

EMBARGOED FOR RELEASE
UNTIL 5:30 P.M. EDT

OCTOBER 7, 1975

OFFICE OF THE WHITE HOUSE PRESS SECRETARY
(Knoxville, Tennessee)

THE WHITE HOUSE

INTERVIEW WITH THE PRESIDENT
BY

JUANITA GLENN, KNOXVILLE JOURNAL
LOIS THOMAS, KNOXVILLE NEWS-SENTINEL
RANDY PREWITT, WTVK-TV
CARL WILLIAMS, WBIR-TV
SAM BROWN, WATE-TV
AND
HOP EDWARDS, PBS

HYATT REGENCY HOTEL

1:35 P.M. EDT

QUESTION: Mr. President, first we would like to welcome you to Knoxville and to express our appreciation for your being here today.

THE PRESIDENT: I have been here a number of times and it is a pleasure to be here and thank you for the opportunity of answering some of your questions.

QUESTION: As taxpayers, we would also like to thank you for your proposal to cut our taxes. We understand this is tied in with a reduction in Federal spending.

THE PRESIDENT: It is a two-part package but it is absolutely necessary that both the spending limitation or the decrease in the growth of Federal spending be imposed at the same time that we go for the tax reduction. If we don't do something about spending, we cannot, in good conscience, do something about reducing taxes.

QUESTION: What would you do if Congress should approve the tax cut and not cut spending?

THE PRESIDENT: I tried to say last night as directly as possible that the Congress had to act on the limitation on the growth of Federal spending or I would be forced -- and I said I would not hesitate -- to veto the tax bill.

QUESTION: Mr. President, we here in the Tennessee Valley have rather a unique situation as to our power, the electricity that we have due to the Tennessee Valley Authority, but in the past 13 months we have had something like 13 or 14 rate increases and we are expecting another one very shortly.

MORE

Now, in the past three or four days a special House Investigation Subcommittee has even proposed that the utility companies be forbidden from having the consumer pay for the high cost of coal to produce electricity. Will you entertain the idea of abolishing the fuel adjustment clause?

THE PRESIDENT: I don't think that I should make a commitment on this program that on any legislation or regulation that would come to my desk without having an opportunity to look at the pros and cons. I think it is unwise for a President to make an off-the-cuff decision. I have a good staff. If and when any change in the law regulations comes to me, I will give both sides a very fair opportunity to make the individual case, but for me to just off-the-cuff give you an answer, I don't think that is the way a President ought to operate, because if you do it in one case, then you are setting a precedent for another instance where such an answer might be very, very ill-advised.

QUESTION: Then, may I ask this: You support strong belief in atomic power generation, do you not?

THE PRESIDENT: I strongly believe in nuclear power. I believe that in the next ten years the United States has to build something like 250 more nuclear power plants. I think it is the cleanest, I think it is as safe as any other, I believe that it helps to make the United States invulnerable against the foreign oil cartel, so I am strongly in favor of nuclear power.

QUESTION: Mr. President, the Governor of this State has been in contact with Arab nations about investing monies in the State of Tennessee and purchasing products made here in this State. What are your views as far as moves such as that by other States or perhaps cities in financial trouble that would go to the third world nations for aid and assistance?

THE PRESIDENT: We do have to monitor the massive investments, particularly if those investments from Middle Eastern countries involve, for example, defense producers, those companies that have a substantial business with the Department of Defense. On the other hand, I see offhand no reason why one or more of these Middle Eastern countries should not buy the bonds of Knoxville or the State of Tennessee or the City of Detroit. They have to make the judgment as to whether it is a good investment and I see no ill coming from the investors from a foreign country having bonds issued by a local community in Tennessee or Michigan or elsewhere.

MORE

QUESTION: Do you think foreign countries would buy New York bonds right now?

THE PRESIDENT: I will let them make that decision.
(Laughter)

QUESTION: Mr. President, TVA is a household word here in East Tennessee, of course. Recently you nominated James Hooper, of Mississippi, to fill an existing vacancy on the TVA Board of Directors. Senator Bill Brock says he will fight this. Will you stick by that nomination?

