

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

MARCH 6, 1976

OFFICE OF THE WHITE HOUSE PRESS SECRETARY
(Champaign, Illinois)

THE WHITE HOUSE

REMARKS OF THE PRESIDENT
AND
QUESTION AND ANSWER SESSION

WILLARD AIRPORT

11:20 A.M. CST

THE PRESIDENT: Good morning. How are all of you?

We had a great two days in Illinois and we are looking forward to coming back next week. I feel in Illinois, as we have felt elsewhere, that the momentum is really rolling. We had some excellent meetings, not only with farm group leaders, but we had a tremendous meeting last night at Bradley University.

You just get that feeling, not only that the crowds are good and warm and friendly, but the main thing is the real intensity of the feeling that we are on the right course at home as well as abroad.

QUESTION: Do you believe, Mr. President, that the real political showdown will be in Central Illinois between you and Governor Reagan?

THE PRESIDENT: Well, it is a very important area, that is why I am here, and to make some new friends and get reacquainted with many, many old friends that I have seen over the years as I have traveled in this part of Illinois.

QUESTION: But do you believe the vote will be close?

THE PRESIDENT: I always assume it will be close but I think our momentum is good and I think we will win.

QUESTION: Is Nelson Rockefeller going to campaign for you?

THE PRESIDENT: He has been very helpful in a number of areas throughout the country and I presume that as the campaign continues he will, yes, sir.

QUESTION: Mr. President, during your campaign we now have more evidence of incursions in Mozambique and that area into Rhodesia. I am wondering what specifically your policy is going to be, should there be any more Communist incursions in that area.

MORE

THE PRESIDENT: We, of course, are watching it very closely. I think it would be inappropriate for me to give any signal as to our precise course of action.

QUESTION: Is there any truth to the story that Melvin Laird is being considered for the Secretary of State's job?

THE PRESIDENT: Not at all. Mel Laird is a very close and very good friend of mine. He has got a number of very fine jobs on the outside in the private sector. He is a very helpful adviser to me, but we have a good Secretary of State and he is going to stay on.

QUESTION: Yesterday your son, Jack, said that he thought that if you won in Illinois that would end the Reagan threat. Do you agree with your son, Jack, on that issue?

THE PRESIDENT: Well, if we win in Florida and Illinois, we will be very encouraged and I would think my opponent would be somewhat discouraged.

QUESTION: How formidable a candidate do you think Mr. Reagan is?

THE PRESIDENT: Let me just talk to the local press, please, Wally.

QUESTION: Could this be the key turning point in your campaign?

THE PRESIDENT: It will be very significant because with success in Florida and success here we will have piled up a significant number of delegates and that is what will make the difference in Kansas City.

QUESTION: Assuming there are victories in Florida and Illinois, do you see Mr. Reagan then pulling out of the race?

THE PRESIDENT: You will have to ask him about that.

QUESTION: Sir, do you think Hubert Humphrey will be your opponent in 1976?

THE PRESIDENT: Yes. I think the rest of them are, as I understand it, cutting each other up pretty badly, dividing the Democratic Party with their comments and criticisms of one another and so I still think the prediction I made better than a year ago that Hubert would be the candidate holds true.

MORE

QUESTION: You have fewer candidates for delegates in this district than there are seats available. Is that indicative of the rest of your campaign organization throughout the --

THE PRESIDENT: I think we have got a very first class organization. Former Governor Ogilvie has done an outstanding job giving us real leadership. Every place I have been our delegate lists are good, they are strong, they are identifiable people who have been leaders in the community. I think we will do all right in this district as well as others.

Real nice to see you all and thank you very much.

QUESTION: President Ford, you are going on live over the air on local radio on WRC. Would you like to say hello to all your farmer friends here in East-Central Illinois?

THE PRESIDENT: Thank you very much, Steve. It is a pleasure to have an opportunity to say hello to them.

We talked with the outstanding farm leaders in the State of Illinois yesterday and I think it was an excellent give and take. They asked a lot of penetrating questions and I think I answered their questions very satisfactorily.

With our tremendous exports and their hard work and the leadership of our outstanding Secretary of Agriculture, I think agriculture in Illinois as well as elsewhere is bound to be prosperous.

Thank you all very, very much. Nice to see you.

Thank you.

END

(AT 11:30 P.M. CST)