

PRESS CONFERENCE
OF
JOHN J. RHODES
REPUBLICAN REPRESENTATIVE FROM ARIZONA
AND
ROBERT P. GRIFFIN
REPUBLICAN SENATOR FROM MICHIGAN

February 28, 1975

NORTH LAWN
THE WHITE HOUSE

AT 5:40 P.M. EDT

Q Congressman, are we finally at the point where we are ready to talk compromise, two comprehensive packages to be put together?

MR. RHODES: Of course, the Democratic package which was submitted to the President today has not been thoroughly studied, and over the weekend, of course, it will be. If it contains -- and I am not sure whether it does or not -- the material which was in the news media this morning as the Democratic package, then I would say it is more of a blueprint than it is a program.

It is not comprehensive. It would be impossible to cost it out to tell what it will do to the economy, and so forth. I would imagine that there would be a lot of questions to be answered about it.

I do think it is good for the country that the Democratic leadership has come up with this blueprint because it does indicate a tendency on their part to work with the White House, which had not previously been apparent. I welcome it.

Q Do you expect the President now to rescind the second dollar of the import tax?

MR. RHODES: I do not have any idea. There are various alternatives, options of the President which were discussed today with the President, but there has been no decision made, and there won't be, until there has been a closer study of the Democratic program.

Q Would you describe the President as pleased that the Democrats have gone this far?

MR. RHODES: Yes, I would. I think we are all pleased because certainly we all feel that the people of this country are entitled to something better than a stalemate between the Republican White House and the Democratic Congress, and this is the first instance that I know of in which the Democrats have indicated that they, too, feel there should not be a stalemate.

Q Congressman, would you tell us what you mean, the difference between a blueprint and a comprehensive program? Specifically, what are you talking about?

MR. RHODES: Of course, a comprehensive program to me is one which could be taken by other people and costed out, and a fairly decent idea as to how it might work could be arrived at, and certainly what I have seen so far indicates to me that this document, which I characterize as a blueprint, falls short of that test.

Q Congressman, there has been comment all along that the Administration was not going to compromise; it was not going to sit down to work out something final until the other side or somebody else had come up with what was called a comprehensive proposal.

Are you suggesting now that we still have not reached the time to sit down and talk turkey?

MR. RHODES: No, I am not. I never said that. In fact, I welcome just any little, old crumb from the table which looks like it might be some sort of a tendency to compromise.

Q The White House has said, though, it would not compromise until there was something to compromise with. Do you think the President feels now there is something to compromise with?

MR. RHODES: I certainly feel that this is a serious blueprint and that it would be wrong if the President were to ignore it. And he is not ignoring it.

Q Mr. Rhodes, Mr. Zarb knew enough about the blueprint this morning to say it would not work, and now the President, this afternoon, is talking very encouragingly about the compromise. Did anything happen today to change the White House position?

MR. RHODES: I think what Mr. Zarb read was what I read in the paper this morning, and I think what he said about what I read in the paper this morning was too polite. I think I would have said it was full of fluff. But if the program is set forth more fully, is more comprehensive and has more hard information than that, then, of course, I will welcome it.

Q One of the key elements in this Democratic plan is to curb imported oil by half-a-million barrels, 500,000 barrels, in this calendar year.

MR. RHODES: That is right.

Q Yet the President's goal is one million barrels --

MRS. RHODES: That is right.

Q -- this year. He has said he will not compromise on his goals. Does that million-barrel goal still stand?

MR. RHODES: Yes, as far as the President's program is concerned, it does. I do not believe that in the long-run or the final analysis that the difference between the Democrats and the President on that point should prevent them from some sort of an agreement. I would imagine there would be -- I think everybody understands that the best thing we could possibly do for the country and the balance of payments, inflation and everything else, is to import less oil at the rates which we now have to pay, and I do not think the Democrats disagree with that.

Q Mr. Rhodes, up until now, the White House has said consistently there would be no compromise on the oil tariff, that the full tariff would be imposed. Were you surprised by the President's apparent willingness now to delay the tariff?

MR. RHODES: I don't know there is any apparent willingness on the part of the President to do anything other than to study this proposal.

Q He said, sir, after his meeting with the leadership, that he was ready to consider -- and all of us got the impression he was all but ready to rescind -- the second dollar or delay it for 60 days. Both he and the Democratic leaders spoke of that. Did he not mention this to the Republicans?

MR. RHODES: This, of course, was one of the alternatives that was mentioned, but it was my very strong impression that no decision had as yet been made.

Q What were the other alternatives?

MR. RHODES: Of course, one alternative would be to do nothing and to stand pat and to see what happens as far as the veto of the deferral bill is concerned, and there were other alternatives mentioned which I think would probably not be discussed with any profitability at this time.

Q Can the House sustain the veto?

MR. RHODES: I would say that the chances of the House sustaining the veto are less than 50-50, but there is a fighting chance that it could happen, yes.

Q Senator, could we get you up here?

Q What are the chances in the Senate?

SENATOR GRIFFIN: I think the chances are a little better than they are in the House. We are close, but I think we will make the goal of sustaining the President's veto if it becomes necessary, and I think it will.

Q Will it help if the President decides to delay the tariff? Would that help sustain the veto?

SENATOR GRIFFIN: Yes.

Q What is your mood after hearing the President? Are we near a compromise?

SENATOR GRIFFIN: Well, I think we recognize that the President's efforts here have borne some fruit. The Democrats have come forward, not with a comprehensive plan or program but with a policy statement. That is not what we really wanted, but it is a step in the right direction. It needs more specificity. It needs to be translated into legislation, but I think it is the beginning of a process of compromise, negotiation, and hopefully getting some legislation on the books.

Q Is it your impression the President will postpone the second and third dollars?

SENATOR GRIFFIN: I don't think we are going to have the answer to that until the first of the week. The President, as has been reported, is going to give it serious consideration over the weekend.

Q Do you have a recommendation for him?

SENATOR GRIFFIN: Not at this point.

Q Thank you.

END (AT 5:49 P.M. EDT)