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THE WHITE HOUSE

REMARKS OF THE PRESIDENT
AND
QUESTION AND ANSWER SESSION
AT THE
EVERETT MCKINLEY DIRKSEN FORUM

BRADLEY UNIVERSITY

8:20 P.M. CST

THE PRESIDENT: Thank you very, very much Dr. Abegg, Congressman Bob Michel, Congressman Tom Railsback, Congressman Ed Madigan, my outstanding Secretary of Agriculture, Earl Butz, Mayor Carver, friends of the Everett McKinley Dirksen chair, students, faculty and guests of Bradley University:

At the outset, let me say I don't think we would have scheduled this tonight if I had known that Chet Walker was being honored last night. I probably would have been here last night if I could have because I am a great fan of his, and I am a great fan of all that Bradley University stands for in the field of basketball, as well as academic standing, and I congratulate you, and I am darn glad and lucky to be the recipient of the Everett McKinley Dirksen honorary chair here tonight. I thank you very, very much.

Bob Michel was much too generous and far too kind, but it is nice to hear in 1976 -- and I thank Bob for not only his kind words but his long friendship, and I could reciprocate in kind for the outstanding job that he does for all of you in the Congress of the United States.

Obviously, it is a great pleasure and privilege and a very high honor for me to be here tonight, not only in Bradley but in the City of Peoria, and I thank Mayor Carver for his warm and very kind reception at the airport.

I have been here, yes, back in 1949, but I have been here subsequent to that, and I am impressed with your people, your administration, and the objectives and the kind of morale that you have here in Peoria. You set a high standard for other communities around the country.

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The trustees of this university have been very kind and honored me in a very personal way with an honorary appointment to the Everett McKinley Dirksen chair of Government and public affairs, and I am deeply honored because Everett Dirksen was one of the finest public servants I have ever known, and history will record him as one of the most gifted and beloved men ever to serve in the Congress of the United States.

Ev and I became especially close during the years when he served as the Republican leader in the United States Senate, and I was his counterpart in the House of Representatives. Ev Dirksen was more than a statesman, more than a master of legislative process, more than a never-to-be-forgotten speaker.

I knew him as a good friend, a wise counsellor and an inspiring teacher. He taught us one of his most unforgettable lessons on the memorable day in 1963 when the Senate was debating ratification of the nuclear test ban treaty.

Speaking in support of that treaty, Senator Dirksen said, and I quote, "Under the circumstances, with bigger and more destructive weapons being built all the time, with armament, burdens upon every country in the world, unless we take a step in the whole domain of faith, what will be left except gloom and defeatism against the day when some careless person will pull the trigger?"

Everett Dirksen knew that somehow the peace of the world must be made more secure, that if men had made the world more dangerous, men could also make it safe and had an obligation to make that effort. Twice in this century the whole world has gone to war. Twice the United States has joined the global struggle, believing with Woodrow Wilson that "the right is more precious than peace" and agreeing with Franklin Delano Roosevelt that "we are willing to fight to maintain freedom."

Twice more we have honored our commitments to individual nations where peace was broken by acts of naked aggression and by armies bent on destruction, terror and conquest. America has seen too much of war in the 20th century, too much of suffering and dying on blood-stained fields of battle.

We cherished the peace that America enjoys, the peace that finds no Americans in combat anywhere in the world tonight.

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Yet, we know that the freedoms we have defended so often are being challenged today. We know that our strength, our power, our constant vigilance and our resolve are the foundation of mankind's hope for peace and stability in the world.

If we should ever relinquish that role, if our contribution to peace should be diminished by our own weakness, the consequences could be severe and tragic for the whole world.

For this reason, the United States must pursue a policy of peace through strength. That is the policy which my Administration will always pursue.

In the last 19 months, I have taken affirmative action to insure that America's alliances are strong, our commitments are worthwhile and our defenses are without equal in the world.

