I remember the Depression, Wally; you're too young.

In those days, we didn't have any unemployment compensation insurance which is a very helpful protection. We didn't have in the 1930s the kind of additional payments that the auto workers, for example, get from the auto unions to bolster the amounts they get from unemployment compensation.

We have a lot of excellent safeguards that protect our economy today from falling into the depression. I don't think we are going to have one because we have these safeguards.

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What we have to do is to prevent reactions that will really be harmful to the economy, restimulating or reigniting inflation which is actually starting to recede at the present time. We have to follow a very narrow path, and the Congress can help, and if they do, we can avoid the pitfalls of more inflation and economic conditions worse than we have today.

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QUESTION: By way of a follow-up, Mr. President, if I could, I would like to try to pin you down on the unemployment figure. Have any of your economists suggested that unemployment might go to 7 percent or do you entertain that possibility?

THE PRESIDENT: I have not heard any of the economists that advise me saying that unemployment would go to 7 percent or over. They do indicate that it may increase above the 6 percent, which was last reported.

QUESTION: John Kolbe, from the Phoenix Gazette.

Mr. President, early this week you withdrew your nomination of Mr. Gibson as the new energy administrator in the midst of some discussions and some disclosures about his severance agreement from an oil company. The White House reported that apparently you personally knew nothing of that agreement before you made the nomination.

Have you taken or do you intend to institute any new staff-type procedures in the White House that will prevent this kind of embarrassing situation in the future, and if so, what do you intend to do?

THE PRESIDENT: Yes, we have. The procedure we intend to follow in the future is to say that a person is being considered and undertake the FBI or investigation review prior to making any specific announcement that we are sending a name up to the Senate for confirmation, which gives the individual some protection and gives us some protection.

In the case of Andy Gibson, he was an excellent head or director, administrator of the Maritime Administration. He took a Maritime industry and an agency in the Federal Government in 1969 that was dead and really made it into an effective Maritime Administration.

He was a first-class administrator. I regret that the circumstances developed because I asked him to serve in a position which requires a first-class administrator. We have not had that kind of firm direction over in the Federal Energy Administration. Andy Gibson would have been a good one.

I regret very much that he didn't make it, and I regret that our procedure at that time was inadequate. We made a mistake. It won't happen again.

MORE

QUESTION: Do some of the disclosures that have come out about Governor Rockefeller fit in that same category as Mr. Gibson?

THE PRESIDENT: None whatsoever. In the case of Governor Rockefeller, prior to the nomination I submitted three names to the FBI and asked them to give me an updating of their files and to let me know whether there was anything whatsoever in the files of the FBI concerning Mr. Rockefeller and two others. I think that was a sound procedure.

The gifts that Governor Rockefeller has given, in my judgment, are the kinds of gifts that a person, if you have that much money ought to have the right to give, and there is no political chicanery involved at all. He was generous to people that he thought ought to be helped, and there is no connection, no relationship between the Rockefeller situation and the Gibson matter.

THE PRESS: Thank you, Mr. President. Thank you very much.

END (AT 6:55 P.M. MST)