

February 7, 1976

POOL REPORT # 1

Air Force One
Washington D. C. to Manchester, New Hampshire

Coatless President boarded AF 1 at Andrews. Nessen said on helicopter he remarked to President, "I guess this is the start of the campaign." President replied, "Yep, only nine more months to go."

Mrs. Ford and Susan along. Staff included: Dick Cheney, Paul O'Neill of the budget staff, Nessen, William Baroody and his wife (Baroody's a New Hampshire native), Morton's aide, Roy Hughes, Stuart Spencer, the No. 2 man to Callaway (Spencer's title is political director of the PFC), Bob Orban, Sheila Weidenfeld, David Kennerly, and Peter Kaye, press secretary for the PFC.

Before leaving, White House, President read over his speech, and briefing materials on New Hampshire. Nessen: "He thinks all the early primaries are going to be tough and close. He thinks he'll do well." "Is Florida thought the toughest early primary? "All the early ones are going to be tough."

On the 35 minute ride from the airport after landing, former Gov. Walter Peterson and PFC state chairman U.S. Rep. James Cleveland will ride with the President.

The budget briefing session will come before 250 mayors, selectmen, state legislators, county commissioners and city counselors. President will speak "off-the-cuff," then take questions for one hour. He'll use mess charts and revenue sharing charts, etc.

Peter Kaye, spokesman for the PFC, said: Prediction on New Hampshire! "It's very, very tight right now. We've got the numbers. It depends on the turnout." "The bigger the turnout, the better chance we have."

Said the support for both sides "is very soft. There is a lot of undecided votes and a lot of movement." On Reagan, "Some of the negatives are beginning to show." Cited the \$90 billion, ERA stand and Social Security.

Ford Campaign: "We haven't had much of a positive campaign until this week." Said Zarb, Richardson, and U.S. Rep. Pete McCloskey, who got 20% of the primary vote against Nixon in '72, will all campaign shortly for Ford.

Asked about polls showing Reagan up as much as 2-1, cited in Star this morning, "That's nonsense..." On Ford organization: "We now have 10 telephone centers, and we are distributing letters and leaflets at shopping centers." Of Reagan organization: "They've had a much more visible campaign to this point than we have." "New Hampshire is a difficult state to organize. It's a helluva state to walk in, because if you go 40 miles outside the city there's nothing but trees and bears."

"We have always planned to concentrate on a telephone campaign, however." "We had hoped to put a precinct force out into the field." Will Ford return again just before primary? "That's still a possibility toward the end." No plans to enter Massachusetts to campaign. Kaye: "The numbers are there to win. There are more Republicans in New Hampshire that feel comfortable with the President than with Reagan, but it's a matter of intensity, turnout, stimulating them and also some luck (weather)."

(More)

Kaye on Reagan: "We've cast considerable doubt on his competence to campaign, and by implication, his ability to govern. I think the essentially negative campaign we've been running has been pretty effective."

"He (Reagan) has been a big help." On \$90 billion effect in New Hampshire, Kaye said, "One-third think it's great, one-third thinks it's bad, the final third are interested, but don't know." "On balance, it has hurt him."

"He's now reviewed as something of a political opportunist, a vacillator, and it's a controversial, if not outright screwy scheme. He's developed something of a credibility problem." Kaye said Reagan is on the defensive. New Hampshire and Florida primaries will be equally tough, he said.

Poolers: Rodgers (AP Radio)
Fisher (Time)
Nyhan (Boston Globe)

N. B. No smoking in gym tonight during dinner.

(End)