In my Presidency, I have proposed the two largest peacetime defense budgets in American history as the best assurance of deterring aggression and maintaining our own national security. There are some very sincere, very thoughtful, and very patriotic Americans who believe these defense proposals take too much of our financial resources.

Take them away from domestic programs supported by the Federal Government and I respect that view. But, we must remember that the foundation for all of these domestic programs, the basic premise upon which they all depend is that the United States will continue as a free, independent and secure nation. That must be our highest priority, and in this Administration it is.

Beyond securing our own independence, America's defensive strength by the very fact of its existence enables us to deter aggression in many parts of the world, and that strength makes it possible for us to negotiate for peaceful progress from a position that commands respect and invites cooperation.

Because both sides of the Middle East conflict respect our strength, our word and our commitment to a just and lasting peace we have won the role of a peace-maker in that very strategic and very volatile part of the world.

Our aim is to make peace secure throughout the world. We are conducting our foreign policy with our eyes open, our guard up and our powder dry. We know that peace and national security cannot be pursued on a one-way street, but we also know that returning to a collision course in a thermal nuclear age can leave the human race in ashes.

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I will not lead the American people down the road to needless danger and senseless destruction. I will lead them on the path of peace through strength, and we will live in peace and freedom in the United States of America.

It is our duty and our great opportunity to make the most of the peace and freedom we enjoy in America today. Let us show ourselves worthy of the price we have paid for them in blood, in sacrifice and in treasure.

Let us take more seriously and more personally our precious right of free political expression in this election year. Let us set ambitious goals for the future of our country and work hard and work together to achieve those goals.

Let us strive to secure the blessings of liberty for ourselves and our posterity and stand tall and strong and free among the nations of the world.

Let us make certain that the cause of freedom has no better friend, no stronger ally than the United States of America, and let us resolve, as the greatest son of Illinois did a century ago, that "the Government of the people, by the people and for the people shall not perish from the earth."

I thank you, and now I will be delighted to answer any questions.

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QUESTION: Mr. President, I am from Godfrey, Illinois, and a student from Bradley University.

Many economists today feel that the country's economic problems are caused, to a large degree, by cost inflationary pressures rather than the more traditional demand pull pressures. In this context, what are your plans, if any, to break up the monopolistic tendencies of big business and big labor and their price fixing abilities which tend to interfere with the efficient operation of the market.

THE PRESIDENT: About a year ago I appointed an outstanding person to be our Attorney General who was an expert in antitrust actions. Ed Levi of the University of Chicago served as an Assistant Attorney General in the Antitrust Division some 15 or 20 years ago. He is acknowledged as an expert in antitrust matters.

At his request I have added to the number of antitrust lawyers in the Attorney General's Office. I can assure you that under his leadership there will be active, affirmative action taken to operate under the laws of the United States in antitrust actions.

In addition, about a year ago I submitted to the Congress legislation that would add to the penalties in dollars, in criminal action, those who violate our antitrust laws. It seems to me that through this kind of action we can make certain, in the business world at least, that there will be a proper governmental role in making an environment where free enterprise can operate without a monopolistic development.

In the field of labor, I have been condemned and complimented for the fact that I vetoed the common situs picketing bill, which had some ramifications involved in this overall area. The strength of our free enterprise system depends upon competition. We can't have big business, big labor, or big Government, I might add, dominating our economy.

QUESTION: Thank you, Mr. President.

QUESTION: Mr. President, I am a student at Bradley University from Spring Valley, New York. In an announcement made two days ago the Air Force informed Bradley University that our Air Force Reserve Officers Training Corps training program will be closed down effective in the spring of 1977. For the past 27 years, through thick and thin, Bradley has supplied the Air Force with highly qualified personnel. The loss of this program will cause Bradley approximately a quarter of a million dollars annually.

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In your opinion, Mr. President, is it possible for the Air Force to justify this action as a suitable reward for Bradley University's continuing support for over a quarter of a century?