THE PRESIDENT: The name has been submitted. The Senate Committee is in the process of completing its investigation on Mr. Hooper. The Senate Committee will make its recommendations to the Senate very shortly. I think it is ill-advised for me at this time to make any comment pending a decision by the Senate Committee and, of course, the nomination in the normal course of events would go to the Senate floor but until the Senate Committee completes its investigation, makes its report, I think the matter ought to stay exactly where it is.

QUESTION: If Hooper does not achieve recommendation, do you have a back-up name?

THE PRESIDENT: We have a number of names and a number of fine people but I think it is premature pending the situation for me to even comment on that.

MORE

QUESTION: Mr. President, the Chairman of the House Intelligence Committee investigating the CIA, Otis Pike, has recently suggested citing Administration officials for contempt of Congress because you believe certain national security materials should not be released to that committee.

Is the Administration working on a compromise agreement to provide some material to the committee, and what kind of agreement would be acceptable to you?

THE PRESIDENT: Last week we gave to that committee 710 pages of classified material, and we deleted 50 words, as I recollect. I think that is substantial compliance with the committee.

We have said that we would not give to the committee the names of intelligence agents. We would not give information concerning certain mechanical equipment that is vitally important for the gathering of intelligence information.

I think that is a fair proposition, and I am glad to report that in this area, the committee has approved that arrangement by a vote of 10 to 3, with Chairman Pike being among the 10, so I think we have worked it out so they will get all of the information that they require to carry out their legislative responsibility.

QUESTION: So, the committee is satisfied?

THE PRESIDENT: It is on that point, yes, sir.

QUESTION: Thank you.

QUESTION: Mr. President, in recent weeks you have found yourself the victim of two assassination attempts. What were your feelings? What thoughts went through your mind whenever you found yourself staring at Squeaky Fromme's gun and later whenever you found that you had been shot at?

On a related matter, do you think the media bears any responsibility for these events?

THE PRESIDENT: Well, the incident in Sacramento happened so quickly and the Secret Service acted so rapidly in handling the matter, that frankly, I didn't have an opportunity to think about it. The Secret Service did a superb job, and it was over in a fraction of a second, so there was no opportunity for me to do anything about it.

MORE

In the case of the incident in San Francisco, I was on one side of the street and was waving to the crowd on the other, waiting to get into the limousine, and I heard this noise that frankly sounded like a firecracker, and those who are more knowledgeable than I said duck and sort of hit me on the back and got me down on the sidewalk and into the car, but again, that happened so rapidly that you honestly don't have time to think about it.

The question about whether the media is responsible, I don't think the media is responsible. I look at it this way: A President has certain responsibilities to see people around the country. You should not act in a dare devil fashion, and I don't intend to. You have to act prudently, and I do intend to act with prudence.

I believe that if we do it right, I can continue to travel without any serious hinderances, and it is my intention to do so.

QUESTION: Do you find yourself fearful now whenever you are in crowds?

THE PRESIDENT: No, I don't. I know for one thing that the Secret Service has taken every possible precaution and, as I said a moment ago, they do a very fine, fine -- really, a superb -- job, so whatever you do in life, there are certain risks.

I was talking to Senator Brock and Senator Baker on the way out, along with John Duncan and Jim Quillen, and I said I probably had more potential risk when I was driving my automobile than I do at the present time, so it is just one of those things that you expect certain risk to be involved.

It is too bad, but that is the way it is.

QUESTION: Mr. President, we understand that you may soon be making appointments to the National Labor Relations Board. One is the General Counsel, and one member of the Board, and that you also may be faced with a vacancy on the Supreme Court.

We are wondering if you have given any thought to these appointments, and if you would consider achieving a better ideological balance by appointing conservatives to these positions?

MORE

THE PRESIDENT: I would naturally be sympathetic to any appointment in positions of responsibility to those who had a political philosophy or philosophical view that coincided with my own.

I think that is a very natural reaction on the part of a President, but I have not related that thought in relationship to any of the positions that you have indicated.