THE PRESIDENT: Based on what you have told me, I am disgusted with the action of the United States Air Force. Quite frankly, it is incomprehensible and we will do our darndest to rectify the error and I will let Dr. Abegg know. I just don't understand it. It sounds ridiculous.

QUESTION: Thank you very much, Mr. President.

QUESTION: Good evening, Mr. President. I am from Ridgewood, New Jersey, and also a student here at Bradley University. Recently, Mayor Young of Detroit made statements expressing not only his city's fears but also those of Philadelphia, San Francisco and several other major cities concerning their somewhat suspect present financial stability and that of the future and also the ability to continue to provide for the necessary public services.

Has your Administration formulated a program to help prevent fiscal crises in other cities besides New York prior to that crisis, or if not, will the tactics or methods used in New York's fiscal crisis also be used in other cities?

THE PRESIDENT: Of course, my Administration has strongly supported the general revenue sharing program which gives to our States and to cities and to other local units of Government about \$6 billion a year which, in effect, is free for those cities to utilize as they see fit for whatever programs or policies that they determine at the local level.

That is a good program. I fully support it and, in addition, we have many other categorical grant programs that go to State or local units of Government. It seems to me, having been somewhat closely associated with the conflicts involved in the City of New York, that communities around the country have to learn that they have to manage their fiscal affairs in a responsible way.

We found that New York City, not for one year, but for a period of time, had not handled its finances very responsibly and the net result was they found that their expenditures, their receipts, were in bad shape, that their cash flow problem was disastrous. I don't think we can permit other cities to expect that the Federal Government is going to bail them all out, because we aren't. If we can't establish responsibility at the local level and at the State level and at the Federal levels, we could go down the same disastrous path that some other countries, friends of ours, have gone down for the last 20 years, and as far as I am concerned, we are not going to permit it, locally, statewide or nationally.

QUESTION: Thank you, Mr. President.

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QUESTION: Mr. President, I am a senior at Bradley University. A recent national wire service reported you have gained a lead over your opponent, Governor Reagan, in the upcoming Florida primary. One of the voter comments listed by the wire service favorably mentioned your performance in office to date, but expressed disfavor with your handling of the pardon granted to former President Richard M. Nixon.

I would like to know whether you are prepared to state unequivocally that there was no deal made between Secretary of State Kissinger, Chief of State General Haig and yourself, or any member of your staff in regard to resignation and subsequent pardon of former President Nixon?

If no such deal was agreed upon, would you please be willing to discuss your response for the granting of the pardon to Mr. Nixon?

THE PRESIDENT: In the first place, there was no deal made in any way whatsoever. Categorically, no. Let me take you back, if I might, to the situation in July and August and September of 1974. This country had gone through a nightmare, a traumatic experience, unprecedented in our country, and I became President under the most extraordinary circumstance, not because I sought the office but because I had the opportunity to serve, and I found shortly after becoming President that if we were to go through a long series of events that would have been, I think, extremely disturbing to the situation in our country, the better procedure would be to make a decisive decision and get the matter off our back so that we could handle our problems domestically with the economy and our problems internationally.

It was a decision made by me alone. Nobody else had any responsibility, and I will take the full responsibility for the consequences, good or bad. But, we had to get on with the job of looking at our problems and solving them, both at home and abroad, and that had to be pushed aside so that all of us -- 215 million Americans -- could concentrate on the future and forget the past, as bad as it was.

QUESTION: Good evening, Mr. President. I am from North Belmont, New York, and a student at Bradley.

Mr. President, you have come under fire lately by former Governor Reagan, former Governor Carter and others, concerning the State Department's handling of detente. What is your justification for the measures, policies and positions taken by your Administration in regard to the Soviet Union and China, in particular U.S.-Soviet relations, past and future?

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THE PRESIDENT: Let me say very specifically that we are going to forget the use of the word detente. I said that back in August of 1975, when I spoke to the American Legion in Minneapolis, Minnesota.

The word is inconsequential. What happens in the negotiations between the United States and the Soviet Union, what happens in the negotiations between the People's Republic of China and the United States -- those are the things that are of consequence.

Now, this Administration believes that we have an obligation not to go back to the cold war where confrontation in effect took place literally every day of the year. We have an obligation to try and meet every problem individually, specifically, every issue as it comes up in an effort to negotiate rather than to confront, whether it is with the Soviet Union or the People's Republic of China.

We can do this effectively if we have the strength militarily and otherwise to have a two-way street. Now, the United States, despite what some critics have said, has not under any circumstances gotten the short end of the deal. We are good Yankee traders, and we have done darn well by the United States.

Now, let's take the grain sales to the Soviet Union. I know some candidates for the Presidency have said that we ought to not make any sales, that we ought to buy all the grain from the farmers and store them in Government-owned warehouses, put that heavy lid over the price structure of our agriculture at a cost, as it was some ten years ago, of \$1 billion a day, about \$400 million a year.

That is what it costs to store grain when we were not selling it overseas. I just don't think we should make our farm export problem the pawn of the international politics. By strong, effective negotiations we came out with a good agricultural deal with the Soviet Union.

If we get a SALT II agreement that will keep a lid on strategic arms in the next seven to ten years, it will be to the benefit of the United States.

Let me ask this very simple question: Is it better to have a mutual limit of 2,400 launchers and 1,320 MIRV missiles -- isn't that better than having 4,000 or 5,000 launchers or 2,000 or 4,000 MIRV missiles?

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Isn't that better for all of us? It really would be better if we could go below 2,400 and 1,320 as long as we had rough equivalents between the two super-powers.

If we had an open thermal nuclear arms race, that is not in the best interest of the United States on the world as a whole. We have an obligation to have rough equivalency that will deter aggression, either by us or by them, and permit us to do some things that are needed and necessary for the world as a whole, as well as for the United States.

Any of these people that challenge us in these kinds of day-to-day negotiations, issue by issue, problem by problem, have not been in the ball game. They have lots of rhetoric, but I don't think they understand the problems.

QUESTION: Thank you very much, Mr. President.

QUESTION: Mr. President, I am a student at Bradley.

Mr. President, would you please state the criteria used in the selection of Mr. Stevens as a Supreme Court Justice, and would you use the same criteria in the selection of future Supreme Court Justices?

THE PRESIDENT: I am very proud of the selection of Supreme Court Justice Stevens. We went through a very constructive process of soliciting names from a wide variety of individuals or organizations that wanted to maintain a very high quality on our Supreme Court.

We had a number of highly qualified individuals. The Department of Justice solicited views from the American Bar Association. They interviewed, as I recall, some ten individuals whose names had been submitted to me. They came up with three or four that seemed to fit the requirements of the day and after looking at the recommendations, the backgrounds and all of the other qualifications, I came to the conclusion that Justice Stevens would be an outstanding member of the United States Supreme Court.

I was delighted to see that a Democratic Congress, dominating the Senate by about or better than two to one, almost unanimously approved him. So, I think we went through a good process. It was proven that he had the qualifications to be an outstanding jurist, and that is what we want, and to the extent that I can do it in the future, that is exactly the process I will follow in the days ahead.

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QUESTION: Good evening, Mr. President. I am from WWCT here in the great City of Peoria. I would like to ask you what significance Mr. Nixon's recent trip to China had and has it in any way undermined your recent journey there of several months ago?

THE PRESIDENT: Under no circumstances has that trip by Mr. Nixon as a private citizen, invited as a private citizen by the People's Republic, undermined my trip to China, my negotiations with Chairman Mao and the other Chinese officials.

Under no circumstances did it undercut, undermine or interfere with the relations of our Government with that Government.