In the first place, there is no vacancy on the Supreme Court. Number two, there is a vacancy on the -- well, as the General Counsel for the NLRB -- and we are in the process now of looking at a person for that vacancy -- but I come back to what I said initially. A person is prone to nominate somebody that has a somewhat similar political philosophy or view toward Government and the the issues that are related thereto.

QUESTION: Mr. President, predictions are that the House will certainly override your veto of the \$2-3/4 billion child nutrition program. Now, in the event that they allow this veto to stand, where is this going to put the needy child and the child who is surely going to have to pay more for his school lunch?

THE PRESIDENT: First, let me explain why I vetoed the bill. That legislation passed by Congress, which I vetoed, called the child nutrition bill, provides for Federal funds to go to pay for school lunches for the children of families that can well afford to pay for the meal.

I see no reason whatsoever for a child of a family sufficiently well off getting a Federally financed meal, and it involved for the current fiscal year, as I recollect, an extra \$200-plus million and about \$600 or \$700 million extra in the next fiscal year.

I am for the Federal Government helping and providing school lunches, nutritional lunches for the children of those who are at the poverty level or below. I believe that is a firm responsibility of the Federal Government, but we should not -- and I don't believe the American people want us to -- finance free meals for people who can afford to pay for their children's lunches.

Now, if the House and Senate, one of them, should sustain the veto, there is adequate statutory law to take care of the needy child, and earlier this year, I recommended a program that would concentrate more for the needy child and would eliminate the child of the family that is well off.

MORE

I wish the Congress had done that. It makes a lot more sense, particularly with the kind of financial problems with a \$60-plus billion deficit in the Federal Government.

QUESTION: I was wondering where you draw the line, sir. I mean, how do you segregate one from the other, which is the needy and which is not the needy?

THE PRESIDENT: There is a poverty family line drawn today by a responsible agency of the Federal Government. I think it is around \$5,500 income. That is a poverty line used by all agencies of the Federal Government and so any family that has a child in school at that figure or below would get a free lunch, and any family with children above that poverty line would have to pay for the lunch.

Now, the bill that I vetoed provided that there could be free lunches for a family that had children that had an income of about \$9,500. I honestly don't think that the taxpayer as a whole should subsidize with free lunches the children of a family that have an income of \$9,500 a year.

QUESTION: Mr. President, Dr. Kissinger has been certainly successful in gaining peace in the Middle East. Let's swing to Latin America now. I know we have a problem with fishing rights with Equador. They claim a 200-mile limit, but coming a little North the Panama Canal seems to be a troubled area.

Are you prepared to make a statement on our negotiations going on as far as the ownership of that Canal? How do you intend to resolve that problem there?

THE PRESIDENT: Let me give a little background, if I might. For three Administrations -- President Johnson, President Nixon and myself -- negotiations have been going on with the Government of Panama concerning that problem. If you will refresh your memory, you will recall there were serious riots in Panama, I think in 1965.

Around 30 people were killed, including some Americans. Now, these negotiations are going on. I have taken the position that we will not accept -- and I would not recommend to the Senate -- any proposal that interfered with the national security of the Canal, that would interfere with the operations of the Canal.

I would not, under any circumstances, do anything in the negotiations or submit a proposal to the Senate that undercut our national security. Within those confines, these negotiations are going on, and I think it would be not wise for me to go into any of the details because we have an outstanding negotiator down there who has instructions within those broad guidelines.

MORE

QUESTION: Mr. President, recently you vetoed two stripmining bills, I think they were H.R. 25 and S. 7, and Deputy Administrator John Quarles of the EPA said stripmining bills are too weak. Exactly what kind of stripmining bill would you sign?

THE PRESIDENT: Well, I vetoed the one in 1974 and again vetoed the one in 1975 but in each case I recommended through the Secretary of the Interior the kind of a stripmining bill that I would sign, one that would have a good balance between the protection of the environment on the one hand, and the capability of utilizing our vast coal reserves on the other.

Unfortunately, the Congress in neither case approved the amendments that I recommended which, in my judgment, would have produced a balanced bill. We are still willing to sit down with the Senate and the House and try to work out a compromise. One of the problems with both of the bills I vetoed was that it would have severely restricted the mining of coal, and coal is our best immediate alternative to foreign oil. We are now mining roughly 600 million tons a year and we want to go to, I think, it is the 1,200,000,000 tons in ten years.

The legislation that I vetoed would have, as a matter of fact, cut back our production, not permitted us to accelerate. In addition, it would have probably meant the loss of, oh, as I recall, about 125,000 jobs, and jobs are important.

So if we could get together, and I am willing to negotiate with the Congress, I think we could pass a well-balanced stripmining bill.

QUESTION: Do you see a bill of that nature coming across your desk?

THE PRESIDENT: It is sort of dormant at the present time, but that does not mean that some negotiations aren't going on but nothing has emerged at this point.

QUESTION: President Ford, what is your personal reaction to the decision by NBC and CBS last night not to carry your address regarding the tax cut recommendations, and do you think it is a valid objection that the networks have that they would have to provide equal time to other candidates if they provided time to you?

THE PRESIDENT: That is a very controversial issue. They have been very cooperative in almost every case, if not every case in the past, and, of course, the closer we get to a convention or an election, their problem gets more and more difficult. I was very happy, of course, that ABC, along with Public Broadcasting, did do it, but I am not going to hold it against NBC and CBS. I think I would have to say I thought they made a mistake, but I am not going to be prejudiced against them as a result.

QUESTION: Do you think the equal time provision is a valid objection?

THE PRESIDENT: I think the Fairness Doctrine is really the way to handle it. In other words, it gives some discretion, it gives some judgment factor to television and radio stations and I would think that some modification of Section 315 is in order.

QUESTION: Thank you, sir.

QUESTION: This is a question for Betty Ford's husband. (Laughter)

THE PRESIDENT: She is doing better than I am in the polls so you should ask her.

QUESTION: In light of the upcoming Presidential campaign, has she been advised or will she be advised to curtail her candid comments, and will she or would she comply?

THE PRESIDENT: I don't think I would be very popular at home if I tried to lay down the law. She has very good judgment but I do have to say this. In our family everybody tries to be totally honest and frank. We think that is the best policy. I don't think you get away with trying to deceive people. So as long as people are honest, I think you are in a better position to deal with the problems. So I think if Betty gets on the television or radio or is interviewed, she will probably speak very frankly, as she always does.

QUESTION: How do you feel about your son's statement that he experimented with marijuana and your promise to say today whether or not you have tried it?

THE PRESIDENT: Well, let me say I never have, but I, again, would say that everybody in our family tries to be frank and honest with one another and we brought our children up to be completely honest in their relations with us and were with them and all of us with other people.

I think there is an old saying, "Honesty is the best policy," because you inevitably get caught if you don't tell the truth and your conscience is clear if you do tell the truth. I can disagree with what some of our children do, but as long as they are honest with us and at least give us an opportunity to express our views, I don't think I should go any further.

QUESTION: Mr. President, shortly before Senator Everett Dirksen passed away, I had an opportunity to sit down and discuss gun controls with him and he told me in his own wry way that he felt like if we just enforced the laws that were on the books today there would be no need for any further legislation regarding this. Now, certainly a man who should enjoy an opinion on that better than anybody is a man who has been shot at. How do you feel about gun controls?

THE PRESIDENT: I have some very strong feelings about it.

QUESTION: I'll bet you do.

THE PRESIDENT: I do not think that the registration of guns nor the registration of gun owners is the way to handle the problem. In my judgment, we have some good laws on the books that, if enforced -- which means prosecution, conviction with a jail sentence -- we would have a big impact on the people who illegally use guns.

Now, I have also recommended to the Congress some legislation that would provide mandatory prison sentences for people who use guns in the carrying out of violent crime. I wish the Congress would pass that legislation. I wish State Legislatures would do the same in those cases where they don't have such legislation. We have to prosecute, convict and put in jail those people who illegally use guns, and if we do, I think we can have a substantial impact on the bad use of firearms.