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QUESTION: Good evening, Mr. President. I am an economics major at the University. Do you believe that with the present state of the economy, that tighter investment spending with the reduction of taxes will boost the economy to pre-inflationary levels?

THE PRESIDENT: I am convinced that it is far better to give tax reductions to stimulate the economy, to increase employment and to decrease unemployment, than to put programs through the Congress where you increase Federal Government spending and where you provide temporary employment for individuals, whether it is at the State or local level. That the policy of this Administration and that is one of the problems I have with the Congress. They want to go the other way. We are going to fight them. We are going to win because we are right.

QUESTION: Mr. President, I am a journalist major at the University. My question is, Mr. President, what effect do you feel the Watergate incident will have on the upcoming Presidential election? That is, do you feel many Americans will vote Democrat because of Watergate?

THE PRESIDENT: I have no authoritative way of making an accurate determination on that. I can only say that I, as a candidate, had absolutely nothing whatsoever to do with Watergate so it has no relationship to my background, my qualifications. I would hope that the performance of the last 19 months would indicate that I have an Administration that is open. It is frank, it does not promise more than it can produce, and it won't lie to the American people under any circumstances.

These are the fundamentals by which my Administration has tried to operate and everybody that works for me understands what those rules and regulations are. So we are different. We have no connection with Watergate and so I would hope that the American people would look at me and those that work with me in that light rather than remembering a sad and tragic past in American history.

QUESTION: Mr. President, I am a resident of Peoria and a part-time student at Bradley. I wonder if you would clarify your position on the subject of civil rights for gay people in America.

THE PRESIDENT: Civil rights for what?

QUESTION: For gay people with respect to hiring, employment and housing, and secondly, if you were elected President, how would you hope to eliminate some of the discrimination that gay people in America live under?

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THE PRESIDENT: I recognize that this is a very new and serious problem in our society. I have always tried to be an understanding person as far as people are concerned who are different than myself. That does not mean that I agree with or would concur in what is done by them or their position in society. I think this is a problem we have to face up to and I can't give you a pat answer tonight. I just would be dishonest to say that there is a pat answer under these very difficult circumstances.

QUESTION: Mr. President, I am pastor of a church here in Peoria. From time to time we get reports, printed sometimes, to the effect that Mr. Kissinger and the State Department have already made promises and commitments regarding the Panama Canal to a Government which is something less than friendly to us, and, furthermore, it has been suggested that the constitutional clause which forbids any United States property to be sold without approval of the Congress, that that will be circumvented by retaining title to it but nevertheless technically not selling it, but in reality giving all the controls and direction and jurisdiction to the Panama Government which only the owner of the property should have.

I would like you, Mr. President, to comment on that if you would.

THE PRESIDENT: First, let me say that whatever is done, if it reaches that point, will be fully submitted to the United States Congress, both the House as well as the Senate. If property is sold -- and I am not saying it is -- or is transferred, it would have to be approved by both the House and the Senate and, of course, if it is a treaty, it would have to be approved by the Senate alone, so you can rest assured that whatever is done, if anything is done, will be submitted in its entirety and completely open and above board.

Now the situation is that since 1964 when they had a series of riots in the Panama area, the Canal Zone and the Government of Panama, some 30 people were killed in these riots, including a significant number of Americans. Those circumstances precipitated negotiations that have been carried on by three Presidents. Those negotiations are going on today between the Government of Panama and the United States.

I can only assure you -- because the negotiations have not been completed -- that the United States, as far as I am concerned, will never give up its national defense interests, nor give up its interests in the operation of the Panama Canal. And whatever is negotiated -- and nothing has been concluded -- will be submitted in its entirety to the Congress of the United States.

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QUESTION: Good evening, Mr. President. I am from Peoria. As you know, Central Illinois has had a severe natural gas shortage. What do you propose to do about this natural gas shortage at a national level?