QUESTION: Thank you, sir.

MORE

QUESTION: Mr. President, before you came in the room one of the gentlemen here made a statement that your ties are looking really great lately, and I will say that the one that you have on today is keeping the tradition up.

What is that, a buffalo on there?

THE PRESIDENT: That is a buffalo.

QUESTION: Buffalo.

Have you been in contact with former President Nixon recently?

THE PRESIDENT: When I was in California two weeks ago over the weekend I called him, yes, sir.

QUESTION: How is he?

THE PRESIDENT: He sounded very fine, good firm voice. He was up on some of the pertinent political and international matters. He sounded in fine shape.

QUESTION: Do you expect to be meeting with him or seeing him anytime in the near future?

THE PRESIDENT: We didn't discuss that, but we talked for roughly ten minutes on the telephone.

QUESTION: I see. Thank you.

QUESTION: President Ford, it has been reported that one of Abraham Lincoln's Cabinet members asked him why he continually joked about grave situations, to which he replied something to the effect, "If I didn't joke, surely the pressures of the office would crush me."

Do you come in contact with these pressures, and how do you cope with them?

THE PRESIDENT: To some extent, I take pretty much the attitude that President Lincoln did, as you expressed them. I don't believe that you should be a worrier or a fretter. I think you have to take the problems as they come. You have to give your best effort mentally and physically. You have to make a decision, and hopefully that decision is right, and you have to go on to the next one.

MORE

But, if you worry and worry and worry, I think that eventually affects your other judgment, so in my case, in perhaps somewhat the same way, I handle it as President Lincoln did.

QUESTION: Thank you.

QUESTION: Mr. President, there have been several predictions of a serious natural gas shortage in this country, as you know, and especially in the area of the South and East Tennessee this winter. What is the Administration doing to relieve the situation, and do you think it can be headed off?

THE PRESIDENT: I have recommended to the Congress some emergency gasoline legislation, which would permit individual consumers in a State like Tennessee to go down to Louisiana, to Oklahoma or to Texas, buy the gas that is available and transport it through the pipelines at a rate that would get them the natural gas.

I hope the Congress passes that legislation. It is vitally important, and I can assure you we are doing everything possible to remedy the problem.

QUESTION: Thank you, sir.

QUESTION: I think our time is running out, Mr. President. Again, let me say how much we appreciate your meeting with us.

THE PRESIDENT: Thank you very much. I have enjoyed it. It has been a real pleasure, and we are delighted to be here in Knoxville.

QUESTION: Well, we hope you enjoy your visit, brief as it is.

THE PRESIDENT: Thank you.

QUESTION: Thank you, sir.

END (AT 2:07 P.M. EDT)

QUESTION: Mr. President, before you came in the room one of the gentlemen here made a statement that your ties are looking really great lately, and I will say that the one that you have on today is keeping the tradition up.

What is that, a buffalo on there?

THE PRESIDENT: That is a buffalo.

QUESTION: Buffalo.

Have you been in contact with former President Nixon recently?

THE PRESIDENT: When I was in California two weeks ago over the weekend I called him, yes, sir.

QUESTION: How is he?

THE PRESIDENT: He sounded very fine, good firm voice. He was up on some of the pertinent political and international matters. He sounded in fine shape.

QUESTION: Do you expect to be meeting with him or seeing him anytime in the near future?

THE PRESIDENT: We didn't discuss that, but we talked for roughly ten minutes on the telephone.

QUESTION: I see. Thank you.

QUESTION: President Ford, it has been reported that one of Abraham Lincoln's Cabinet members asked him why he continually joked about grave situations, to which he replied something to the effect, "If I didn't joke, surely the pressures of the office would crush me."

Do you come in contact with these pressures, and how do you cope with them?

THE PRESIDENT: To some extent, I take pretty much the attitude that President Lincoln did, as you expressed them. I don't believe that you should be a worrier or a fretter. I think you have to take the problems as they come. You have to give your best effort mentally and physically. You have to make a decision, and hopefully that decision is right, and you have to go on to the next one.

MORE