THE PRESIDENT: Let me thank you for asking one of the most fundamental questions asked here tonight. The United States is presently hamstrung by some outmoded legislation that precludes us from stimulating the production of more domestic natural gas production.

The Congress has been struggling for a long time. The Senate passed a good bill about two months ago. The House of Representatives, by a razor thin, narrow margin, passed a bad bill, terrible -- absolutely terrible -- which is worse, in effect, than what we have as a matter of law right now.

Unfortunately, we are at a loggerhead or a stalemate. We have had a declining production within the United States of natural gas since 1973 and as long as we have the present law or the House of Representatives bill our law, it will go down and down and down and down and we will buy more and more and more foreign Arab oil, and that is not good for America.

What I am saying is get the Members of the House of Representatives -- I think all the ones here voted right (Laughter) -- get them to help us to go along with the Senate and stimulate domestic production.

QUESTION: Mr. President, this will be the last question.

THE PRESIDENT: Can't we have one more. There is a nice looking young lady over there.

QUESTION: Mr. President, I am from Peoria and I am a postal employee. I understand that you were against increasing the postal subsidy and now they have been denied the chance to close the rural Post Offices. What do you see as the future for the Postal Service, a service that is vital to all Americans?

THE PRESIDENT: I think we are right down to the bare bone facts. We either have to achieve greater economies in the operation of the Postal Service and have a smaller deficit or we have to charge the people who use the Postal Service for the service that is rendered, or if we don't achieve more economies in the operation or the people who use the Postal Service are not going to pay more, then the taxpayers, as a whole, have to pay the deficit.

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It is just one of three options. Now, I happen to believe we can do a better job running the Post Office. There is no reason in the world why the Post Office should have \$1 billion 300 million deficit in a 12-month period.

So we come right down to how we can eliminate the deficit and there are three options. And I think the Congress has to work with me, but the people in the Post Office Department have to work with us in order to solve the problem.

QUESTION: Mr. President, before we let the last question go with the lovely lady, I am Director of the Dirksen Endowment Fund and on behalf of the Dirksen name and particularly to the Center, and I want to say tonight that you are not only playing well, you are going to continue to play well.

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QUESTION: Thank you, Mr. President. I am from the City of Peoria.

The Peoria Journal staff has reported that you have asked Congress for a block grant for education at the elementary and secondary level. These block grants would replace 24 aids-in-grants. This sounds great, but would you assure us that we would have less restrictions?

Title I and some of the titles are extremely restrictive to us in the local area and in handling these funds.

THE PRESIDENT: You are exactly right. I have recommended to the Congress that we take 24 primary, secondary, or elementary and secondary education categorical grant programs, consolidate them in one block grant program, and that the money should go to the States and to the local units of Government without any matching requirement so that at the local and State level independent decisions could be made as to which areas there should be local emphasis.

The local emphasis in Peoria might be different than the legitimate needs and local emphasis in Miami, or the local emphasis or needs in Grand Rapids might happen to be different from what they are in San Francisco. So, the block grant program gives this flexibility, and we have promised every State and every local unit of Government that they will get no less money than they have gotten this current fiscal year, and they have much more decision-making responsibility at the local and the State level.

The more we get education decisions made at the local level without court interference, the better off we are in the United States.

Could I say one final word. That is great music, but I have a couple of more lines. (Laughter)

Obviously, I have enjoyed being at this outstanding university tonight and talking with all of you from Bradley, as well as from Peoria and surrounding areas. But, before I leave, you know a long time ago I played football at the University of Michigan back when the ball was round, and I just have a great interest in athletics. I think it is great. I am proud of it. I am proud of the fact that Bradley has done so well in basketball, and I am a great enthusiast of Chet Walker, but before I leave, let me pay my respects to another great product in Peoria, the basketball team at Richwoods High School.

Let me conclude my comments tonight by saying that I would like nothing better than to follow their example and go undefeated in Illinois in 1976.